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Documenta is an important forum for the study of theater in the Low Countries. It is a journal that accommodates in-depth, scholarly contributions on all aspects of theater, as well as essays and critical reflections. Although the main proportion of articles in *Documenta* focuses on theater and performance, contributions relating to music, film and new media are also considered, as far as they relate to the performing arts. The journal was founded in 1983 by Jozef De Vos in the bosom of the Ghent Documentation center for Dramatic Art. Since 2015, *Documenta* has been published by S:PAM (Studies in Performing Arts & Media) of the Department of Theater Studies at Ghent University. The editorial board is composed of theater scholars from various universities and colleges. Editors-in-chief are Christel Stalpaert and Bram Van Oostveldt, in collaboration with Jozef De Vos, who led the journal for 32 years.

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DOCUMENTA VOLUME XLI 2023 issue 1

Parliament of Practices

Issue editors: Adriana La Selva & Patrick Campbell

3 – Editorial –– Adriana La Selva and Patrick Campbell

Section 1 - Dialogues

17 – Transforming the Past into Presence: in Dialogue with Eugenio Barba and Julia Varley –– Eugenio Barba, Julia Varley, Adriana La Selva and Patrick Campbell

43 – "In the Studio" with William Kentridge –– William Kentridge and Vera Mihailovich-Dickman

67 – Dialogue and Repertoire: The Ever-Changing Nature of Walking and Talking Together –– Diana Taylor and Andrea Maciel

91 – Shedding Light on the Light District: Artistic Processes in and around the Teatro de Contêiner –– Veronica Gentilin, Lucas Breda, Dona Carmen, Dentinho and Vinicius Torres Machado

111 – Like the Space In-Between Beats: A Dialogue on Dialogue –– Lotte van den Berg and Marije Nie

Section 2 - On Dialogues

141 – Talking to Myself: A Dialogue Between Practice and Performance –– Julia Pond

159 – Unfolding a Series of Suggestions: A Reflection on a publication practice permeated by dialogue between practices –– Leonie Persyn

183 – 'Slow togethering' as a Tool for Dialogic Development amongst Dance Dramaturgs –– Miranda Laurence and Sara Živkovič Kranj

203 – Looking at Theater Through the Performers' Experiences: Practices of Political Engagement in Teatro do Vestido –– Gustavo Vicente

225 – Articulating Architecture: the Joint in Radouan Mriziga's '55' and the Palais de la Dynastie (Brussels, Belgium) –– Elias D'Hollander

249 – Motherhood as resistance in the Bio-performance Analfabeta: An Interdisciplinary Dialogue between Biology and Performance –– Paulina Bronfman and Alejandra Zúñiga-Feest

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Editorial

–– Patrick Campbell (MANCHESTER METROPOLITAN UNIVERSITY)

–– Adriana La Selva (GHENT UNIVERSITY)

This Special Edition of *Documenta* is dedicated to the Parliament of Practices (PoP), a platform for generative knowledge exchange, based on dialogical forms and devised tactics, initiated by Marije Nie and Adriana La Selva in 2020.[1] PoP grew out of the work of Cross Pollination, a nomadic laboratory for the dialogue in-between practices, founded by La Selva and Nie in 2017. Cross Pollination features a core group of seven practitioners from different artistic backgrounds, who have over the past six years developed a shared *studioness*, an ability to collaborate on performative research projects that elaborate upon the legacy of the twentieth century theater laboratory.[2] PoP expanded upon Cross Pollination's laboratory practices, transposing these to a broader social context, engaging a range of different artists and researchers in horizontal modes of knowledge exchange and creative dialogue.

PoP challenges disciplinary divisions and responds to the growing neoliberal trend for portfolio careers in the Arts by hosting and facilitating ongoing dialogues across different fields of knowledge, offering freelance artists and independent researchers a sense of shared community. Parliament Sessions have taken place in a range of different contexts and settings over the past three years, including online encounters, theater festivals, academic symposia and community-based projects across Europe and Latin America. These sessions provide opportunity and space for sharing and exchange based on personal and professional practices and artistic genealogies. Discursive and dialogical methodologies have emerged that seek to articulate the intangible knowledge of embodied praxis; artists inevitably share this tacit know-how to a certain degree, but often struggle to speak about it or put it into words. By balancing speech and action, discourse and collective creative experiences, PoP sessions establish dialogues between participants, enabling them

to speak *about* their practices *through* their practices. Far from a cerebral, hermeneutic process, this experience is frequently joyful and empowering, contributing on a micropolitical level towards practices of citizenship and democracy, offering tools for a more creative and sustainable way of being and becoming together.[3]

PoP is grounded upon our professional experiences of the theater laboratory, a space in which practical know-how and discursive forms of knowledge exchange sit side-by-side. It is also framed by a number of key concepts generated within the fields of philosophy, the philosophy of science and critical theory. In terms of dialogue we are inevitably inspired by the work of David Bohm (1996), particularly his focus on *active listening*,although we reconfigure his approach from our background in the (performing) arts. Latour's notion of a Parliament of Things was inspirational in terms of giving voice to our practices as 'quasi-objects' : "the object-discourse-nature-society whose new properties astound us all and whose network extends from my refrigerator to the Antarctic by way of chemistry, law, the State, the economy, and satellites" (1993, 142). Quasi-objects manifest through connectivity, generating networks, collectives, and communities: this has been our experience of the generative role that practices play within the dialogical context of PoP. Isabelle Stengers' notion of an *ecology of practices* (2013), is also key to the way in which we think of our artistic *techné* as a *tool* for thinking and as a means of approaching others in a way that foregrounds the individual's *professional culture*. Intersubjective exchange is mediated by the divergent borders and guiding principles of each participant's practice, enabling us to:

> … make present what causes practitioners to think and feel and act [...] it is a problem which may produce also an experimental togetherness among practices, a dynamics of pragmatic learning of what works and how. This is the kind of active, fostering 'milieu' that practices need in order to be able to answer challenges and experiment changes, that is to unfold their own force. This is a social technology any diplomatic practice demands and depends upon (195).

Through our dialogical methodologies, we exercise our practices as *tactics*. We understand the term 'tactic,' following Michel De Certeau (1988), as a subversive physical thinking often diametrically opposed to the 'strategies' employed by institutions to circumscribe

relationships and daily behaviour. Thus, when employed tactically, our practices can have a political currency, reconfiguring human relationships in ways that are more consciously creative and democratic. A key praxical framework for us is the concept of 'bodies of knowledges': the crafted constellations of embodied memory and *techné* unique to each individual body, honed within the context of a given *praxical territory*. The term praxical territory denotes "... the discipline-specific knowledge we each carry and its imbrication with our wider, lived subjective experience" (Nie et al., 2021). This fusion of craft and life opens up a 'space and place' that reverberates with legacy and landscapes of mutual belongings.

In many ways, this Special Edition acts as a discursive iteration of PoP: articles have, for the most part, been written dialogically or focus on the ways in which (performative) dialogue generates novel forms of knowledge. Whilst professionals from a variety of different specialist fields have contributed to the publication, we hope that connections can be made across texts. In this way, the curatorial process has been akin to a *Spatial Fabulation*, a Cross Pollination tactic that was developed out of a deconstructive embrace with Donna Haraway's *oeuvre* (2016).

> Our spatial fabulations draw from visual arts practices such as collage, installation, and media design to compose a reflection-in-movement about a collective Session. They gather traces from the work that has taken place – texts, images, video, sound – and place them in a constellation literally connected by strings, creating a tied labyrinth of companionships. The practitioners, but also external visitors, are invited to thread their way through, making a pathway of their own. This interaction with the constellation of threaded material awakens memories, responses and invites action on reflection and meaning-making. In this way, no one is in charge of defining what happened, and the ephemeral, the invisible and the disregarded is still able to resonate inside (La Selva, Campbell, Nie, Maciel 2021, 12).

Thus, we envisage that, taken as a whole, the journal can also form a dialogical assemblage with the reader, an *entanglement* to paraphrase Barad (2007). We invite you to *thread your way through* the

gathered articles, reflecting on the traces of conversations, creative processes and investigative research that populate the coming pages. Through this labyrinthine process, an epistemic web should emerge, one grounded on the pragmatic know-how of the professional artist and (practitioner)-researcher and their capacity to collaboratively generate knowledge and build communities of practice.

The first section of this edition – *Dialogues* –, engages practitioners and researchers connected to the Parliament of Practices platform in conversation with researchers and artists they have built a relation with throughout their careers. It sketches out the ways in which the genealogies of the authors collide as they articulate a certain ecology that emerge in-between their practices. The second section- *On Dialogues*- presents and discusses several methodologies built through dialogical creative and interdisciplinary forms. Through the curation of these articles, we suggest that a liminal space exists on the edges of the cognitive patterns underscoring such methodologies that allows for emergent potentialities to manifest, unveiling inter-epistemic insights within performance cultures.

The first Dialogue, entitled '*Transforming the Past into Presence in Dialogue with Eugenio Barba and Julia Varley'*, is based on a conversation that **Patrick Campbell** and **Adriana La Selva** held with **Eugenio Barba**, Artistic Director of renowned theater laboratory Odin Teatret, and Odin actress **Julia Varley**. The two artists reflect on the recently inaugurated Fondazione Barba Varley, an NGO founded to give voice to the 'nameless': theater groups and independent artists working silently and often anonymously at the borders between theater and activism across the globe. The issue of dialogue is explored in terms of communication and relationality, with a focus on the tacit awareness – the bodies of knowledges - of the theater laboratory practitioner. A number of new tactics developed by Barba and Varley are discussed, such as *The Journal of Theater Anthropology,* ISTA: New Generation and Living Archive: Floating Islands. Having recently left their long-term base at Nordisk Teaterlaboratorium in Holstebro, Denmark, Barba and Varley reflect on a new phase in their artistic careers in relation to issues of legacy and transmission.

'"In the Studio" with William Kentridge' features a dialogical interview between contemporary multimedia and performance artist **William Kentridge** and scholar **Vera Mihailovich-Dickman**. The pair's long-

term complicity (they were students together in South Africa and Paris) allows for a warm repartee, predicated on a performative set of visual prompts, employed by Mihailovich-Dickman as a dialogical tactic to elicit affective responses from Kentridge to questions posed. Kentridgeextemporizes on mark-making, the notion of Johannesburg as expanded studio and his work with the center for the Less Good Idea. They both reflect on their experiences of virtual processes during the pandemic period, with a focus on Kentridge's films about life in the studio and Mihailovich-Dickman's experiences with Embracing the Unknown, a project that emerged out of the online meetings of the Parliament of Practices from 2020-2021. Concluding the article, Mihailovich-Dickman explores Kentridge's Chamber opera *Waiting for the Sibyll* (2019) in relation to issues of fate, serendipity and the power of border-crossing collaborative creation.

In *'Dialogue and Repertoire: The Ever-Changing Nature of Walking and Talking Together'*, Performance Studies scholar **Diana Taylor**, founding director of the Hemispheric Institute of Performance and Politics, engages in a dialogical exchange with dancer, performer and practitioner-researcher **Andrea Maciel**. The concept of dialogue is explored in relation to the activities of the Hemispheric Institute and Taylor's theorising in her published body of work. The entangled relationship between the archive and the repertoire is explored in light of the potentiality of performance and practice-research to challenge the ontological fixity of the written word through repetition and reformulation. A genealogical link is traced between the so-called War on Terror, officially articulated as a (counter) attack on external state enemies, and the more recent attempted *coup d'états* enacted by representatives of the far-right in both the USA and Brazil, which have turned this violence inwards, inflicting it upon the nation-state itself. The segregating tendencies of contemporary identity politics are touched upon, in contrast to the plurality and multiple subjectivities cultivated by the Hemispheric Institute's cultural activities. An increasing process of intersubjective rigidity and intolerance is articulated as an elimination of symbolic processes of collective dialogue and negotiation based on shared empathy, which flies in the face of performance as an act of imaginative questioning and world-making. The links between neoliberalism and trauma are expanded upon and *walking and talking together* emerges as a potential dialogical model for shared artistry and activism, predicated upon interrelationality, collective respect and mutuality.

Vinicius Torres Machado, Lucas Breda, Verônica Lo Turco Gentilin, Carmen Lopes and Dentinho engage in a fascinating dialogue regarding the work of Cia Mungunzá de Teatro and the group's activist partners in *'Shedding light on the Light District: artistic processes in and around the Teatro de Contêiner'*. In 2016, Cia Mungunzá set up Teatro do Contêiner, a makeshift theatrical space fashioned out of a container, erected on public land without state support in Bairro da Luz, one of the most impoverished neighborhoods in the center of Sao Paulo, where large numbers of impoverished and addicted people live rough on the streets. Machado's own difficulties in developing relational artistic projects in the area serve as a starting point for the conversation, as he generously gives space to members of Cia Mungunzá and project stakeholders to reflect on the challenges and creative discoveries uncovered over the course of the project's lifetime. A braided vision of relational arts fusing theatricality, activism and radical care emerges, giving voice to one of the most dynamic dialogical community arts projects to emerge in Brazil over recent years.

'Like the space in-between Beats: A Dialogue on Dialogues' closes the first section. It is a written transcript of a performative dialogical flow between **Marije Nie** of Cross Pollination/ PoP and **Lotte van den Berg** of Building Conversation, a Dialogical Art project. The two artists' discourse traces the space in-between practices, ethos and ideas, following impulses and allowing for an organic flow of communication to occur. Issues pertaining to role-fluidity, reciprocity, listening, participation and actualization emerge in relation to the concept of 'conversation as action'. Rather than a debate grounded on the upholding of arguments, Nie and Berg listen to one another and respond in the moment, reflecting on their artistic processes and projects. The text perhaps most clearly reflects the ebbing and flowing of a discursive encounter, one that echoes the specific praxical territories of theater making and performance, with its focus on centering, embodiment and improvisation.

The first article on dialogue - *Talking to Myself: a Dialogue between Practice and Performance* by **Julia Pond** - offers a ludic exploration of the entwined ontic implications of performance and practice in relation to contemporary work culture, through a dialogical exchange between the author (Julia) and her performative persona (Julia Pond, CEO of the fictional company and performance installation BRED).

Once confined to the private sphere or to the field of practice as daily personal activity, questions of subjectivity, individuality and affect are unpacked in relation to the repetitive performativity of today's mediatized,corporatized workplace. The ways in which the latter penetrates muscular memory, impacting and imprinting upon intimate experiences such as motherhood, is explored through this playful pastiche of the Platonic dialogue. Interestingly, the binary divide between self and persona begins to blur as the subject of artistic practice is broached: the installation-as-artwork allows for processes of 'mixing', 'fermentation' and 'rising', permitting a third, dialectical plane - artistic authorship - to emerge beyond corporate performativity and the practices of daily life. It is here that the author's agency appears, in the description of her performance, which rearticulates the tropes of digital capitalism in a slippery, critical fashion.

Leonie Persyn's *'Unfolding a Series of Suggestions: A Reflection on a Publication Practice Permeated by Dialogue'* looks at *unfolding* as a tactic for dialogical knowledge exchange and generation within the field of publishing. The notion of the *researcher-as-dramaturg* emerges out of Persyn's own practice, indicating the ways in which she has begun to creatively explore and evaluate the spaces in-between her research, her collaborative creative projects and their reception, particularly in print. The publication *A Series of Suggestions* (2022) serves as case study, reflecting upon Persyn's collaborations as a dramaturg with three contemporary artists - Polish-Belgian choreographer Kinga Jaczewska, Dutch in situ artist Rita Hoofwijk and Belgian theater maker David Weber-Krebs. The 'book' consists of a box containing two postcards and five A3 posters folded into a Mini-Zine, which are all accessed through acts of unpacking and unfolding. The reader's journey – which fuses tactile experience and discursive exegesis - serves as an analogy for the complex ways in which artistic practice, its research and dissemination consist of constantly folding relationships between time, space and movement, processes that allow for both sense-making and imagination to flourish.

''Slow Togethering' as a Tool for Dialogic Development amongst Dance Dramaturgs' by **Miranda Laurence and Sara Živkovič Kranj** explores dance dramaturgy as both a dialogical process and practice. The term 'slow togethering' is coined as a means of expressing

dialogue over time, a process of becoming that is shared, allowing for praxical insights to emerge. The novel format of the article aims to performatively disrupt the conventions of logical, sequential thinking, whilst reflecting the overlapping, braided ways in which dramaturgical tactics and dialogical exchanges generate collective knowledge. The writing itself is framed as practice-research; the two lines of narrative were generated following clearly defined protocols, and the resulting texts were then thoughtfully formatted on the page in relation to one another. Thus, the article represents a discursive iteration of slow togethering, one that opens up a 'third space' for the reader, allowing them to creatively engage and interact with the text, both as 'choreographic' visual score and as discursive exegesis articulated through the printed word.

'The Politics of Everyday Life in the Performer's Experience: Practices of Engagement in Teatro do Vestido' by **Gustavo Vicente** explores the lasting impact that dialogical political engagement as creative process can have on the life and practice of theater artists. Reflecting on his experiences as a collaborator with Lisbon-based company Teatro do Vestido on the performance *Juventude Inquieta* (*Restless Youth)*, part of a larger project entitled *Labor* (*Labour*), Vicente sketches out a 'choreography of engagement', one in which field research and documentary theater approaches offer a working methodology that transcends theatrical production as *poiesis*, impacting makers on a deeply personal, affective level. Dialogical processes allow for the scenic articulation of collective trauma - such as the violence inflicted on the Portuguese population by the Salazar regime - whilst interpersonal encounters during research and development processes serve as a potential *event* for the actor, in Badiou's sense of the term (2013), opening up enduring affective territories that expand the political potential and efficacy of theater.

The dialogue between architecture and choreographic practices is explored in **Elias D'hollander's** *'Articulating Architecture: A Speculation with the Joint of Choreography and Architecture in Radouan Mriziga's 55 and the Palais de la Dynastie (Brussels, Belgium)'* . Examining from a decolonial perspective the ways in which Mriziga's choreography *55* (2014) disrupted the Palais de la Dynastie, constructed for the Brussels World expo in 1958, D'hollander traces the *joints* linking the two together in a deconstructive performative embrace. Drawing on post-structural thinking the author articulates the efficacy of

Mriziga's work, which speculatively transfigures the monumental nature of the Palais by establishing a particular ecology of practices, one that foregrounds the fleshy joints of Mriziga's dancer's physique and the sacred geometry he maps out in chalk on the reception hall's floor, a design that harks back to Maghreb architecture.

Finally, in *'Motherhood as Resistance in the Bio-Performance Analfabeta: an Interdisciplinary Dialogue between Biology and Performance',* **Paulina Bronfman and Alejandra Zúñiga-Feest** reflect on a performative response to a collaborative creative process with Adriana La Selva of Cross Pollination/Parliament of Practices, developed at The Third Conference of the Nucleus of Artistic Research (NIA) of In/Inter/Disciplinary Laboratories hosted by the Faculty of Art of The Pontificia University of Chile (LAB IID) in 2022. The potential for dialogical collaboration between the arts and the sciences is explored, and the bio-performance enables an eruption of the personal, as Bronfman reflects on migration, motherhood and 'becoming illiterate', a process framed by biologist Zúñiga-Feest's research into the resistance and resilience of plants growing on volcanic substrates in the Andean region of Southern Chile. This interdisciplinary encounter is explored as a potential model for border-crossing, generative processes of knowledge exchange and dissemination that fuse and blur (the scientific) method with artistic tactics and subjective experience, indicating a potentially fertile ecology in-between distinct practices and epistemes.

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Notes

1 Marije Nie is a professional tap dancer, musician, performer, teacher and artistic researcher, working internationally for more than 25 years. Sharing knowledge between artistic disciplines, with communities and with professionals outside the arts is a main topic in her work. Nie was a long-term artist-in-residence at Nordisk Teaterlaboratorium (DK), a member of artist-driven concert space Splendor (NL) and co-founder of Cross Pollination and The Parliament of Practices. Adriana La Selva is a fellow FWO researcher, working on a Ph.D. at S:PAM (Studies in Performance and Media) – in association with the IPEM (Institute for Psychoacoustics and electronic Music) – at Ghent University, where she is investigating what it means to practice an archive, by addressing the transmission of embodied practices through virtual media. She is a member of theater group The Bridge of Winds and co-founder of Cross Pollination.

2 Other core members of Cross Pollination include Andrea Maciel (Brazil); Alex Boyd (UK); Gonzalo Alarcón (Chile); Patrick Campbell (UK) and Jonas de Rave (Belgium).

3 For more info on the Parliament of Practices, please refer to La Selva, et al. "Parliament of Practices: No-Topian Tactics for Praxical Dialogue.", 2020.

Dialogues

Transforming the Past into Presence: in Dialogue with Eugenio Barba and Julia Varley

–– Eugenio Barba (ODIN TEATRET)
–– Julia Varley (ODIN TEATRET)
–– Adriana La Selva (GHENT UNIVERSITY)
–– Patrick Campbell (MANCHESTER METROPOLITAN UNIVERSITY)

In this dialogical article, Patrick Campbell and Adriana La Selva of international research platform Cross Pollination interview Eugenio Barba and Julia Varley of Odin Teatret, with a focus on the activities of the recently inaugurated NGO Fondazione Barba Varley. Having left their institutional base, Nordisk Teaterlaboratorium, in December 2022 after 56 years of being rooted to a concrete theatrical space, Odin Teatret now work nomadically, developing new projects both within Denmark and beyond. The Fondazione Barba Varley extends and builds on the legacy of Odin Teatret, with a specific agenda to support and promote the 'nameless' – theater groups and independent artists working silently on the borders between theater and activism. Derrida's writings around the politics of friendship (Derrida 2005) serve as a loose critical framework for articulating the potential dialogical avenues available once one abandons the

appropriative drive on institutionalization. The conversation follows an organic flow, with a focus on dialogue and communication, the embodied dialogical tactics of the theater laboratory practitioner, and the current activities of the Fondazione, such as the Constellation of the Nameless, ISTA New Generation, The Journal of Theater Anthropology (JTA) and the Living Archive: Floating Islands. Theatrical legacy and its transmission are articulated as relational and interpersonal, grounded on a deeply personal process of 'creating signs': the generation of poetic forms that translate a pragmatic know-how forged over a lifetime dedicated to art as activism.

Keywords: Theater Laboratory, theater and activism, Odin Teatret, Cross Pollination, ethos, dialogue

Introduction

This dialogical article is the fruit of a conversation that took place in January 2023 between Eugenio Barba, Artistic Director of renowned Theater Laboratory group Odin Teatret[1] and founder of ISTA, the International School of Theater Anthropology[2]; Julia Varley, Odin Teatret actress and core member of the Magdalena Project[3]; and Adriana La Selva and Patrick Campbell, members of Cross Pollination, a nomadic laboratory for the dialogue in/between practices.[4]

Barba and Varley's contribution to contemporary theatrical practice has been immense; Barba was fundamental in promoting the work of his friend, colleague and theatrical master Jerzy Grotowski, and went on to form Odin Teatret, the first group theater in Europe.[5] Alongside Odin Teatret, Barba revolutionized approaches to actor training and theatrical montage, developing an expanded laboratory practice that transcended the stage, activating communities across the world through street theater performances and barters.[6] His work at ISTA brought together artists from different continents to

explore the tacit knowledge underpinning the actor's craft, resulting in a range of performances with the intercultural Theatrum Mundi ensemble.[7] He has published widely on his work, contributing in a significant way to studies within the fields of theater, drama and performance.[8] Julia Varley has been a key member of Odin Teatret since 1976 and has developed a unique approach to actor training, with a focus on the organic dramaturgy of the actor. She is a master teacher and director, playing a significant role in supporting emerging artists and networking with group theaters across the globe. She has also published extensively on her own work, imbuing her writing with the praxical knowledge of the seasoned theater laboratory artist.[9]

For Campbell and La Selva, entering into dialogue with Barba and Varley is always a privilege and a pleasure. Cross Pollination – founded by La Selva and Nie in 2017 – emerged from the 2016 ISTA session in Bergamo (Italy) as a response to Barba's project grounded in the specific experiences of the contemporary freelance artist. Whilst ISTA focuses on the pre-expressive level of the actor's craft – a transcultural level of principles instilling *scenic bios* or presence in the body of the performer (Barba 1995) – Cross Pollination's research focused on the possibility for dialogue between independent practitioners steeped in different performance crafts, ranging from tap dancing to theater, dance, somatic practices, music and martial arts. A platform rather than a group, Cross Pollination's members live in four different countries and gather on a regular basis to research, teach and produce work together. The platform's laboratory inquiries have generated a range of dialogical tactics, including the Parliament of Practices, the specific thematic concern of this present Special Edition.

The conversation presented below took place at a historic moment of rupture and rebirth for Odin Teatret: the group had just parted ways with their former umbrella organization, Nordisk Teaterlaboratorium (NTL), located in Holstebro (Denmark), and Barba and Varley had recently inaugurated the Fondazione Barba Varley, a non-profit organization based in Lecce (Italy), which aims to support and promote the "nameless" – theater groups and independent artists working silently and often anonymously on the borders between theater and activism across the globe. For many groups, the loss of an institutional base would provoke entropy and chaos,

yet for Barba and Varley, it seems to have served as a catalyst for new adventures and creative collaborations.

In *The Politics of Friendship* (2005), Derrida reflects on the ramifications of the concept of property through a deconstructive embrace with Nietzsche's oeuvre. He suggests that the very notion of property is tied to love and possession, and that beyond the appropriative drive to possess lies ruin; a loss of that which was constructed before, a repetition of longing. But, according to Derrida, it is precisely in this 'empty place' beyond ownership that true friendship can emerge (65). If one can hold fast to the aporia, and let go of a lust for power, the "friendship that deserves its name" may emerge (66). And perhaps this empty place of friendship, devoid of longing, might be a space for dialogue to appear in a more egalitarian fashion. It is precisely these friendships, grounded in the international network of contacts established by Barba and Varley over the years, that are blossoming in unexpected ways after their departure from NTL, offering new, nomadic pathways for creative experimentation and action: new dialogues emerging with old friends and new companions.

The Fondazione Barba Varley, for example, has a range of different thematic concerns and nascent projects, which include ISTA New Generation: a reconfigured version of the International School of Theater Anthropology that foregrounds the practices of a new generation of theater/dance artists from different cultures whilst integrating teaching methods with digital technologies; and Living Archive Floating Islands (LAFLIS), an interactive and participatory archive housed at the Biblioteca Bernardini in Lecce, which will immerse visitors in the practices and historical ventures of Eugenio Barba, Odin Teatret and the Third Theater.[10] The Fondazione offers scholarships and awards for artists, groups and activists and also serves as a publishing house for books and the annual *Journal of Theater Anthropology* (JTA). During the pandemic, Barba and Varley also carried out an array of interviews with artists, activists and scholars entitled *Constellation of the Nameless* and produced a series of videos – *10 Lessons on Theater Anthropology* – that draw on archival footage to articulate the major findings of Barba's research at ISTA.

The work of Odin Teatret continues, and the group are currently working on new projects without a fixed base. In many ways, Barba, Varley and the Odin have embraced a nomadic existence over recent

months, similar to the one that has constituted Cross Pollination since its inception. This convergence of tactics is significant and speaks to the current period of economic instability and precarity: in order to survive, theater laboratories are "putting structures upside-down," as Varley suggests below: turning to innovative models that enable them to carry out their ongoing research, embracing the unknown as a source of futurity. The conversation below reflects on these issues, as Barba and Varley discuss notions of dialogue and embodiment; genealogy and legacy; border-crossing and marginality; ethos and craft. A renewed vision of a theater laboratory freed from both the comforts and constraints of a fixed institutional base begins to emerge, one that should speak to a new generation of practitioners facing similar economic and political challenges across the globe.

ADRIANA LA SELVA: We would suggest that there is an innate dialogical bedrock to the historical practices of Odin Teatret. And we are aware that the etymology of the word "dialogue" means "through words" and that *logos* refers to words, reason, and discourse. However, your poetics have always been characterized by an embracing of the (il)logic of the body and of the disruption and insight that the tacit knowledge of theater brings. Given this complexity, how do you see the role of dialogue in your work, both at Odin Teatret and beyond?

EUGENIO BARBA: Dialogue implies communication. And of course, communication can happen in different ways, even through silence and total immobility. When two human beings are in front of one another, even if they don't communicate, in spite of themselves, they are reacting to each other – so do animals or any living organism. We can see that a conscious or unconscious dialogue always happens anytime two living beings simply become aware of each other.

Those who communicate most are people in love; they do not use many words. Love produces reactions; perceptible physical signs, which have a completely different nature than vocal communication, this air that becomes sounds and meanings. Words are sounds that were written originally on stones, then on skin, on papyrus, and finally on paper. In writing, the possibility of establishing an immediate dialogue died: there is no human being there. Nevertheless, there

is a feeling in the science of communication, a sort of presence. And then we should discuss what presence is.

Dialogue for me can take place in different modes, as you were mentioning before. One thing is sure: the more we are aware of the dialogue, the more we try to be concise in expressing or formulating what we want to say, the more we restrict our range of imagination and the misunderstanding of the other person. So, when we speak about dialogue, we have to be aware on what level it takes place.

JULIA VARLEY: My first reaction has to do with the dialogue between the actors, the dialogue between the actor and the director, and the dialogue with the spectators, which are very different, especially at Odin Teatret. They happen in quite different ways. Now, the dialogue between the actors happens on stage through actions. Maybe it becomes clearer with the Theatrum Mundi experience: we are on stage, as actors of different traditions, who do not speak the same language (in the sense of Italian, Greek, English), but still, we manage to have a dialogue which is through the physical actions, the impulses, the way we behave on stage. So, it is as if you can establish a dialogue by going forwards, by going backwards, by expanding, by contracting, by accelerating the rhythm, by de-accelerating the rhythm. So, all these impulses create a dialogue, and the dialogue exists because it is not just somebody making an action: rather, all the time you are transforming your actions into reactions. So, the dialogue is how you establish a chain of reactions.

If I think of the dialogue between actor and director at Odin Teatret, of myself as an actress and Eugenio Barba as a director, then I know that the dialogue is established if I, as an actor, manage to propose or to show something that gives associations to the director. So, it is not just what I establish in the dialogue, but what I manage to awaken in the mind of the director in the sense of associations, which many times has nothing to do directly with what I am doing. So, it is as if my words – if we want to employ this term – mean something for me, but something totally different to the director.

Figure 1. Eugenio Barba and Julia Varley at the latest ISTA/ng session in Hungary, 2023. © Francesco Galli

Still, this creates a dialogue, because then Eugenio, as a director, will move on his associations and then give back to me tasks or reactions which will elaborate on what I have created. Then the dialogue becomes very, very complex, because it is the performance itself that starts speaking to both me as an actor and Eugenio as a director. It is as if the dialogue passes through a third entity, which is the work, the piece that we are creating. And there, Eugenio often will talk about how he transitions from protecting the actor and the way the actor is working to protecting the spectator, their logic and what they receive.

Then the next dialogue, as an actor and a director, is with the spectators. In this case, what we know is that what we do on stage is interpreted in very different ways by each spectator. And that is in a way what we try to establish, so that the (il)logic that you mentioned before is important, because the spectator will receive what we are saying at these different levels. At an emotional level, which has to do with the physical impulses, with the intonation of the voice, with the relationship with space, if we are close or far away. It also has to do with meaning, storytelling and narration. It has to do with how the spectator comes to the performance, where they are sitting, if they understand the language or not.

Then, the dialogue for us also happens afterwards. After the spectator has seen the performance. How do they react through time? And spectators, many years later, can tell us, "Your performance changed my life." Or they can say "it was interesting." Or they can say "it made me angry because I didn't understand, but still it moved me and that made me angry."

And then in the performance *Min Fars Hus*, for instance, all the letters that we received from the spectators, established a dialogue with us over the years, because we then presented these letters to other spectators, decades later.[11] It is something that continues through time. It is not something which only belongs to the moment in which we perform. Eugenio was speaking before about this, taking the past and making it into the present, and that has a lot to do with the dialogue that we establish with spectators, because it has to do with the memory that they retain and how you can then transform this memory. Over time, through the next dialogue, or with dialogues which happen afterwards.

EB: We are talking about dialogue, but we use this term without making concrete in which situation it takes place. A dialogue between the owner or the director of a factory with one of the workers has completely different rules than a dialogue between a teacher explaining poems to a class and asking for students' questions. The more deferential or provocative the students' answers, the more the teacher will feel gratified. But if the worker disregards good manners or politeness whilst speaking with the director, the situation changes. So, dialogue functions according to certain premises, which depend on the situation and the people involved.

PATRICK CAMPBELL: What is interesting for me, when you both speak, is that again, you are speaking from your practice: both in terms of the particular kind of multi-layered way that the aesthetic works and the dialogues that the aesthetic allows for. So, it goes beyond a poetics and begins to become political as well as affective, because you are reaching out and touching people across time and across geographical locations. This also makes me think about the development of your work from Odin Teatret to the Fondazione, which is the focus of our second question.

We are very interested in the recent work of the Fondazione Barba Varley, which seems to have a dialogical focus through actions such as the Constellation of the Nameless, ISTA New Generation and the very mission statement of the organization, which seeks to reach out to marginalised communities both within and beyond the theater.

So how do you see the evolution of your dialogical tactics within this new context? Could one argue that dialogue is a meta-practice that emerges out of your work, through different ways of dialoguing with different people?

EB: I don't think in terms of dialogue, but in terms of relations. You bring people together and then they find their own way of relating to each other out of their needs and expectations. A fruitful dialogue begins when the partners' diversity is taken into consideration and, through a concrete, practical, cognitive process (for example, making a performance together), it transforms a condition of subalternity into one of mutually inspiring revindication. What I consider most

important is to be aware of the existence of a lot of people and groups who are isolated – and who are extremely interesting in spite of their anonymity. They are nameless, as we all are ...

Of course, I am not an anonymous person, but when I meet these people, they fascinate me in terms of what they are doing in their particular contexts. Is it possible to establish bonds of mutual cooperation with others who are in a similar situation? It is not accidental that, thinking of the growing heterogeneity of theater groups and even of short-term projects, the image I was presented with was that of the *floating islands*.[12]

Yes, these people are isolated, yet responding to their needs. But, if someone from outside comes and says "oh, I know that you are here and every day you fight to be coherent with your dreams and illusions," suddenly their awareness of themselves changes completely. This is what Odin Teatret tried to do: bringing together people from different fields. For me, an enriching experience was to meet people from academia with their knowledge, which is complementary to that of practitioners. The ISTA, the International School of Theater Anthropology, very early on, was an earthquake in the way of thinking and imagining theater for the scholars who participated in that very active situation. It was the same during the Holstebro Festive Week, the *Festuge* – in which our small town's different sub-cultures, that prosper in isolation, suddenly come together, creating a friendly collaborative frame with a shared feeling of belonging to the same place in spite of deep differences in terms of life vision and technical expertise.[13]

This, for me, is the core of a dialogue: the main purpose of Odin Teatret's work with diversity. The primary factor is diversity: you dialogue through diversity and, in order to do this, you have to establish contact, respond and share. The Festive Week was intended as a celebration of our town's diversity. So, everyone can say "I am a part of this place, because I am doing this and I am doing it this way." The same holds for the encounters with ISTA. So, for me, the Fondazione Barba Varley is politics by other means, and by politics I mean a longing for change.

Open access to knowledge is important. The internet and Wikipedia make learning easy, but it is just information; knowledge is something

different because you have to incorporate it. You let it pass through your mental, personal and biographical metabolism so that you have new possibilities to offer people. Therefore, we have to invent new ways of transmitting our accumulated knowledge in the present.

Theater is a fleeting art that produces pasts. The theaters are storehouses of pasts. In these pasts the technical and transcendent essence and value of our craft is hidden. The pasts are underground streams in which each generation can quench its thirst in the process of building its present with all the necessary changes. All ages are *our* age. All theaters are *our* theater in the present.

How can we make the experience of the past be part of our present life? What does it mean practically to say that what our ancestors did may be worth also for us? It is a question of our own identity, integrity and entirety. Until the end of our life, we should be aware that we have received and that we should transmit, i.e. give back.

Of course, I cannot say this to journalists, politicians and spectators; they would laugh; it sounds moralistic and rhetorical. They expect facts, not words. I must transform my thoughts in actions, inject this attitude with an artistic coherence, through my performances, my theater group's dynamic, my daily choices and pragmatic decisions. It is a dialogue in the form of resistance to the fashions of the epoch and to the trends of the spirit of time. But this dialogue is rooted in know-how and expertise, often in a condition of solitude within the fragmented cultural and social situation in which I myself, Odin Teatret and the Fondazione are immersed. But this is what we are attempting to break, through our different and dispersed activities.

JV: To answer, I would go back to when I lived in Milan as a teenager, and I was making political theater. When I arrived at Odin Teatret, what I realized was that my political being was all based on ideology – ideas that had no capacity of actually being active, really doing something. And then I spent a lot of time at Odin learning how to do an action; how to be really present, here and now. And I think that this is one of the reasons why I defend so strongly my need to be an actress.

I have got a quantity of work which is absurd and, of course, I could go on just creating projects or directing other people. I try to defend the fact of being an actress because it is the base on which I stand and it is the base of the action, which is so different from saying words. We can say that we treasure diversity, yes, but one thing is to say it and another thing is to really live in it, to act in it and to communicate it through the practice.

And for me, this is what I want to take from Odin Teatret into the Fondazione. Because when one starts talking about social inclusion, integration, communication, political vision, the tendency is to go towards the words and the ideas. It is like a battle of values, because then the problem is also how one very quickly gets into a conflict of what one really means with the words and what one really means with the values that one is trying to establish. And then the communication breaks down, because if one just tries to defend the words, what we think we mean by the words, it is very easy to get into a conflict that does not result in anything. And for me, the strength of theater is that it can go beyond these words, and it can go beyond narration, in the sense of what we want to say with the words or the ideology.

EB: Julia, what you are saying, regarding the tension between actions and words is fundamental to our profession. Due to its ephemeral nature, duration is important in theater: creating something which lasts. Therefore, our need to operate through the Fondazione is also a way of persisting in our work in spite of the fact that we are no longer within the old, known framework of Nordisk Teaterlaboratorium – this huge, complex organism of diversity with many active initiatives and groups. Now I want to work at my own pace, in accordance with my age and the energy I have and, most of all, in response to the following question: what does it mean to have enough time?

JV: The fact of trying to bring the experience of Odin Teatret into the Fondazione based on actions rather than words means that I insist a lot on the activities that we do and how the activity will have a result. It has always been the case that, at Odin, we do something and then we try to explain it and understand it. And to do this within

the Fondazione is not so easy, because people in institutions are much more used to the fact that you have a premise; you say this is what I want to achieve and then you do it. But we do it the other way around. We started the Living Archive without having any idea of what it was and now we are slowly coming to understand what it means. So, it has very much to do with how you put structures upside down, which of course is something that you in Cross Pollination are insisting on so much.

It has to do with sharing knowledge, with the prize that we give. It has to do with the fact of managing to go on tour with performances because, although Eugenio has now accepted Zoom communication, we know that actually showing live performances, being live, being present, has a completely different effect on people and that it is important to be able to go to those places that cannot afford what Odin Teatret would cost. We went to Guatemala and to Bolivia last year, and it was very important, not only because we came into contact with the reality there, where for instance a theater has to have a parking place because otherwise spectators do not come, because they are too afraid of the violence. In Bolivia we saw a theater group that based their training on a ritual from a small village, and you suddenly understand that theater is responsible for keeping alive rituals which are disappearing from their social contexts. And so, these travels also give us a completely different point of view, which we manage to then communicate and transform within our work at the Fondazione.

But another thing which I think is fundamental for Eugenio and I in the Fondazione is that, with Odin Teatret and Nordisk Teaterlaboratorium before, we created an enormous network of contacts, because we have always insisted that it is the personal relationship that makes it possible for us to survive if we sell performances. We have kept this going now for 60 years next year – Eugenio for some years before – which means that we have a knowledge which has to do with people.

We were sitting in a car in Bari once with Luca Ruzza talking about the archives and what we should do when we were talking about all these contacts.[14] He said that we had to share this knowledge that we have, as people. And so, from there we get ideas of how we can contact the different theater groups, journals or people and try and create these connections, these knots of knowledge. Because

it is when two people get together with their completely different points of views and experiences that something else, something new, happens. It is not because you decide beforehand you want to do something new; it is just because you create the context for this to happen, and this is what we try to do very much with the Fondazione as well as with Odin Teatret.

ALS: That's wonderful. In fact, you responded to the next question that we had, which has to do with the archive. As you know, I am also working on a part of this archive which one day, soon I hope, I will speak again with you about.[15] But one question that I am very curious about is what are the concrete actions that are in place right now in order to construct this Living Archive and how are you visualising or envisioning this space?

EB: I gave my library and my artistic legacy to the region of Puglia, in Italy, on the condition that they build the Living Archive Floating Islands (LAFLIS). This is a place dedicated to Eugenio Barba, to Odin Teatret and to the Third Theater. The place where this will happen is Biblioteca Bernardini in Lecce. There will be a traditional archive – you can go there and find all the documents about my and Odin Teatret's activities, our international networks and projects. specialized archivists will take care of students and researchers, but in this *living archive* there are two more sections concerning transmission and transformation of the past into present.

Transmission implies the publication of JTA, the *Journal of Theater Anthropology*, the production of films, interdisciplinary meetings, didactic seminars, theoretical-practical encounters. The ISTA sessions belong to this section because they gather stage artists from various continents and create the frame for a personal experience, enabling young generations of performers to test the technical principles from various acting traditions, adapting them to the present.

LAFLIS' third section is dedicated to transformation. How to give an artistic and sensorial life to this cognitive capital, which consists of documents, letters, programmes, posters, cuttings, films, photos? They do not say much! The issue is how to transform all of these elements into an artistic, sensual, auditive-visual language.

It is possible to make installations, which today, thanks to technology, can become interactive. Imagine all the profusion of experiences from Third Theater … There are seven big rooms in the space in Lecce. I imagine a huge forest of wild flowers – orchids. Each one of these small orchids represents a group: you touch it and then suddenly somebody's voice starts singing, explaining, as their history and life is projected on the walls. It is a question of transforming this archival material into a bodily/emotional experience, a concrete way of coming into contact with the people involved.

JV: Eugenio's office and my changing room have been taken down to Lecce and they are going to become an installation. It should be so that one goes in and touches one of the items and then we tell the story of that object, or that painting, or that poster. But for the moment, we are just trying to put the things up and make the rooms exactly the same as they were in Holstebro.

And then we are going to put on an exhibition or installation. Something about Odin Teatret in Puglia, which is the region where we have done all the experience of Carpignano with the barters and also one session of ISTA in 1987.[16] So those should be the first things. And one of the ideas we have had is to do a kind of 'Woodstock' of Third Theater. But first we need to get through all these bureaucratic hurdles with the *regione di Puglia*, and then we can continue to dream up more ideas.

PC: So, the next question builds on the idea of the archive. Whilst theatrical exercises and performances can be documented using a variety of media, how can one transmit the subterranean knowledge of being together as a collective, united by practice and shared goals? How can the spirit behind the laboratory exist in an archive, possibly beyond the bodies of those who made of this a life's work?

EB: Of course, the spirit cannot be stored in an archive. What characterises Odin Teatret is a certain mentality that is rooted in routine and daily tasks. You may call it our working ethics. Simply do your job well. What does this mean? There is an imprinting in terms of relationships, which is fundamental. We spoke about it at the begin-

ning of our conversation. If someone asks: "how did Eugenio Barba lead Odin Teatret?", it could be answered: "like Napoleon, and like a sergeant of the Marines: he was all the time *decided* and beside his actors." (*Laughs*) This has been my way of building a group dynamic, a working culture, a reference point. Sometimes I had an idea, but most of the time, I just cared for the details, day-by-day, reacting to small happenings in our environment and outside it, exploiting and developing them from the possible to the impossible.

No archive will reconstruct this network of relationships, trust, knowledge and diversity which corresponded to Odin Teatret or to any other group; it is impossible. However, an archive can become a very stimulating environment exploring the past and bringing it back to new life. In order to ensure that visitors keep the freedom of their own visions, you have to work with a sort of theatricality. In an archive, live presence and relationships are different entities. The central question is: will we be able to create an environment that is not identical, but equivalent to the live relationships between actor and spectator?

Will we succeed? I think so, if we have time, patience and a group of motivated people. Let's take an example from the past. In 1960, no one could imagine a theater which did not show performances every evening. But then I started a theater laboratory and defined it as a place which did not perform daily. Today I can say that a laboratory is an incubator and a catalyst, and even politicians would understand it, because they can refer to the history of Odin Teatret and all its initiatives, which no other theater was or is developing. Just think of the groups which have been inspired in our region. Take the Greenlandic theater Tukkaq. The group was founded by a former actor of Odin Teatret and the National Theater of Greenland emerged from the group's aspirations. Think of Teatret Om, which worked at our venue for years, and which today is a strong autonomous example of a group that has found its way.[17] And all the others, as well.

The Living Archive Floating Islands obliges me to reimagine my own practice. I am aware of its fragility. When I disappear, the whole thing risks becoming a dusty tradition. Entropy is the destiny that threatens us all.

JV: At Nordisk Teaterlaboratorium, there was a lot of talk about how the DNA of Odin Teatret should be passed on. With a workshop, for example, you can maybe pass on a few techniques, or you can give a vision of what it means to work and to continue to work. But it is impossible to pass on something that you feel is essential, which takes a much longer time and most of all involves the possibility of seeing the contradictions. It is this and then it is the opposite, and then it is the opposite of the opposite and then it is something else and it develops.

So, first of all, it is as if the essence has got something to do with the individual. Because, for each individual, it is different. And then it has got to do with long-term relationships, which last through time. With the archive, what we have insisted on a lot is that we need to create an environment of people: people that are actually there, so that you do not go to an archive and come across a computer which says where you can find documents. Rather, you find a person that will ask you what are you interested in and what are you trying to work on, and then they will say: "OK, there are these documents, but there are also these other people that you should meet and talk with." And so, the environment becomes essential.

How we create the environment within a kind of organization that is institutional, is something that we are fighting with, at the moment. It did not work in terms of the relationship between Odin Teatret and Nordisk Teaterlaboratorium, because we thought, in the beginning, that Odin Teatret could remain within the institution. It has turned out that this does not work. So, with the archive, it has mostly to do with the people that you managed to involve, with those who feel motivated, with those who really want to go in and get into a relationship with the documents, or the objects, or the films and take it forwards on to something else. So, the essence will change, but we hope it will be stimulating and creative.

ALS: Speaking of institutions, we are aware that you are in conversation with UNESCO, in terms of establishing Third Theater as an intangible cultural heritage – correct me please if I'm wrong. So, what is important about this shared theatrical ethos and practice? How is this process going and how has dialogue helped shape and form this heterogeneous array of theatrical floating islands?

EB: The notion of Third Theater, or group theater, is a recent addition to theater history: it did not exist before the mid-twentieth century.[18] Before this, we only had two complementary environments: professional theater and amateur theater, which continue to exist significantly in Europe. But neither form is very active on a broader social level; Third Theater, in contrast, is.

After 1968, young rebel people started creating theater groups all over the planet. They were not contracted by a director of a building; their way of approaching the profession had other motivations than would-be actors aiming at working in an institutionalized theater.

Theater groups do not only have an original way of establishing a relationship with different sectors of spectators; they are substantially an innovative system of production. Their creative processes have a different nature and dynamic than the institutionalized criteria. And most of their apprenticeship is autodidactic, outside official theater schools.

When I think of Third Theater's heterogenous and often magmatic reality, I can clearly notice that it was the consequence of a generation longing for changes in their personal life and in their society. It is not accidental that Artaud and Brecht were the main reference points. In any form of theater, there are three key elements: one is *technique-knowledge*, how to do it; the other is the *aesthetic quality*, the efficiency of the results; and the third one is the *ethical dimension*. Third Theater has embodied, willingly or unwittily, this turn towards ethics within our craft.

JV: If you think of the movement that started in May 1968 in Paris, you have a very specific time in which this happens. It provoked changes that still resonate today. I mean, of course, there were other factors, but the social revolution, the sexual revolution, feminism, all of this happened at that time. Third Theater also arises from that period. The historian's way of seeing it is that, "okay, it happened then, and now it is finished." Well, we know that it has not finished. It is not something that you can put a date to, something that happened during a given timespan and then stopped. It has a value which continues to the present day and the contribution it has given to how one sees and works with theater is enormous.

Now, one of the problems is that critics or historians tend to equate Third Theater with bad artistic quality. Because they are not capable of putting the performance into the context in which it is being shown. So, the aesthetic question is not only valid in relation to what it represents in official theaters or festivals; it really changes the communities in which it exists, where the artistic quality is determined by something which is completely different. So, how can one give a value to the aesthetics of Third Theater, but within the context in which it is presented and not just as a kind of absolute? This is something that is strong within the Third Theater: for example, when Parvathy Baul does her Magdalena Festival in India, where she has on one side the Third Theater from Europe or Latin America and on the other side the very potent ancient traditions from Asia.[19] And you can really see that they belong to the same family, that they have the same quality, that which Eugenio calls 'ethic', the same way of working. But in Europe and in America, one does not recognize this, because scholars and programmers there do not have the capacity of seeing beyond their own geographical and intellectual limits. Which is also why you are doing this interview, I think, to open these limits, which are so engraved in academic research and putting you into trouble.

ALS: We both have been transformed and inspired in a myriad of ways by the legacy you have created. We have also tried to carry on this legacy as practitioner-researchers. We are connected to Third Theater practices in different ways, through the activities of the Bridge of Winds,[20] the research projects that we carry out in academia, our work with Cross Pollination and the new MA Performance: Laboratory Theater pathway at Manchester Metropolitan University, which started in 2023.[21] However, younger generations naturally have new sets of desires and needs, and expectations regarding theatrical practices. So, how do you see your most recent endeavours touching a younger generation of practitioners and scholars, inspiring them to carry on this legacy in their own ways?

JV: The question of transmission is a very difficult one. I find myself often in a workshop, saying "don't do Odin Teatret training, please, just walk normally! Don't make variations and changes!" It is as if we have started a tradition where at times it is difficult for people

not to fix themselves on forms and to really go beyond the form and find the principle and remember the 'why': why are we doing this and not just the 'how'? Which of course is difficult.

I have found in my teaching that the most important aspect for me has been to direct, because then the pupils that stay with me for many years ... I am really able to get them to the point where the performance has a rigour that the pedagogical work does not have. Because when you are just teaching, you have to be democratic; you have to give space to everyone, you have to give the possibility for everyone to explore. But that puts you into a false confidence that everything is possible – it is not. When you get to the moment of creating a performance that has to be presented to the spectators, then a lot of the things which we have been teaching or passing on do not count. You have to use other parameters. And, so, the passing on, of course, has different levels: giving a workshop, working for a whole year with the same person, or working for 50-60 years with a group.

And this has a completely different result, in the roots that this tradition, even the small tradition that they got enchanted with, has in the people and their capacity of changing. Because those who stay closer to the forms that they have learnt are those who have studied less time. Those who have followed us for really a long time have transformed and have found completely new ways and then, for us, it becomes interesting. And within Odin Teatret itself, you can see – each of the actors is very different in the way of teaching or in the way of being actors on stage. So, what we pass on is also different. And, for me, the relationship remains what will really determine how the younger generations take what is given to them and transform it. Because the value does not come from the exercises or even from the work that you have done; it comes much more from the relationships that you establish between the person who is transmitting and the person who is wanting to learn. And there it is a mutual choice, which again cannot happen in universities, because in universities you have to teach in rows. This mutual choice, I think, changes how one perceives the experience.

It is a bit like anthropologists, when they go and study a culture which is far away from their home. Their point of view will change what they write about or what they tell. And so, the point of view of

the individuals that are involved really changes the legacy and how it will appear to be in the future.

EB: There are two driving forces in what I do. I start something, because I wish to: I like the idea, the challenge, the possible results, the surprises of the process. It is very selfish. The second force springs from my experience. It has led me to understand that I own the action, but not the result. I do not know how the action will develop, how far and for how long. I must concentrate on the action, and something will happen.

One cannot speak in abstract terms about the next generation. The only thing that I can do is to interfere in the lives of a few people. That which I do is for these people. I show that the impossible is possible to those who are motivated and stimulated to continue something which has nothing to do with me. I continue the tradition of the impossible, the shared endurance and dignity of theater men and women before me who inspired me. You can ask me now, "Eugenio, you are eighty-six years old, it is time to rest?" I would answer: "You are right concerning my age, but I have no time to rest: I have such a short time left that I have to run!"

I only need a few motivated people. I am interested in the younger generation, but I cannot do anything for them: they have to solve their problems for themselves. Now, I am shaping my last signs. For a few people, these represent a light and an encouragement. This is my task.

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Notes

1 Odin Teatret is one of the most prominent theater groups internationally, and key representative of theatrical innovation from the mid-twentieth century onwards. Founded in Norway in 1964, the group moved to Holstebro, Denmark in 1966, changing its name to Odin Teatret/ Nordisk Teaterlaboratorium. In December 2022, Odin Teatret left Nordisk Teaterlaboratorium and continues to operate autonomously in Holstebro and beyond. To date, Odin Teatret have produced 81 performances, performed in 65 different countries, and have generated an array of performative tactics for cultural engagement and social activation. The group was responsible for establishing autonomous actor training as a keystone of the performing arts, and developed an innovative, expanded approach to pedagogy and knowledge exchange, initiating the theater workshop culture of the late twentieth century whilst pioneering imbrications between the performing arts and scholarship. A range of academics have written about the Odin and its practices; examples include Andreasen and Kuhlmann, 2000; Chemi, 2017; Christoffersen, 1993; Ledger, 2012; Turner, 2018; Watson, 1993.

2 The International School of Theater Anthropology - ISTA was founded by Eugenio Barba in 1979. Conceived as an "itinerant university", it consists of a multicultural network of performers and scholars with a shared interest in Theater Anthropology, a new field of study that focuses on the human being in organised performance situations. Theater Anthropology maps out the performer's pre-expressive scenic behaviour, which is grounded in extra-daily embodied principles that induce different energetic qualities and states, attracting the spectator's attention on a kinaesthetic, pre-linguistic level. According to Barba, the pre-expressive layer thus constitutes the elementary level of organization in theater, and is transcultural in terms of its reach and implications.

3 The Magdalena Project is a network of women working within contemporary theater and performance. Founded in 1986, the Project had its administrative base in Cardiff, Wales, under the artistic directorship of Jill Greenhalgh. Hundreds of independent women theater artists from 5 continents have participated in meetings and encounters over the years, sharing their performances and working methods. The Project has developed a unique horizontal structure which has enabled it to function and proliferate internationally, and for the name and history of the Magdalena Project to be adopted and augmented by women across the world.

4 Cross Pollination is an expanded, nomadic theater laboratory for the dialogue in-between practices, both scholarly and performance-based. From 2017-2022, it was a resident group at the Nordisk Teaterlaboratorium in Denmark, under the auspices of Odin Teatret. The actions of the collective have taken place in different settings across Europe and Latin America, and the group have published articles on their work and practices (La Selva, Maciel, Nie and Campbell 2021a, 2021b and 2021c).

5 Jerzy Grotowski was one of the most prominent theatrical directors of the twentieth century, and the founder of the laboratory theater tradition. He developed systematic processes of actor training and a unique approach to scenic montage, and carried out continuous praxical research into theater, ritual and performative forms that fundamentally broke with western

paradigms of theatricality. See Grotowski, 1968 and Schechner and Wolford, 2001.

6 Barter is a specific form of performative exchange developed by Eugenio Barba and Odin Teatret, in which the Odin share their group culture, founded on their laboratory practice, with the local cultures in the places they travel to. Barter is an instrument for creating human relations through art, and has been a mainstay of the Odin's practice since the 1970s.

7 Theatrum Mundi is a theatrical mise-en-scène resulting from ISTA Encounters, featuring guest artists from Asia, Europe and the Americas and participants. Theatrum Mundi productions are events with 45-50 performers and musicians from diverse genres and traditions, under Eugenio Barba's direction, frequently based on dramatic texts from the western canon, radically reinterpreted in light of the intercultural performers' array of codified and non-codified acting techniques, which are juxtaposed and foregrounded in Barba's montage.

8 Barba is a prolific writer, producing texts reflecting both on his own work and the history of theater as a whole. Selected outputs include Barba, 1986; 1995; 1999; 2010 and Barba and Savarese 1991; 2018.

9 Varley has published three books (Varley, 1997; 2011; 2016), co-authored a further three monographs (Adams, Aniksdal, Gale & Varley, 2017; Cremona, Galli & Varley, 2017; Barba, Galli & Varley, 2020) and penned an array of scholarly articles focusing on her own work, theater laboratory practices and the presence of women in contemporary theater. She is a member of the Editorial Board of *Open Page*, a journal dedicated to writing by and about women working within contemporary theater.

10 "Third Theater" was a term coined by Eugenio Barba in 1976 to describe an international network of group theater practitioners with a shared laboratory ethos who saw theater as a vocation, a way of life. Barba differentiated these artists' approach to their craft from that of the First Theater (the mainstream theater of production houses) and Second Theater (the avant-garde, driven by aesthetic tendencies and trends). For more information on Third Theater, see Barba, 1999 and Turner and Campbell, 2021.

11 *Min Fars Hus* (My Father's house, 1972) was a performance by Odin Teatret, directed by Eugenio Barba, based on the work of Dostoyevski.

12 Eugenio Barba published two books, *The Floating Islands: Reflections with Odin Teatret* (1979) and *Beyond the Floating Islands* (1986) which focused on the work of Odin Teatret. The term "floating islands" was employed by Barba in these publications as a metaphor to describe the Third Theater.

13 Initiated in 1989, the Holstebro Festuge was traditionally directed by Eugenio Barba and organised by Odin Teatret. It involves the participation of local residents, regional organisations, and international artists, who gather together to take part and share in performances, screenings, art exhibits, and barters over a nine day period in Holstebro and the surrounding region.

14 Lucca Ruzza teaches Virtual Scenography at Sapienza University of Rome. In the 1980s he founded the Open Lab Company, a production center for performance and theater architecture.

15 La Selva is referring here to POTA – Practising Odin Teatret's Archive, a research project at the University of Ghent (Belgium) funded by the Government of Flanders, on which she is lead

researcher. The aim of POTA is to develop a virtual training space by digitally capturing the training of Odin Teatret actress Iben Nagel Rasmussen, Roberta Carreri and Julia Varley, along with the embodied practices of their students. La Selva has published scholarly articles on this project, see La Selva 2023 Marouda et al 2023).

16 The phenomenon of barter emerged in Carpignano in 1974 through interactions between the Odin (who were working there at that point) and the local population.

17 Teatro di Sfera Om was founded in 1989 by Sandra Pasini and Antonella Diana in Rome, Italy. In 1994, the artists received subsidies to study in Holstebro at Odin Teatret, moving permanently to Denmark in 1996. The group changed its name to Teatret OM in 1997. In 2006, the group established a permanent base in Ringkøbing, becoming a regional theater for the municipality of Ringkøbing-Skjern. The group's aesthetics and ethos resonate with those of the wider Third Theater, and their work focuses on site-specific, sensory theater grounded in the reality of West Jutland. Several members of the group are also core members of the Bridge of Winds.

18 For an overview of the development of group theater in the twentieth Century, see Barba, Eugenio and Savarese, Nicola. *The Five Continents of Theater: Facts and Legends about the Material Culture of the Actor: 1.* Brill/Sense: Leiden, 2018.

19 Parvathy Baul s a practitioner, performer and teacher of the Baul tradition from Bengal, India. She is also an instrumentalist, storyteller and painter, and has maintained a long-term professional relationship with Odin Teatret. She joined the ensemble for the performance *The Tree* (2016), directed by Eugenio Barba.

20 The international research group Bridge of Winds was founded by Iben Nagel Rasmussen in 1989. The group consists of artists from Latin America and Europe, who meet every year in different parts of the world to carry out daily training, develop studio and outdoor performances and conduct barters with local communities. Over the past 34 years, the group's unique training practice has proliferated amongst the Third Theater community thanks to the group's pedagogical practices and outreach projects.

21 In 2022, Manchester Metropolitan University initiated a specific Laboratory Theater pathway on its MA Performance Programme, which includes a placement at Nordisk Teaterlaboratorium, Holstebro, Denmark.

“In the Studio” with William Kentridge

–– William Kentridge
–– Vera Mihailovich-Dickman (INSTITUT POLYTECHNIQUE DE PARIS / UNIVERSITÉ PARIS-SACLAY)

This interview explores both the individual and collective creative processes of the prolific multi-disciplinary visual and performance artist, William Kentridge. It takes place in Paris where the artist has under thirty minutes to engage in a dialogue before the first performance of his Chamber Opera*, Waiting for the Sybil,* in a theater new to the troupe. The conversational manner is complicit and playful, drawing on common backgrounds and histories. The result offers up a new angle on what ‘Studioness’ has become for the artist. Exploring the inward-looking and outward-reaching movements within studio practice, the interview seeks to enlarge the notion of the studio to include remote and virtual practices. The impact of, and response to, the COVID-19 lockdown period is central to the discussion.

Keywords: Studioness, Parliament of Practices, center for the Less Good Idea, Johannesburg, *Sybil,* mark-making, studio group, process, lockdown

Introduction

I cannot give full credit to the COVID 19 virus for the serendipity of meeting members of the Parliament of Practices (PoP) in virtual space.[1] Like myself, they had been seeking to maintain practices that could be embodied online, to co-create in virtual space and to imagine new ways of doing so. Most of those I met were trained in physical theater and were researchers, grounded in the practices of Odin Teatret and NordiskTeaterlaboratorium (NTL), based in Denmark. This took me back to my early theater training in South Africa, then later in Paris. I was based at the Paris-Saclay University, where internationalization of the curriculum called for mobility, whether physical or virtual.[2] Theatrical techniques were also essential to my intercultural communication courses at the Institut Polytechnique de Paris (Telecom Paris).

With the PoP practitioners I had met online, we decided together to experiment with facing the unprecedented situation of lockdown. Practitioners of different creative disciplines based in six different countries, we joined as a working group of the PoP, calling our circle 'Embracing the Unknown.'[3] These online meetings continued for six months, during which time we set a random date to meet up in Germany [4] where we engaged in a physically present two-day workshop. After this exhilarating experience, we were sure we could offer virtual mobility workshops to the EUGLOH Alliance,[5] made up of five Erasmus partner universities of which the Université Paris-Saclay is a member. With the SLAM Lab,[6] I put forward a proposal to run remote workshops called 'eSpaces of Creative Encounter' which was accepted by the Alliance, with the University of Porto contributing a visual artist from the Fine Arts department.[7]

Between March 2021 and March 2022, students and staff from five countries and a wide variety of disciplines were led by six different artists, two per workshop, combining their disciplines and leading a three-hour session where, although English was the common language, it was not the basis for the exchanges, which were mostly physical, drawing even on gibberish and Dadaist practices. After co-leading twelve workshops, I was invited to join the core PoP embodied research group, Cross-Pollination,[8] for a summer intensive workshop in Denmark.

Throughout all this experimentation, I realized how close we were to the working practices and aesthetic philosophy of William Kentridge, an artist and former colleague whose solo and collaborative work with the center for the Less Good Idea I was familiar with and truly appreciated. When I discovered they were soon to perform *Waiting for the Sybil* (2019) in Paris, I approached him for an interview for this issue of *Documenta*.

Waiting for the Sybil

The 2019 Chamber Opera, *Waiting for the Sybil*, directed by William Kentridge, won the 2023 Olivier Award highlighting outstanding achievement in Opera, following a performance at the Barbican theater in London, in September 2022. *Sybil* was also nominated for best New Opera. Kentridge speaks of this creation in detail during a podcast *To what end?* (2023).[9] He refers explicitly to his way of working in the studio as a way of "keeping doubt and uncertainty about your first idea such that other things can come in and shape and inform it" (Kentridge 2023). He does not rule out contradiction in the creative process and values the unpredictable way in which ideas come together.

The idea started as a commission for the Rome opera house that had, in 1968, premiered *Work in Progress* by Alexander Calder. The original Calder mobiles are still at the theater, which he saw in motion, and the nature of the mobiles led to the idea, for the stage creation, of movements of circling and turning. Another source, this time at the Barcelo opera house in Florence, was a Phillip Miller performance with William's video projections of prints of 'predictions' on encyclopedia paper making up the leaves of a tree, and a series of songs including the song 'Waiting for the Sybil', where the Sybil was born as a character. This led to his exploring the myth of the Cumaean Sybil in Naples, who could predict the future and answer your questions. You could write your questions on an oak leaf and she would answer them in her cave on another leaf, but when approaching the mouth of the cave to fetch your answer, the wind would always be swirling around and you would never know if it was your fate you had picked up or somebody else's. Again, the idea of circling and chaos was present. The overarching idea became to explore the question of 'fate' through the character of Sybil. Although we

might believe we can predict the future, we have no *right* to expect any specific future outcomes. We can never know if we are making a *right* or *wrong* decision. The pandemic, as it happened, was what prevented the planned launch of the opera at the Rome opera house. It launched in Luxemburg to a timid audience of 50, appropriately spaced a seat or two apart.

But back to the creative process. Two years before the pandemic, the center for the Less Good Idea had been co-founded with partner Bronwyn Lace. The work began with an open call to draw together about thirty people in Williams's downtown Johannesburg studio: musicians, actors, dancers, a video cameraman, to capture what could be generated in a 7- to 10-day workshop on the theme of fate and the Cumaean Sybil. First, the context was shared - the Calder, the Philip Miller, the Sybil - but then a big space for improvisation and invention was opened up. (What sound could we have? What tree? One huge tree that turns around? One singer? What could costumes be like?)

What was important was to construct "an openness for recognition," not to have clear instructions or meaning, but to say "there is a body of possible languages", and then it is about being open to "what can emerge" (Kentrdge). During the devising process, it took them about three minutes to know that they needed live music. And then it was a question of capturing the grammar of the excitement that makes things emerge, to bring it on stage, to the stage. There was an "impulse towards meaning", and an "unavoidable optimism in the process of making" that William also calls *Fortuna*, closer to serendipity than to random chance (Kentridge). There is a life force in the collective making.

Kentridge insists on the importance of the studio being a "safe space for stupidity". One needs to find a place for human stupidity in the face of machine intelligence, he explains, a space that does not compute, so as not to be owned by the algorithm, the new form of "fate" that threatens to control us (Kentridge). At least in the studio there is a place big enough for this doubt and uncertainty, he says. But then, what is it than can be accomplished together in a studio? How much alone? And how much interaction with the outside world? Kentridge recognizes it was a natural move for him:

> […] to go from making drawings to animating them to working with a puppet theater company, people coming to the studio. So, there is a section of the studio, the main room, for drawing, which it does not help to have anyone else in. And then there is a bigger, more industrial studio in town where sculpture happens, rehearsals, filming if there are lots of people. And a lot of work that happens at night or on the weekends when the studio is empty."
>
> (Kentridge)

And when a piece like *Sybil,* with music directed by Nhlanhla Mahlangu and Kyle Shepherd, with dancers from The center of the Less Good Idea like Teresa Phuti Mojela, Thandalize "Sonia" Radebe and Thulani Chauke, all *authors* in their own right as composer-musicians, choreographers and dancers, comes to the attention of a broader public, it does indeed make political, existential and aesthetic sense, and *that* is its power.

Preparing for dialogue

I would have to interview Kentridge somewhere near the Théâtre du Châtelet in Paris prior to that evening's performance of *Sybil.* I had imagined us sitting around in a local café in a *tête* à tête, a 30-minute recorded chat over coffee. After all, we had met and acted together as students on our campus at the University of the Witwatersrand ("Wits") in South Africa. We had both studied in Paris in 1981. I had visited his two studios in Johannesburg and had seen several of his international exhibitions and performances. However, I was unexpectedly invited to attend a rehearsal before our meeting. It will be hard to talk about anything but the show, I had thought. If the interview happens at all, it cannot be improvised.

I had recently given an international scientific paper on the role of chance in the art of Henri Michaux[10] and William Kentridge.[11] But chance meetings in William's work are, to a certain extent, prepared. The improvisations have a framework. I decided to reflect that technique back at him, to give him a space of freedom, a playground to a certain extent, while introducing, almost randomly, a certain number of questions I wished to address. In order to connect with

Figure 1. Dialogue prompts. Photo © Vera Mihailovich-Dickman, 2023.

him and change registers from the rehearsal I was to attend (I had already seen the show in Luxemburg), I had prepared three items: a newly printed French stamp commemorating the life of Nelson Mandela who had died ten years earlier (our shared history after all); an old postcard, paint-washed by a Serbian artist friend, Milos Todorovic, showing the Denfert Rochereau square (near to where William had lived in1981), and a postcard-size print of one of Henri Michaux's *Mouvements* ideograms in Indian ink. I prepared a set of cards from which he could randomly draw the subjects or questions for our conversation, but then considered that to be too playful and too risky for the situation. After all, I had no idea where we would be. I had also brought a charcoal image I'd made to connect Kentridge and Michaux while writing about their work previously. I had a range of questions and would have to find a way to connect them, allowing William to think freely.

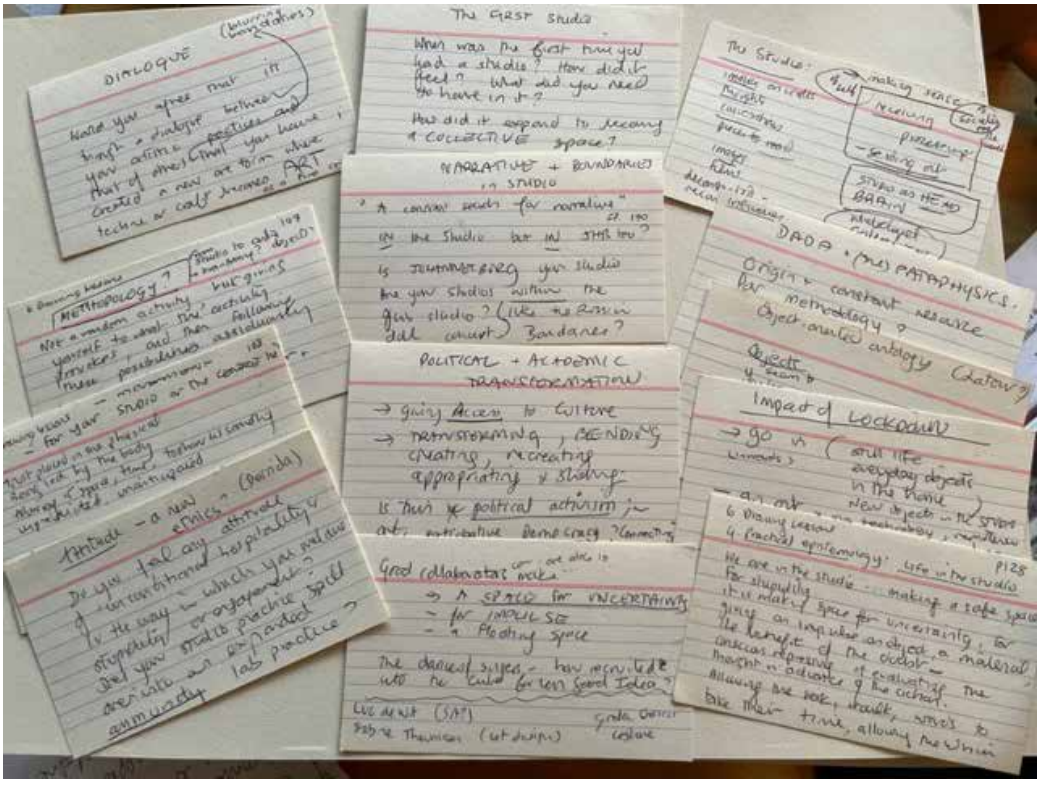

Figure 2. Interview questions. Photo © Vera Mihailovich-Dickman, 2023.

We were invited backstage to the Green Room (the name of our theater club at Wits) to sit around a low table onto which I spread my cards and 'gifts', proceeding to choose a card at random from which to start the interview. Sparked by the first question, William was able to 'walk around the studio of his brain,' telling me a story, until we found a place where there was a mystery, surprising us both to some extent. There was something he had never thought about or seen, and now it appeared clearly. It was'studioness' he had accepted to talk about.[12] He had spoken about the "Studio" on many occasions,[13] but we had found a new dimension, which became more important than any other details. It was the city of Johannesburg as solo and collective Studio. I considered the mission accomplished. The next day, William Kentridge confirmed it.

The interview

Vera Mihailovich-Dickman: (an aside to William): From the Green Room at Wits in Johannesburg to the Green Room at the Théâtre du Châtelet in Paris!

William, thank you for this dialogue - I see it more as a dialogue than an interview mostly because this issue's contributors, many of whom are peers, are far more interested in dialogue and dialogic practices than they are in hierarchically determined academic work. Several are members of Cross Pollination, the research platform that initiated the Parliament of Practices, a tactic that has been employed across Latin America and Europe to promote dialogue across disciplines, cultures and experiences. Despite being a transnational network, they have in common a background in the theater laboratory. I attended a workshop with Cross Pollination in Denmark last year but working with several of these practitioner-researchers online was my entry point. It was under lockdown and so, as a starting point, there was a question of: does one reach inwards in this situation or – somehow - outwards?

If I think about you, your work, the studio, in fact 'studioness', one of the things that we wanted to talk about, and that my peers and I are curious about, is boundaries, the inside and the outside, and that Russian doll expansion that starts inside your brain. I felt, at the Whitechapel Gallery exhibition in London, somehow, that I was walking from one part of your brain to the next, and then, at the LAM exhibition in France, walking through your whole expanded studio. Let's start with that - what was your first studio, if you remember it, and what did you feel you needed in it?

William Kentridge: I think I must've been about 13 or 14 when I felt I wanted to build a studio. I had a perfectly adequate big room in the house called "the playroom", as a child, with toys, a table tennis table … but I thought that, at the age of 13, I needed a studio. There was an old potting shed in the garden, concrete slabs for putting seedlings in, and I worked over the December holidays with a gardener in the house, a person my parents had employed as a gardener, to turn this into a studio. Neither of us had constructed anything before but we

bought window frames and windows and bricks and roofing and built the top walls of this collapsed building into a studio and tried to put some sort of lino flooring down but a) it faced completely the wrong way, so the only flat surfaces had direct sun blaring in, and b) it was very damp, so the concrete never dried properly, and the floor just lifted off and floated away.

You couldn't really seal the windows because we were inadequate builders and had chosen a completely unusable space as a studio. So, the activity of building it was important and good, the idea of studio was there at a very early stage but, practically it was much more efficient as a real studio to move back into the house. So that was the first studio, a kind of 'failure' studio and it stayed as a derelict building for another twenty years before it was knocked down and a cottage built in its place.

Then I had, when I moved out of the Houghton house when I was 20 into Junction Avenue, a two-roomed apartment, a cottage, and one of those rooms was designated as the studio, which was not a tiny room by Paris apartment sizes, but not a big room, maybe 4 by 5 metres

VD: You were making posters at that time, right?

WK: I was making posters and doing a lot of silk screen for theater. I was working for the Johannesburg Art Foundation and we would do the silk screening by hand without a vacuum table and then put clothes lines up all over that second room and over our bedroom and go to sleep at night with the lacquer thinner fumes drying off the posters as we slept underneath them, and poisoning ourselves, and that was a studio for a number of years, and then we came to Paris.

VD: You didn't mind 'poisoning yourselves' because there was a kind of activism in your work too, wasn't there?

WK: There was a kind of activism in the posters, absolutely! And then when we came back to Johannesburg after the year in Paris at the Theater School (Jacques Lecoq) we bought a house in Bertrams and that was a slightly bigger space – the larger room there was the biggest room in the house and that became a studio.

VD: By then were you already developing multiple techniques, as well as filming?

WK: That was starting. The first few films were made in that studio, so it was both a place for making films and for drawing and then we moved into and took over the largest room in my parents' old house, which was their sitting room which became the studio for a few years: it was my studio there from 1993 to 1999. Then when we moved in, I finally built a proper studio in the garden. That was the first purpose- built studio. The others had been biggish rooms and in the Studio what I needed was a space where I could pin anything up on any wall, so all walls are pinboard surfaces. It had a section closed off from the studio which was an office – where two people were working. It had a storeroom for materials and a plan chest for drawings. It needed storage and the mechanics for making some tools and raw material and then the central space was the studio which had to be big enough to walk around in, that the walking around the studio was an important part and the fact that one could pin things anywhere in it too, so all the walls were potentials. It didn't have to have great natural light because a lot of the work I was doing then was filming. I needed to have controlled lighting better than natural light, so that it would stay consistent. It's built in amongst trees, almost like a huge treehouse, but the studio itself has no view line at all - if you go into the office there are beautiful, gorgeous trees, but what I needed was a kind of 'enlarged head'.

VD: The interesting thing is the importance of being in the studio, waiting for the right thing to attract you - you can walk around for quite some time until something jumps off the wall and says "this is what today speaks to me and where my work is going to start." There's a lot of collaboration in your work which leads me to the impression that in the same way as you slowly expanded, so did your studio, almost as if, today Johannesburg itself is your studio?

WK: Yes, yes, but just to correct a little bit what you were saying just before – it's not walking around waiting to see what takes my fancy - it can be said that I know exactly what I've got to do but to gather the energy, to start, for the first mark to happen, that's what the walk means.

It's kind of finding the moment when the decision is made, and the first mark comes out and that's the key - and often the way to deal with that is to make not exactly a random mark, but a very gestural fast mark, so it will then find its clarity in the workings. But this gathering of the thoughts and energy, both of those things happen together.

VD: And that, for you, needs to be in a limited space?

WK: Yes, interesting, even when I'm outside. I've done something like walking around the edge of the swimming pool for an hour and I realize I haven't actually got into the pool, I've just been circling it and then I think what the hell, it's hot, let me get in and collaboratively, a lot of our good conversations happened in or around the swimming pool, when you don't think that that's what you're doing, when we haven't sat down and said, "OK let's have a serious talk about the project." It's when you're doing something and then you say, "You know, I've got a new thought" but it has to do with somewhere in a physical space (...) so the swimming pool is one space, the water is one space - slowly swimming up and down lengths, ideas coming up, checking them with other people - finally we've spent half an hour with our arms over the edge of the pool talking. Inside the studio is another space - as I go in, I open the door, I close the door, and I'm in the space ready to work, and, before the work it's just - "let me just try to clarify what I'm about to do," so it's in the expectation that work is about to happen that often the walk insists its way in. Sometimes you can go in and straight away the first mark goes down, you know what you're doing, it's all set up, but even then – "let me just clarify - this will lead to that," and then there's a circling of the studio.

VD: When you're driving from the studio in Houghton to the one in Maboneng, in town, for example, I'm sure you are looking around you, as if everything that you are seeing is a little bit like the things on the studio wall?

WK: I'd never thought about it in those terms - but thinking now of Johannesburg as the studio, particularly in the sense that the collaborators and performers that I'm working with are so, in general,

Figure 3. William Kentridge in the Houghton Studio. Photo © Adine Sagalyn, 2015.

Johannesburg-based, it *is.* It's not the walk between the drawing and the camera, which it is in the studio, but the movement between the Houghton studio and the town studio - it's that kind of connection. It also has the edge, it has the edge because it's always a complicated drive, complicated in the sense that you have to be aware. You're aware at every stop street,[14] at all the places - you have to be, more than I would feel in, say, a European city, though maybe that's a false idea of a European city. Let's say, you can't be on your phone during that journey. You have to be checking when you're reaching a stop street, what/ who's around, what's going on - that is the circumstance of Johannesburg in that part of town.

VD: There's also the question of the narrative that is important for you and so Johannesburg is a constantly changing narrative. There's also this idea of making sense of this changing society, on a certain level. If you're observing, you must certainly be bringing into your work things that you've seen, or they become some of the figures or structures that appear and that go into interaction with other things,

Figure 4. William Kentridge in the Maboneng Studio, CBD Johannesburg. Photo © Vera Mihailovich-Dickman, 2015.

other objects that are important to you, part of your vocabulary, and then they go around until they make sense, and you connect them in some way. Is there some kind of growth in the narrative?

WK: It's interesting because it's a connection I hadn't thought of before. You bring up thinking of inside the one studio, the smaller space of the Houghton studio and then the other – there's a range of objects that keep on requiring to be drawn, like the coffee pot, or the panther, the rhinoceros, or the tree, in the same way the collaborations are with many of the same people moving from project to project. In a way there are many different trees, but they are all "the tree", and there are many different roles that different actors or singers who work with me perform, but it's the same group, so in that sense it does feel like it's a Studio Group.

VD: A "Studio Group". That's really interesting. I was also wondering whether, because of the society that you live and work in, you see it a little bit as political and academic transformation. For example, in a way you're giving access, but you're also gaining access to cultures you had no access to. Your work is very multilingual, you are also giving access to the voices of and works by people that might not be accessible otherwise, and you are, somehow, by blending, creating, recreating, appropriating, sharing, transforming, you're materialising something new, establishing a collaborative encounter with these cultures. You're making something new, which seems to be a kind of political act in the sense that you're working with the raw material of a new society, something that was not possible before Mandela was released. Although it's in the art, it's almost like a participative democracy. It's like looking at a truly democratic way of living and connecting where voices can actually be shared and where you can equally co-create. Is it deliberate for you to co-create across cultures in that way?

WK: Well, I'd never thought of it in quite the terms that you are describing it. I'm not disagreeing with it. I always think of them as particular individual performers - there are so many astonishing singers, actors who obviously bring with them histories and stories, some very specific ones that become part of the narrative. So to give an example of that, you're talking about the trade in body parts around the world, thinking, for a character, of people selling their kidneys,

trading organs like that - both legally and illegally, voluntarily and involuntarily, and one of the actors is saying, "yes, there's a man in the township called Fingers and each time he needed something he would chop off a finger because he had insurance for his hands." So, the first finger bought him a car, the second finger enabled him to fix his house, the third finger did something else and it was a kind of monetizing of the body in another strange way. So, for him it was a hilarious story of this person they called Fingers in the township, but it certainly gave a whole new angle into thinking about the body and trade in the body. So, it's not just for the voices, or for movement skills, there are those plus all the things that go behind it and, for monolingual white South Africa, there's a shame in not knowing all the other languages that we've heard all our lives.

VD: Is that what they say, the word "shame", at the very end of *Sybil* - are they singing it?

WK: No, they're singing "*Tshepo*"– they're singing "Hope - Where shall we place our hope?" The soloist woman is singing a version of "Where shall we put our hope?"

VD: I see, but when they're lifting up the leaves, were they saying "shame, shame?"

WK: No, no it's "Shwe … Shwe" so I'm not sure, literally, but it's a sound more than anything …

VD: So, to stay with the idea that if you're going from the way you work in your solo studio to the way you work in your collective studio, there's almost a sense of reaching out into the community, the society, that your practice in your individual studio has become a practice across the city where in fact where you're blurring boundaries …

WK: Well even the stuff that's done in the other studio, the center for the Less Good Idea,[15] it's very much there, in town, next to my studio. The community the center deals with, for example, its primary focus is on the artists, actors, and giving them a space to work in an open way that would be impossible in the theater or on other projects.

Secondarily, it's the people who come to see it and tertiarily, it's the immediate community around the Center.

So some of the artists who come to the center are interested in working with groups of people, musicians - there are some Nigerian funeral dancers, there's Isicathamiya choirs (similar to acapella, but rooted in an isiZulu tradition), there are other dancers in the area that they like to work with - but other artists are much more interested in things about themselves, or other relationships, questions, and all of those are possible at the Center. After years of working in a kind of agit-prop way, of thinking – "what is it? – what are the sort of images that the world needs to see?" - to changing, over the last many years, to saying, "I need to do something that either intrigues *me*, or the people I'm working with," in the hope that if there is something in it that interests me, other people will connect to that too, rather than starting with thinking – "what do other people not know that I know, that I can show them?" A lot of the projects start with frustration with one's own stupidity, working from there outward, rather than thinking – "here's something I know that I'm going to teach you."

VD: I think that the project that I started was about discovering that our home could be a studio and that the objects in the home also had a place. Some had been forgotten, sometimes we were taking photographs from the point of view of an object, bringing in and sharing objects we'd forgotten, going into spaces we had never sat in, working across languages led by artists and students from different disciplines and cultures and also students in different countries, trying to co-create in this space and time our lockdown home 'studio' which was remote. I noticed that some of your very beautiful drawings, still life with objects I hadn't seen before, like vases with flowers, partly collaged, were being done then, yet it seems you didn't reach out to have remote interactions. Was that a personal preference, or had you discussed it, and were there problematic technical issues about people working from home with computers or phones, not having the rooms and space, or needing to come to a collective studio?

WK: No, some things were possible to do long distance and we started with them, but editing, even something like editing, there is some editing that people do in their own houses, but it is very much the conversation together …

VD: So, working together in real time creatively for a final piece that is going to be edited?

WK: A lot of the lockdown project was a series of nine half-hour films about life in the studio, done all in the studio in the garden, and that was about the compression of the studio, the claustrophobia of being stuck there, so even when the lockdown ended, the decision was taken to still keep all the filming in that place, and as soon as they could be, the editors were back on site.

VD: In fact, you said in the conversation with your film-maker Walter Murch that editing is poetry –

(**WK:** *He* said that) –

VD: And you agreed, maybe? It's about bringing in the poetry?

WK: Well, for him it's just a question of how long is a shot, but the drawings don't ever feel like co- creations. The theater pieces absolutely do, the sculptures do feel like this, the tapestries do. Where there are other people, it's not just their technical skills but it's their experience, their eye, their judgement that is part of the making of the pieces, and theater pieces supremely so.

VD: Were the sculptures your idea?

WK: The sculptures are my idea …

VD: Of course, some of the works we'd seen before in shadow pieces and cardboard …

WK: But I just began to realize it's about scale and as they grow, they are more and more essential.

VD: Yes, it's really brilliant to see that!
I know we have to conclude because other people need your time

Figure 5: Vera Mihailovich-Dickman and William Kentridge in the Green Room, Théâtre du Châtelet. (Photo taken on request by local staff)

but maybe I can just ask, William, at the center for the Less Good idea, when you're working across disciplines with all these different people, does somebody lead the workshops with a physical methodology, for example, like you used at Jacques Lecoq, when you speak about the different breathing steps and four stages or four levels of tension?

WK: Different people lead warm-ups, so we have different approaches. We say, "Won't you do the warm-up today?" and then the different directors have their way of working with them. So, there's not a physical methodology of the Center. We had a series of classes in physical theater, so one was Jacques Lecoq, (…) one with Jenny Reznick, each one doing a course, three different physical theater courses. So there's a process or a strategy, but there isn't a technique.

VD: And then you work for, say, a five-day intensive week?

WK: Yes, but then, you know, different groups get together at different times to complete what they were doing.

tetterie / Box Office

VD: OK, well one of our dreams was one day to work across the ethers with the center for the Less Good Idea and maybe, William, we will be able to make that happen because your work has been so inspirational.

WK: There are groups that do this with Bronwyn.

VD: I raised the question with Nhlanhla Mahlangu in Luxemburg and in a video call later. He said it was not very interesting for him but that it interested Thandazile "Sonia" Radebe, and she was, at one stage, wanting to go further, but it was harder then to gather the conditions to take that further.

But I think your work with the idea of 'embracing the unknown' (our expression) and the 'safe space for stupidity' (your expression), going into and embracing uncertainty is a very interesting creative process that we are also trying to use in a summer school art-science project (Useful Fictions #3) with Marcus Neustetter on the Institut Polytechnique de Paris campus. We're going to try and take those working principles and embody them, making it very physical.

We're trying to create an ephemeral studio space which will have a very physical existence where we bring in the body and material objects, where it's a lab, but not just a thinking lab. We'd like to elaborate or create a new space together, an environment of symbiosis, and I think everything, all the indications that are given in the books that you've written, things you've spoken about so frankly and unpretentiously, give us ways of working that help us feel safer in this space of complete openness where we need to trust the process.

Figure 6: William Kentridge outside the Théâtre du Châtelet, Paris.
Photo © Vera Mihailovich-Dickman, 2023.

Closing thoughts

There is a fine line between a 'solo' or 'group' studio preparing work, where every artist is contributing *techne* to building a new oeuvre that can be exhibited, published or performed, and a more open studio, so to speak, where collaborative research is a way of working that can help an artist discover how to expand their potential while remaining true to certain principles, techniques or values. How can artists, and even just learners, surprise themselves through interaction with others that help them grow? How is a 'safe space for stupidity' created? Is it simply an attitude of openness and curiosity that builds on deep questions that can be explored together? Or is there a process that generates both trust and creativity?

Perhaps a missing link, one precious to William Kentridge, is to be open to the time and interaction it takes to allow meaning to emerge from chaos, to trust that every contribution makes a difference to meaning making, and that sometimes a new form emerging collaboratively allows for new understandings - of the past, of oneself, or of an artistic practice.

This interview was edited for clarity and brevity.

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Notes

1 Parliament of Practices (PoP): A platform and a tactic for generative knowledge exchange initiated by Marije Nie and Adriana La Selva in 2020, cf Parliament of Practices: Notopian tactics for praxical dialogue link:https://doi.org/10.1080/13528165.2020.1930765

2 "Internationalization at Home" pedagogies of which "virtual mobility" is an option (Leask, 2009)

3 This included artists Karolina Beimcik (Polish jazz singer), Christoph Falke (German actor and director), Tapani Monen (Finnish actor and director in Italy), Marije Nie (Dutch musician and dancer, often based at NTL in Denmark), and Marta Wryk (Polish opera singer in Germany)

4 Studio 7 in Schwerte, run by Christophe Falke

5 At the time the E.U. Global Health (EUGLOH) alliance was a new European University comprising 5 partners: U. Paris-Saclay, U. Porto, LMU, U. Szged, U. Lund. There are now 9 partners in the alliance.

6 Synergie Langues Art Musique (SLAM), UEVE, Université Paris-Saclay, plug-in lab headed by Brigitte Gauthier.

7 Rita Castro-Neves, photographer and installation artist in Portugal.

8 Cross Pollination collective was founded in 2017 by Adriana La Selva and Marije Nie, to bring practitioners from all disciplines of the performing arts together in a nomadic theater laboratory to engage in the dialogue in-between practices. Cross Pollination's Nomadic Laboratory: a praxis in-between practices Revista Brasileira de Estudos da Presença. 2021, Vol. 11, Issue 4: Laboratories in Flux

9 https://news.berkeley.edu/2023/01/27/berkeley-talks-william-kentridge/

10 Henri Michaux (1899-1984), Belgian-born major 20th century French artist (poetic writings, visual arts)

11 TimeWorld Congress, Paris 2021: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hBOeWSBov-k&t=144s

12 'Studioness' is a possible translation of "studiinost" (Eastern European theater practitioners referring to a praxical spirit). For Bryan Keith Brown "Studio is a place for perfecting oneself, a collective and organizational form around the interdependent relations or ethical bonds between the people who comprise it" (Brown, 2019, 13 in *A History of the Theater Laboratory*. Abingdon, Oxon; New York, NY: Routledge) quoted in endnote 6 by Adriana La Selva in Affective topologies and virtual tactile experiences in theater training (Theater, Dance and Performance Training, Vol 4, Issue 2, 2023).

13 Note in particular "Drawing Lesson Four - Practical Epistomology: Life in the Studio" in Six Drawing Lessons, Harvard University Press, 2014, and Footnotes for the Panther, Fourthwall Books, Johannesburg 2017.

14 A "stop street" or "robot" in South African English refers to a traffic light or an intersection, a junction.

15 "The center for the Less Good Idea" - the name originates from a Tswana proverb: "If the good doctor can't cure you, find the less good doctor". (...) "In the act of playing with an idea, you can recognize those things you didn't know in advance but knew somewhere inside of you" (lessgoodidea.com).

Dialogue and Repertoire: The Ever-Changing Nature of Walking and Talking Together

–– Diana Taylor (NEW YORK UNIVERSITY)
–– Andrea Maciel (UNIVERSITY OF BRISTOL)

This conversation between Professor Diana Taylor and Dr. Andrea Maciel presents Taylor's life-long experience fostering art and activism, as well as promoting dialogical research encounters through The Hemispheric Institute of Performance & Politics. The discussion encompasses the role of the archive as part of a mutual collaboration between performance and practice as research whilst opening a critical inquiry on how new epistemologies for artists and researchers can contemplate the archive as a force for the creation of laboratorial praxis. Drawing on her long experience as a core member of Cross Pollination (CP), an international arts research platform for the exchange of knowledge and nomadic laboratory spaces, Maciel invites Taylor to also reflect about the power of performances and somatic practices to trace trauma related to social cultural alienation and oppression.

Keywords: performance, activism, archive, politics, trauma, identitarian discourse

ANDREA MACIEL: The theme we are looking at for this Special Edition is dialogue. And dialogue in performance studies can be also understood as an agency in the process of creating repertoire and archive. Perceiving the archive as an ongoing conversation can also be a way of seeing an emancipatory relationship between archive and performers. For me, it is safe to say that the Hemispheric Institute encounters were able to foster spaces for dialogue leading to the creation of many different repertoires in my practice.[1] All the processes, creative practices, thought-provoking experiences that I witnessed and practiced throughout at least a ten-year period at the Hemi Encounters were not only something that I carried with me – enabling agency, perspectives and insights through my practice – but also went even further beyond that. I have also witnessed so many artistic companionships coming out of the Hemi encounters, unfolding into projects and collective work. Hemi was also present for a community of artists and researchers as an awareness of an ethos which we can relate to.

Bearing this in mind, how do you see the presence of this kind of dialogue, as related to the idea of archive and repertoire?

DIANA TAYLOR: There are many different ways of approaching this. Let me start with my most recent book *¡Presente!: The Politics of Presence* (2020). I write that, to be me, I have to walk and talk with others. So, I start with the notion of subjectivity as interrelated, as dependent on dialogue and shared practice (such as walking). We have to be in these relationships in order to be ourselves. You must name me. I must name you. It is a practice of recognitions. So, I think it shapes the foundation of every single thing we do. But, as you said, there is also an ethics to dialogue, a politics to it, a method to it, there is a whole epistemology stemming for relationality and dialogue. Who do we talk to? How do we relate to others?

I started the Hemispheric Institute in 1998 because of the urgency and the difficulty of interpersonal, interdisciplinary, international dialogue. Every one of us contains what I've called a rich 'archive' and 'repertoire' of knowledge. But we *know* and act from different places. A person or community in the Yucatan Peninsula, or Buenos Aires, or Saskatchewan has different points of reference. We cannot understand each other's languages, or gestures, or practices without understanding the context. We would need to speak and share work

and ideas to communicate across the differences. When I became part of the Performance Studies Department at NYU,[2] one of my first observations was that the scholarship was basically written in English: the texts were predominantly from the U.S., Great Britain, Australia, and Canada. But clearly people from the rest of the world have rich performance practices and theorizations. They may approach issues from a very different place, and we cannot assume that we are talking about the same things. So I thought – let's find a way of bringing artists, scholars, and activists from the Americas together to share work. But it wasn't easy. Artists, activists, and scholars from different countries, working in different disciplines, languages, economic conditions, and so on, did not have the experience of working together.

Here's an example. In a very early 'Encuentro' or gathering of the Hemispheric Institute ("Memory, Atrocity, and Resistance", 2001, Monterrey, Mexico) I met with the artists and activists who had joined the event. I was explaining why I thought it was important that artists, scholars, and activists come together to share their work and ideas on a topic. I think the Encuentro was about the repression and disappearances that took place during the dictatorships. One of the artists said: "I understand artists sharing work with activists – think of Grupo Arte Callejero (GAC), young artists who collaborated closely with activists from H.I.J.O.S., the children of the disappeared in Argentina, trying to bring the torturers to trial and justice. So, that makes sense. The artists help make the violence and the movement visible. But why scholars?" I responded that artists and activists – especially in the case of GAC and H.I.J.O.S. – put their bodies on the line as part of their process. But I asked: who complicated the idea of 'the body'. Who taught us to think about sex, gender, race, class, abilities, age and so on when thinking about 'the body'? "Ok, ok," they said. "You can stay." And that is how we built Hemi and the Encounters as spaces of dialogue, of sharing, of trying to communicate across all the differences that separate us.

The act of bringing people together from very different contexts and circumstances requires us to rethink Western cultural assumptions. What counts as art? Who/what is art for? How do 'artists' differ from activists? And what about scholars? These separations go way back in Western thought. Plato, Arendt reminds us in *The Human Condition* was the first to introduce the division between those who know

and do not act and then those who act and do not know … so that knowing what to do and doing it became two altogether different performances. So, to value everyone as a thinker and a creator is crucial. And, as important, we need to challenge the Western notion that the 'archive' of written knowledge is stable and survives and the 'repertoire' of embodied, performed knowledge, is ephemeral and disappears. In my *Archive and Repertoire*[3] I argue that memories, habits, practices (such as singing, weaving, dancing, storytelling, cooking, and so on) that pass through the body are living performance practices. They continue to be shared and transmitted, often with changes and modifications. The forms of transmission between the archive and the repertoire are different and the distinctions are very important. Both systems of transmission are vital, and they often work together. In a legal trial, for example, the jury pronounces the verdict that is then written down in government archives. But it is also important to know that the transmissions through the archive and the repertoire change over time – neither are stable. While clearly each individual performance will never be the same twice, materials in archives undergo change and our relationship with those materials also change.

AM: Would you consider this ever-changing nature of the archive precisely what links the archive with dialogue?

DT: Yes, sure.

AM: This makes me think about the artistic relationship between practice and the act of creating definitions, which is something present in our 'practice-as-research' methodologies. I feel that this can often get scholars and practitioners into great trouble. The question is how to define something that is not definable in one shape? How to observe the fluidity of what we are producing and at the same time organise concepts around what we do? How do we observe the *Zeitgeist* around us in a sense that we can produce connections between the archive and the reality of our present moment?

DT: I think those connections come through repetition. It's through doing things again and again and again and knowing that every one of our approximations is temporary. We can go back to the archive

and see how it was done back then. Or remember how we did it last time. While it may be the 'same' dance or performance piece, it's never the same. When I finish a book, the first thing I want is to start everything again. And it's already changed. The next book only reflects that moment, because if I needed to go back and write again, I would do so in a different way. We haven't exhausted a topic or captured the ontology of anything by naming it.

AM: Maybe this is a good point: give up on capturing ontologies and stick with repetition. Would you say that repetition is already a way of conversing?

DT: Yes, and a reformulation; a reframing attitude of observing the same things in different ways, taking in consideration different elements, changing our minds about the same objects. It just strikes me that we are too often affected by this old Western traditional way of building definitions, as if a written dictionary will define and somehow 'fix' what things are. I don't think so. Our creative process is in constant change.

AM: Reading your chapter on 9/11 in your book, *Archive and Repertoire*, I was struck by your testimony on how it was almost impossible for you to deal with that political moment. The whole context of the War against Terror in the wake of 11 September was a massive turning point, affecting our way of existing in the world. You said, and I quote, "I didn't know how to live in the world anymore." The first years of the Hemispheric Institute Encuentros/Encounters co-existed with this world scenario. I am aware that the intention behind the creation of Hemi exceeded a mere encounter of political performance; the Hemispheric Encounters had above all this clear aim of being an episteme of practices, a peer-to-peer support place. A place to be with and, as you said, to "walk and talk together" whilst listening to different voices from performances in the Americas. But there was a very scathing political scenario to respond to. The polarization between West and East was the great global tug-of-war. It was such a loud conflict that, I think it is safe to say, it ended up compressing many other possibilities of dialogue and relationships between many nations and cultures.

From my point of observation, Hemi was simultaneously responding to this *Zeitgeist* and at the same time existing as a space in which performance artists from Latin American, the U.S., and Canada (and other corners of the world) could speak in an amplified arena of visibility with one another. My question is: how do you see those twenty years of continuous dialogue and responses to 'terror'? Today we observe the terror within society through endless polarizations unfolding in hate campaigns, digital cancellations, fascist outbursts. We are just recovering from the shock of 8 January, with the invasion of Brazilian Parliament in 2023,[4] and the US is looking back on the damage provoked over the last two years in the wake of the 6 January Capitol attack in 2021.[5] In so many ways, we can state that the terror has moved within. The polarization is highly internalized, supported by an extreme mediatization of politics. How do you look back to those twenty years of performance production within the Hemi context in relationship to this shape-shifting presence of terror in our world?

DT: I think your point is so important. The terror has not gone away. It seems so widespread now. In fact, I think we could say that "the Americas" stem not just from an interconnected landmass but from an interconnected practice of terror: conquest, genocides, enslavement, disenfranchisement and exclusion of populations, wars, and criminal politics. My *Archive and Repertoire* book comes after *Disappearing Acts – Spectacles of Gender and Nationalism in Argentina's Dirty War* (1997), which was a very important book for me, especially in relation to what you are talking about. The book starts narrating my viewing of a performance in 1990. This was eight years after the re-instalment of democracy in 1982 post dictatorship Argentina, a very fragile and troubled democracy by the way.

So, I was there, watching this play put on by a very prominent leftist theater playwright/director/actor Eduardo Pavlovsky who was also a psychoanalyst. He plays a torturer. The play was staged in this pit of mud; it was beautifully staged. Pavlovsky cast his actual wife, who was helpless and naked throughout the performance while he was tortured her, demanding that she name him. The justification, apparently, was that we should all name the torturers as a political act. The physical exertion that this female actor/character went through was such that she literally could not speak. They had to have a female actor sitting in the bleachers at the back saying her lines.

I had been invited to speak at a forum on authoritarianism, authority and authorship, in which I argued how the work was not challenging or denouncing authoritarianism, but rather repeating the violence and the gendered nature of the violence. My comment triggered a very angry reaction from the people involved in the play. The director got extremely angry with me, arguing how she was condemning authoritarianism. She said I had no right to say anything because I wasn't from Argentina and had never been tortured, and that I should shut up because I was an American, Yankee, feminist, fascist. I was stunned, but not silent. I responded that "You don't need to have your eyes pulled out of your head to understand Oedipus," which I think is a very important premise in theater. You don't need to have experienced the trauma to understand or be moved by a representation of trauma. That's why representation is important. That's why we have art, theater, performance.

That night, I went back to my hotel room, and I thought to myself, what am I doing? Do I have a right to speak? And I thought: well, I'm a person who is professionally dedicated to theater and performance. I am from Latin America. I know a lot about the dictatorship because I've lived and studied it. And I know quite a bit about theater because that's what I do. So, if I don't have the right to speak because I wasn't tortured or because I am not from Argentina, perhaps it is better that I give up my profession. I'll become a dentist or something. And that inspired a great reflection into what dialogue was for me. Who controls it? Where and when are we allowed, or not, to speak?

Disappearing Acts was the most difficult book I have ever written because I needed to understand what, if anything, I could offer from my perspective. But Argentina was in a painful moment – trying to overcome the brutal dictatorship, the pure and unadulterated fascism. People were suffering from what I called 'percepticide' – they had been forced not to see or hear the violence going on all around them.

As I was finishing that book in 1995, I was observing the same fascism beginning to make itself visible in the US. It was already clear to me that what we're seeing now in the United States that culminated on 6 January was already being incubated back then. The "Contract with America" came out in 1994 with all the 'reforms' for cutting public

investment, shrinking the participation of the state, and delimiting citizenship rights.[6] Interestingly, looking back at our current political situation the Contract with America sounds almost progressive.

It was right after that book that I started Hemi. I began the planning and development in 1997 and we received funding in 1998. The purpose behind Hemi was to create a space for creative people from different places, backgrounds, cultures to honestly talk to each other. We never had rules. It wasn't like, "You had to be respectful." The goal was engagement, active listening, and sharing work.

In Hemi, the conversations kept changing over the years and that was fantastic! Fascinating how subjects evolved. The first *Encuentro* was in 2000 and the things we were talking then were not the same that we were talking in 2002 or 2019 for example. But even this variety of topics touched on the same substratAM: the genocide and marginalization of indigenous people in the Americas, enslavement and its ongoing enactments, gender/sexual violence, discrimination, economic disparities and resource extraction, white, male, patriarchal supremacies, and ongoing criminal politics. All these problems are Americas-wide.

In parallel, we were witnessing the United States at war with Iraq and all the violence unfolding from there. But we knew that this violence was always there, and that the US has been practicing this same kind of despotic violence since its own foundation. In 1954, the CIA was involved with the Guatemalan state coup, and they were disappearing people by then. So, our discussions were about a practice of violence and terror that was always already there. And the discussions were also intertwined and depended on where you were situated in the Americas. Many times, our discussions were all about identity, and this usually came from US and Canada. People from Mexico for example would not go crazy about identity; they would rather talk about violence, feminicides, censorship.

AM: It's very interesting what you were saying, in a sense of pointing out how the conversations were always changing and evolving whilst speaking to the current political moment. So, the differentiation was happening within the ethos of the groups of scholars and activist who were finding new aspects of political performance. At the same

time, there was an exploration of how to embody this vast array of social traumas through this dialogical thread.

Do you think it would be safe to say that there were two kinds of dialogical lines going on in parallel: one stretching the happenings in the world and how this political violence speaks to us, and another sensing and exploring how performances were reflecting it?

DT: Yes, absolutely.

AM: This also stretches the point of importance in the cultivation of a space for multiple vocalizations of cultural subjectivities. Hemi was a place in which difference, plurality, and embodied agency could co-exist, creating a collective atmosphere in a period in which this plurality and diversity of social conversations were getting extremely stiff in the world. Maybe I am touching on a can of worms here, but it is already apparent the segregating nature of identitarian discourses.

DT: Yes, and it goes back to who is allowed to speak. Who gets to speak and how we speak collectively.

AM: This is definitively a reality for those working in educational and artistic contexts at the moment. We have been suffering tremendous pressure and witnessing people being cancelled as a result of a war of identities. I am totally aware of how important it is to acknowledge diversity and empower unrepresented categories, but things seem to be out of balance at the moment in terms of how the rules of communication put in place to acknowledge the diversity of identity can be used in an authoritarian way. This is a very complex and complicated issue now, and I believe this discussion will evolve as we include a range of different voices.
What happened within the context of what you're narrating from your experience in Argentina is an elimination of the symbolic process. When the space for understanding and being part of a collective debate can only exist out of the concrete experience of the facts, we are in danger of losing key aspects of performative practice and additionally disregarding any possibility of human empathy.

DT: Absolutely. It goes against everything that performance says and does. Performance is simultaneously an action and a form of being in the world. It's driven by imagination which depends on the 'as if'. So, if I need to be that person who is suffering the experience to understand or talk about it, then only this person can do it. On one hand, we need to recognize the impulse – people from under recognized groups have been displaced and silenced for too long. Having white male actors take on women's (and everyone else's) roles dates back to ancient Greece. But that's not what we're talking about here. We're experiencing a 'cancelling,' as you call it, predicated on the assumption that we cannot understand or communicate across difference. It is the worst form of isolation. There's no communication. No solidarity. No empathy. There's no imagination. It's terrifying, really.

Going back to what we're talking before about walking and talking together; part of that is based on the assumption of mutuality, on how we share many things in a respectful way. So, if I have total control on setting the rules on how you are going to deal with me, how I can be named by you? How do I become myself through interrelationality? And how can we come to self-realization through collective respect and mutuality? Granted, giving ourselves up to the idea of naming each other depends on mutual respect. Naming has been soul crushing and destructive for people who have been enslaved or criminalized for 'deviant' behaviours for being Black, or female, or trans, or differently abled. But respectful mutuality with our peers, the people we choose to walk and talk with, allows us to be more fully ourselves. And if people don't allow this to happen anymore, then we are all diminished, I think. It also makes us vulnerable to hate discourses. When it becomes a law, and staff in all institutions have to be trained in every aspect of interaction, we run a risk of policing our behaviors to such a degree that we disregard our sense of mutual respect and togetherness. What is frightening is that this promotes a neoliberal managerial approach to life.

AM: Certainly, this leads to a stiffening of our sense of connection and dialogue. Not a shadow of a doubt that this is an obstacle to exercising our plurality, our idiosyncrasies in terms of how to be together. I guess it is safe to say it can obstruct a collective creation of archives, repertoire, and performances in the world. Do you have any thoughts or ideas about how to stir new sparks that can get us out of

this new neoliberal, managerial dynamic in our social relationships?

DT: I am very sad to see how corporate and managerial our institutions have become. As you were saying before, the terror has also been institutionalized. It's a shame that our institutions have adopted this neoliberal managerial approach to life rather than allowing debate and discussions about the themes that are challenging to us. I would say, let's have interactions, let's talk about things respectfully rather than dictate them.

I have a friend who's a feminist artist who was recently interviewed by a magazine. The topic of pronouns came up. She said she wanted to be referred to as 'she', but they wanted to use 'they' instead. She insisted on 'she,' and in the end, they didn't publish the piece. So, this can even escalate to a point where one can't name oneself. I personally prefer everybody to be a 'they'. I'd be very happy to do away with pronouns altogether. I think gender is just a huge, big issue of social control. But we're not going to get rid of gender altogether.

AM: It really shuts down our sense of togetherness and connection, I think. As a performer, I wonder how we can respond to it. It is a such troubled subject, touching on very acute issues. But I keep asking how performances can create interesting ways of opening up perception, provoking a new awareness about this trouble.

DT: In my new book *¡Presente!,* there is a chapter called 'We Have Always Been Queer' about Jesusa Rodríguez's performance in Montreal, *Juana la Larga,* that sparked a big discussion about sexual identity, especially trans identity.[7] I've published it aware that it could be attacked. Again, I insist that understandings of sexual identity, like much else, depend on the context. We can't assume that everybody shares the same context. Jesusa's performance provoked a heated debate centered on her representation of the medical violence directed at an 18th century hermaphrodite. The confrontation was complicated. It featured Jesusa, a lesbian Mexican artist, an 18th century hermaphrodite, Juana, a trans man in Canada, and many others who weighed in on the various sides. And my question there was: how can any one of them/us presume that they understand how the other one feels? What performance offers is exactly an open space for inquiry, and it seems to me that this space is shutting

Figure 1. From Juana la Larga, Jesusa Rodríguez, Hemispheric Institute Encuentro ©Julio Pantoja, 2014.

down the possibilities of exploration of how other's feel and think. If one honestly asks: what did I mean when I said that? What did this mean to me? And, necessarily, what did this thing mean to you?

AM: Good point. A discussion that has the aim of acknowledging identities can end up shutting down the unknown and obliterating connections. Following this thread, I would like to ask you to talk a little bit about the digital, which is also an area that holds a lot of tension, especially when we weigh up the digital medium which allows for the propagation of the archive and algorithmic logic. Both are part of the same living web: it is through the media that we act, connect, show

up, shout out, campaign for funding, get ideas published or not. And it seems to me that there is a war going on in digital medias, where algorithms are programmed to increase hate campaigns, where extreme right-wing movements like Bolsonaro in Brazil, Trump in the US, and Brexit in the UK seem to be nurtured by algorithmic logic.

At the same time, digital space allows for the possibility of creating a bank of political performances, following the example of what you have done through the Hemi Archives and the *e-misferica* digital journal.[8] Digital Performance archives are driven by an intention of fostering dialogue and keeping the liveness of the creative process accessible to a vast public.

My question is: how can the performance archive's presence in digital media be restrained and limited by algorithmic manipulations? Considering that the nature of performance is to break the norm, or question the mechanisms and conformities that restrain our social perception, I keep asking: how can we hack this binary logic?

DT: I think we are talking about two different things. The digital is one more form of communication and interaction. The web existing in space, the airwaves, the fiber optic, the whole infrastructure, was developed for military use, and later we were allowed to use it with this huge amount of flexibility and connection that we have. Our life depends on digital communications. However, like everything else in our life, at the moment, this is completely controlled by neoliberalism. We have a neoliberal regime controlling the airwaves, in the same way that it controls television and so on. And because of that, it controls the politics. So, I think the fight is against neoliberalism, not against the digital. The digital is just one more platform, one more way, one more place.

We have to be fighting the banks now. We must be fighting all these environmentally destructive industries. That's what we have to focus on. And part of this fight may be focused on the power we can exercise as consumers, because if you don't buy, things come crashing down. It's only buying and debt that keep this machine functioning.

It seems like it's a big fight, no person alone can do that. It takes a huge amount of social organizing, and we can organize on the same exact platform that they control.

AM: This situation is part of our daily fight. Groups and organization like Cross Pollination and Intercultural Roots, which I am part of, have to deal with the paradox of using these platforms and being used by it.[9] We are usually 'gifted' by Google and Microsoft with 'free' funding for ads and we are aware that if, on the one hand, these tools can expand our outreach, on the other they are the same tools that use our data to sell even more. I often catch myself thinking: what alternative will come out of this digital feudalism? Again, it seems that we go back to the issue of who gets the right to talk louder than other voices.

At Intercultural Roots[10] our activism consists of expanding notions of health through peer-to-peer support and enable-the-enablers programmes. We were recently, for example, enabling artists in war conflict zones in Africa, to promote peaceful dialogues through the dissemination of folkloric dance cultures that trespass the borders of the civil conflict. But we need to hand over our info to them and we don't know how this is going to be used. I think that we should expand this discussion and perhaps involve engineers and programmers in our digital activism.

I would like to talk about collective and individual somatic traces of pain. It seems to me that this is key in the process of promoting dialogue and social emancipation from neoliberal logic.

As a somatic dance-theater teacher, my work is centerd on developing a felt-sense of the body's potentialities. It is about inviting bodies to feel and sense what they can do, which involves being aware of their inner impulses and body-memories. This practice inevitably forces people to confront memories of trauma and pain. Sometimes this work brings about that which is impossible to bear. From my experience, I feel that this is a pivotal point: supporting people to be with their pain in a safe space and look to the memory of the trauma in an expanded way, which can help them to develop a sense of agency.

This work is developed in the theater laboratory, when Cross Pollination works with young artists to create a space in which vulnerability can be a means for creation and growth. The key point is to foster a work dynamic allowing young artists to be in touch with what makes them feel vulnerable, but at the same time exercise clear boundaries in terms of how they would like to step in and out of this space, for

the sake of their own autonomy as an actor-creator. In order to create this safe space, we need stability, trust, being present with each other and creating an ethos of mutual responsibility which enables kinship and peer-to-peer movement practices which, consequently, fuel collective activism.

I feel that, in the collective social field, this psychophysical dynamic also applies. We could witness recently in Brazil how the Truth and Reconciliation Commissions were obliterated by extreme right-wing military factions in Brazilian Government. The reaction to the 2014[11] Truth Commissions' aim to dig up traumatic memories and promote clarification regarding cases of torture, deaths, and disappearances throughout the Military Dictatorship, gave leverage to Bolsonaro supporters, culminating in his election in 2018. Today, on 17 January 2023, there are millions of Brazilians protesting against the democratic election of President Lula and calling for a reinstallation of a Military Dictatorship.

What has happened to people's memory? This movement of never looking back and burying memories is, in my view, a great impediment for any dialogue in any field. It is space in which the excluded bodies see themselves in a hole that is impossible to climb out of.

DT: I am co-directing a project at the moment called 'Zip Code Memory Project' https://zcmp.org/. Zip codes were created to deliver mail efficiently but, of course, they also become zones of racial and economic divisions. Some people live in very wealthy zip codes and a lot of people live in very poor zip codes. During the pandemic in New York, the death rate of the people living in a poor zip code were more than twice as high as those in wealthy zip codes.

This inspired a colleague and me to do something. The project is very much about what you are talking about. We did what we know how to do – convene large groups, engage artists, activists, and scholars – to offer workshops in marginalized zip codes of New York "to gather and process the effects of the pandemic. How had it affected our lives? Where, in our bodies, did we carry the uncertainties, anxieties and fears it provoked, the harm we had suffered?" (*Zip Code Memory Project*). We needed to build trust, create a space for imagining repair, and demanding justice.

What was clear to me, and it has been for a long time since I wrote *Disappearing Acts*, is that certain people carry trauma. Like for example, the Mothers of The Plaza de Mayo in Argentina whose children were permanently 'disappeared', carry trauma. It is certainly individual trauma, but their trauma-fuelled activism makes clear it is also collective trauma. The entire population who did not support or agree with the dictatorship was put at risk. Marginalized populations, descendants of enslaved people, often continue to experience trauma. In part, trauma is handed down genetically through 'epigenetics'. But it's also prolonged through continued assault – discrimination and institutionalized practices of exclusion and inequality. This collective trauma needs to be acknowledged and addressed with all the attention that medical professionals in Western, capitalist systems reserve for traumatized individuals who can afford treatment.

But Western medicine has been terribly neglectful about everything related to trauma. At first, they said it was very rare, then later they started to relate it to people who've come back from war (Freud's 'shell shock'). Then Judith Herman[12] made clear that women who have suffered rape and/or domestic violence often experience trauma. We are finally coming to a kind of social awareness that trauma is endemic, despite the lack of recognition from Western medicine. There is a wonderful book called *The Body Keeps the Score* by Bessel Van Der Kolk that really brings evidence to the failure of Western medicine on dealing with trauma.[13]

And because trauma is endemic, we have to address the things that have produced it – the dictatorships, the white supremacist violence in the United States. These, as I said earlier, continue the great 'conquests' and enslavements through different means. So as long as the group that controls everything – power, money, access, etc – was in control, everything was supposedly all right. When that group feels challenged, it unleashes chaos and terror.

If you look deeper at all the dictatorship in Argentina, Brazil, Chile and most of Latin America, from the fifties until the early eighties, they were about neoliberalism. And the U.S. supported and encouraged the dictatorships to open their markets to neoliberalism. The historian Greg Grandin[14] has a brilliant book about this.

AM: Yeah, yeah, absolutely.

DT: Now, I think there are different strands to those extreme right-wing movements. The U.S. is experiencing a demographic shift – 'white-non Hispanics' will no longer be the majority by 2043 ("Whites no longer a majority"). That group has considered itself the true founders and the economic engine of empire – forgetting of course the near extermination of Indigenous peoples and the 'free' forced labour or Blacks, LatinX, Asians and other people of colour who continue to work for less than a living wage. Poor whites now join the ranks. Instead of blaming neoliberalism that out-sourced jobs, etc, they blame people of colour for stealing their jobs. The economic violence remains, but there is a different approach. People can't just say you are going to be my slave and work as a maid in my house. Now there is an expectation of equality. There's an expectation that people can go to universities, people can have jobs, women can be more empowered in society and so on. In reality that is an almost impossible dream. This new authoritarianism, this neo-fascism has to do with keeping those people out of power, as always. So, it's not just neoliberalism but it's about keeping these populations out of power and in 'their place'.

I used to think keeping people 'in their place' would be impossible. Demographic shifts and generational shifts promise to change this slave plantation order and mentality. How can the few who profit control the many who suffer because of this system? But then I stop to consider the conquest of Mexico. Millions of Indigenous people in Mesoamerica were conquered by 800 Spaniards. Which leads to the conclusion that what is needed is power. The Spaniards had firearms and horses. They brought disease and inflamed regional discontent. Most important, however, was that they took advantage of the conflicts within the Indigenous groups so that they in fact destroyed each other. And this is what the ones who run the apparatus of control are now doing; they are consolidating power through all the mechanisms that we were talking about earlier, through the media, algorithms, law reinforcement, through the Supreme Court. The misinformation campaigns have us all hating and threatening each other. 'Cancel culture' is a provocation from both the right and the left. We will cancel each out. The legal system can do the rest. Eliminate voting rights, affirmative action, abortion rights, and now contraception! Authoritarianism combined with rampant capitalism. In a word, fascism.

Figure 3. María José Contreras interactive performance, Talk to the Future, Zip Code Memory Project, 2022, © Desiree Rios

So, I start to question the statement that everybody has trauma. Maybe that's not true. I'm beginning to think that some people profit a lot from trauma, and they don't think that there's anything wrong with it. And maybe only later do they start thinking, oh yeah, maybe I shouldn't have done that. For example, in the United States under Trump, the government put migrant children in cages, held them in cages called ice boxes or 'heleras'. I haven't heard one person in the United States saying, "Oh God, I wish I'd done something about that." Apart from activists and people who were already involved in the social justice movement, everybody else was very tranquil about it. Are people blind to these children's trauma? Have they blinded themselves? Are we being taught not to care?

AM: Yes, I understand your point, we can't generalize trauma without the risk of creating a big umbrella that puts everybody involved in the same place. But don't you think that those psychological, and psychophysical conflicts are expressed in the paralyzation of our social political lives and the fact that this makes even more evident the correlation between minimal state, fascist waves and all the violence that comes with it?

DT: Yes, absolutely. This is what I wrote in my *Disappearing Acts* book. That is why this book is so important to me. This very public display of violence is often accompanied by public silencing. The Argentine military disappeared people in public. But you knew that if you said anything, you could be next. It didn't matter who you were. So, I call that 'percepticide'. You have to blind yourself. You cannot hear or see or acknowledge what is doing on around you or you will die. Percepticide is a way of killing your senses in order to be alive.

I remember people telling me that they would hear their neighbour being taken away and they would muffle their ears with their hands, because they could not allow themselves to hear, see or do anything. Percepticide annihilates relationality. I really believe there is trauma there. People felt threatened, and they felt that they could be next. Many of them couldn't speak about it for years. The people I interviewed at first when I was there, they kept saying, no, no, I never knew. And then later they started to reveal, but it took a lot of time. This is collective trauma. The public display of terror is meant to silence and traumatize the population.

However, for example, the assumption that we were all struck by the pandemic, I don't think it is totally true. People who had money and resources went to their country houses so they could feel safer, and they could do this because there was someone that could deliver food to their house. It was a pandemic wave that hit everyone differently. There were the ones like me that could stay at home and teach my classes through Zoom, but there were the ones who didn't have any choice other than risk their lives to be paid. Because there's no social structure for these folks, their families, their kids. Could you say that we were all traumatized?

AM: Of course. We must differentiate the trauma. It is almost similar to the assumption that human issues are global, disregarding all the cultural and historical differences in terms of how we are experiencing the same situation. Yes, let's not treat trauma as a *tabula rasa* in which local conflicts and historical marginalization are eliminated.

DT: Exactly, and we participated in it. My life is made possible by people who work for little or no benefits, little or no money. That's the reality. And if I can't face that reality, then I can just muffle my ears like people who listen to their neighbours being taken away.

My point is, and this the true line of thought of my *¡Presente!* book, which says: "What can we do when it seems that nothing can be done, but doing nothing is not an option?" I've got to do something. Doing nothing is not an option. Absolutely not. But that's the whole thing in neoliberalism, right? That's what neoliberalism stands for: nothing can be done and there is no alternative. That's what Thatcher said, right? There Is No Alternative: TINA. We need to say no to that. There are alternatives, and we have to fight for them every single day from wherever we are positioned. And the more we fight for them together as groups, as artistic and political coalitions, the more effective we will be. I love the kind of work that you're doing, your idea of dance-theater though somatic practices, through groups that are bringing and inviting other groups.

AM: Yeah, it is like having a new kind of political alternative that can be compared to a viral contagious movement. Understanding the viral in another way, as a contagious transmission of affects and good memories that connect us. It is necessary, because it's exactly when social conflicts are disregarded, when people experiencing conflicts like the delivery guy who has no alternative but to face his

death, this guy knows deep inside that social life is paralyzed. And then this same guy will be totally enraptured when someone comes with a histrionic discourse saying: let's break everything, let's go to Congress and destroy it all. This despotic shout is captured as a way of doing something in a world where no mobility, action or participation is available. The emptiness of alternatives within this person will contribute to their adherence to fascist actions.

I like the subversive idea behind the Hispanic, LatinX and Black demographic expansion in the US. Sounds like the return of the originally excluded and can sling a possible and necessary cultural revolution. On the other hand, we know that this can awaken reactionary manifestations from a cornered imperialism. As you suggested, lets continue to talk and walk together in resonance with what it is possible to do, move and dream together.

I am curious to ask you how you feel in yourself, at the moment. How do reflect on your trajectory and all the constellations of things that made you who you are so far. You are so many things and have been in so many places. I mean Mexico, Canada, New York, Argentina, all these places are also part of you, right?

DT: I feel great. I'm very happy. I'm working on a new book. And I feel so lucky to have my house in Mexico, because it's such a necessary balance for being and working in New York. New York represents the height of global capital, right? And here, in my little town in Mexico, everything still feels not pre-capital, maybe, but certainly not neoliberal here yet. The town I live in has a very strong Indigenous presence and people still cultivate bartering and other ways of producing things they need in their lives. There's definitively a different way of doing things here, a different sense of time. I've been coming to this town since I was a teenager, and it allowed me to nurture this imagination or this idea that there is another way of being in the world. Things can be different. We do have alternatives. But we must be able to talk and walk with our allies, no?

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Notes

1 "The Hemispheric Institute gathers artists, scholars, writers, learners, and activists from across the Americas. We focus on social justice and research politically engaged culture and performance. We share this work in digital archives and amplify it through dialogues and public scholarship, residencies, publications, and gatherings. Our dynamic, multilingual network crosses disciplines and borders, and is grounded in the fundamental belief that artistic practice and critical reflection can spark lasting cultural change."

2 Performance Studies at NYU is dedicated to the analysis and study of cultural enactments of all kinds, and to understanding how they can produce meaningful change. Combining an interdisciplinary range of approaches including feminist and queer theory, critical race theory, and other modes of analysis, with an equally diverse range of research methods, Performance Studies offers graduate and undergraduate students the opportunity to explore and think critically about the world-making power of performance in theater, performance art, dance, sound/music, visual and installation art, activism, and online, as well as in the performance of 'everyday life' .

3 *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas.* Durham: Duke University

Press, 2003. Translation into Portuguese by Eliana Lourenço de Lima Reis, Belo Horizonte, Brazil: Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais Press, November 2012.

4 On 8 January 2023, following the defeat of then-president Jair Bolsonaro in the 2022 Brazilian general election and the inauguration of his successor Luis Inácio "Lula" da Silva, a mob of Bolsonaro's supporters attacked Brazil's federal government buildings in the capital, Brasília.

5 On January 6, 2021, following the defeat of U.S. President Donald Trump in the 2020 presidential election, a mob of his supporters attacked the United States Capitol Building in Washington, D.C.

6 Contract with America, a document signed September 27 1994 on the Capitol steps in Washington, D.C., by members of the Republican minority before the Republican Party gained control of Congress in 1994. The "Contract with America" outlined legislation to be enacted by the House of Representatives within the first 100 days of the 104th Congress (1995–96). Among the proposals were tax cuts, a permanent line-item veto, measures to reduce crime and provide middle-class tax relief, and constitutional amendments requiring term limits and a balanced budget. With the exception of the constitutional amendment for term limits, all parts of the "Contract with America" were passed by the House, under the leadership of the speaker of the House, Newt Gingrich.

7 Jessusa Rodriguez is a Mexican director, actress, playwright, performance artist, scenographer, entrepreneur, and social activist.

8 e-misférica is a biannual, peer reviewed, online journal published by Hemispheric Institute of Performance and Politics. The journal publishes scholarly essays, multimedia artist presentations, e-books and performances in English, Spanish and Portuguese.

9 Cross Pollination (CP) runs a nomadic laboratory for the dialogue in-between practices, both scholarly and performance-based, as an integral and essential part of the politics of embodied research in theater and performance. Cross Pollination and Intercultural Roots are both organizations which are fostering the dialogue between artists and their practices through online platforms.

10 Intercultural Roots for Public Health and traditional Embody Arts is a UK Charity organization promoting arts for health and social change through art and educational projects. IR brings together practitioners, artists, scholars and teachers to create collaboratively and develop their practices for health and social change.

11 On 10 December 2014, the commission issued a report with its findings. The report identified the participation of 337 agents of Brazilian government involved in human rights violations, including arbitrary prisons, forced disappearing, torture and subsequent death of political opponents to the dictatorship in Brazil.

12 In *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence – From Domestic Abuse to Political Terror* (2022).

13 *The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma* is a book by Bessel van der Kolk (2014) about the effects of psychological trauma, also known as traumatic stress.

14 Greg Grandin's book *Empire's Workshop* is an eye-opening examination of Latin America's role as proving ground for U.S. imperial strategies and tactics. He is also the author of *The Last Colonial Massacre* and the award-winning *The Blood of Guatemala*.

Shedding Light on the Light District: Artistic Processes in and around the Teatro de Contêiner

–– Vinicius Torres Machado (STATE UNIVERSITY OF SÃO PAULO)
–– Lucas Breda (CIA MUGUNZÁ)
–– Verônica Lo Turco Gentilin (CIA MUGUNZÁ)
–– Dona Carmen
–– Dentinho

This article presents interviews with artists from Cia Mungunzá de Teatro and their partners about the artistic work carried out in Bairro da Luz in the center of the city of São Paulo / Brazil. In 2016, Cia Mungunzá was responsible for creating the Teatro de Contêiner (Theater of Container), a cultural space established in one of the most impoverished areas of Brazil, where the level of poverty leads many to use crack cocaine and alcohol. The Teatro de Conteiner was installed as a result of an occupation of public land by Cia Mungunzá de Teatro unknown to and unsupported by the state. Since then, the cultural space has been home to social and artistic activities. The possibilities for action by artists in the region were placed alongside my (Vinicius Torres Machado's) own experience in order to highlight the difficulties of the work and the achievements of the interviewees. Respondents Lucas and Verônica are co-founders of the Cia Mugunzá and are co-responsible for

the occupation of the area. Dona Carmen is a former social worker who leads a project in the neighborhood that has moved into the Theater of Container, teaching impoverished women how to sew. Finally Dentinho is a social worker and artist in the area. The article seeks to bring the voice of these artists to reflect on the presence of artistic works in places of extreme poverty.

Keywords: teatro, performance, social action, dependencia quimica

In 2017 I was part of an artistic community in São Paulo/Brazil searching for a venue to perform a new project which we had been working on for the past few months. It was supposed to be a long form performance projected to involve audience participation on a large scale, starting with a choreography inspired by Brazilian popular dances, and culminating in a dinner at whichscenes would be performed. Our initial idea was to develop the piece in a park or any other open area where contact with nature would bring up new possibilities of being together, and enhance our relationship with reality and life. Back then, the Brazilian population was deeply engaged in using their right to demonstrate across the country, since during this period, some astonishing events had been moving parts of our society: a coup masked as a legitimate impeachment that forced the leftist president Dilma Roussef out of government; and the impact of 2013's enormous demonstrations, which had started as a leftist protest against the increasing of public transport fares, but were suddenly misappropriated by right wing political groups, galvanising the rise of the current Brazilian far right movement that would culminate in Bolsonaro's presidential election. The city became a disputed area, and a large group of artists were moving their projects outside of their workspaces, creating performances in open areas of the city. What was also important for our artistic group at the time was our understanding of some of Jacques Rancière's ideas from his book *Politics of Aesthetics* (2004), especially those which gave us a deeper comprehension of what the sharing of a performative act in a co-creative process between the audience

and performers could be. The aim of our performance was to create an open space where interaction could take place, tackling the lack of contact among individuals in our society, and maybe bringing forth a more inclusive relationship with our peers.

These ideas and the changes taking place in our society made us aware of the recent project developed by Munguza Theater Company, who had occupied an abandoned public space and built up a theater from scratch in the center of São Paulo.[1] The theater was named *Teatro de Contêiner* (Theater of Containers) and soon became one of the most fascinating artistic projects in São Paulo in recent memory. This theater, made out of containers, set in a deeply stigmatised area of the city (due to its extreme poverty and the gathering of crack cocaine and alcohol addicts) is also impressive because of its beautiful garden. There, we immediately thought that our performance would fit in smoothly but, in our naivety, we did not realize that performing in that area of the city would bring up many ethical issues, starting with the value of beauty itself inside the most impoverished area of São Paulo, pejoratively known as *Cracolandia* because of the large number of crack cocaine addicts living on the streets in the area.

The Luz District (Bairro da Luz) in the center of São Paulo, where the theater is located, is an area of much dispute, especially after construction conglomerates bought a large part of the neighborhood for a low price and, since then, have been trying to get rid of the impoverished and the homeless living on the streets. Therefore, beauty is an aesthetic value implicitly used against the people living there by the city's administration acting on behalf of the construction companies. Under the name "Cidade Limpa" (clean city) and other revitalization campaigns, the local government goes directly against the life of the impoverished, considering this demographic as 'things' referred to as *noias* ("schizos"/paranoid drug addicts), zombies, etc, due to their cocaine addiction.

In one of the most appalling moments of these so-called revitalization campaigns, the destruction of the *cortiços* (derelict cohabitation spaces in the center of São Paulo that act as refuges for the poor) in the Luz neighborhood gave rise to a strong reaction from our society, especially when a bulldozer destroyed some houses with people still inside. One day when we were visiting the area to understand what

exactly was happening, a large group of crack cocaine addicts fought back against the police who were cruelly evicting them from their places of residence and taking their tents away from them so that they could no longer shelter on the streets, and would be forced to move. Although we were working there for some months, the reality was that we were also intruders, and thus, we were attacked with sticks and stones in the same way that the police were being attacked.

At that time we were in the process of changing our initial project in order to adapt it to the new reality we were facing. The first step was to momentarily give up on the original idea of creating a performance and to work according to the needs of the community. In this period we were approaching the Festa Junina (June Festivals) season, a series of Christian parties important for Brazilians during the Winter. Therefore we decided to make the production of this event our artistic project for the next month. The festival took place inside of Ocupação Mauá, a previously abandoned building near the Teatro de Contêiner that was occupied by the *Movimento dos Sem Tetos* (Homeless Workers' Movement). This movement had occupied some other buildings across São Paulo (and continues to do so to this day), in an action referred to as *Dia de Festa* (Party Day), since it was the day when they finally got a place to live.[2] The Festa Junina, organised for and with the people of the Ocupação Mauá community, was an important celebration for us, and gave us an immense feeling of fulfilment. The fact is that the social gap between us and the people living in Ocupação Mauá was not as wide as the one we would later experience with the homeless outside the building.

Failing to see this, and eager to perform, we decided to return to our initial project of creating a performance; not in the garden, as we had previously thought, but on the streets near the theater. Our intention was not to hide ourselves within the theater and avoid contact with the impoverished community living on the streets. However, back then we could not see that, due to our differences, promoting togetherness without working on our differences would make the performance almost impossible.

The Brazilian theorist Ricardo Fabbrini explains how the creation of a relational performance might give rise to a false impression of reality, because in most the cases, the necessity of building up such an event together hides the fact that society is based on conflicts

of opposing forces (2010). In the case of Brazilian society, with its huge socio-economic gap, this idea seems to be more true than ever. Nevertheless, in our case, the difference among us was so great that it would inevitably overshadow any other subject brought forth by the performance. Alongside people whose livelihood depended on scavenging rubbish from the streets, we were always representing what we were: white people, from a middle class background bringing all the signs of the long history of oppression and exploitation that continues to affect the black community in São Paulo, who form the majority in that area. Most of our actions looked as though we were either making amends or, when ignoring the social difference, extremely out of touch with reality. The possibility of conceiving a performance not based on representation became impossible, because in a society with such a huge social gap, when one is performing, one necessarily represents one's own societal and historical background. It was at this time in 2017 that ideas about inclusivity and self-representation were starting to develop in the São Paulo artistic movement, which brought with it the voice and issues of social minorities (a key focus of the art being produced there right now) to the forefront of Brazilian life.

After our performance, which took place at night, bordering a block with transgender prostitution, rag and bone men, and crack cocaine addicts, the group collapsed. We decided to not perform again and now looking back I think that performing there, especially with a play with no direct political content, showed that we were just a group of people who could afford to do something like that, while the people over there were struggling to find something to eat. Looking back, I don't think that we could handle this, and we didn't have the tools to work in a different way. It seems that the urge to perform and carry out our aesthetic research overshadowed the possibility of creating a work of art deeply entrenched in radical care, where the support is no longer the performer or anything that is watched, but the relationship that is created. This is what we were trying to do when organising events for the community living there. As Harry Josephine Giles points out:

> So, in a political situation in which care is both exceptionally necessary and exceptionally underprovided, acts of care begin to look politically radical. To care is to act against the grain of social and economic orthodoxy: to advocate care

> is, in the present moment, to advocate a kind of political rupture. But by its nature, care must be a rupture which involves taking account of, centering, and, most importantly, taking responsibility for those for whom you are caring. Is providing care thus a valuable avenue of artistic exploration? Is the art of care a form of radical political art? Is care, in a society which devalues care, itself shocking? (Giles)

Interested in understanding how some artists were working with this idea of radical care in a practical, yet unknowing way, the extracts of the three interviews that follow are an attempt to shed some light on the work being carried out in the Luz neighborhood. All the interviews are connected to the Theater of Containers, since it has started to be a center for social and artistic endeavours in the area. The actors and directors Lucas and Verônica are co-founders of the Mungunzá Company and are co-responsible for the occupation of the area. My interest in talking to them came up not only because of their brave venture into building up a theater from nothing, but also to shed light upon how a theater group dealt with the stark contrasts within the region and how their aesthetic approach was influenced by that context. The two other interviews go more in the other direction. Using the social care programmes within the community as a starting point, I would like to understand how Dona Carmen might consider her projects there from an artistic perspective. Dona Carmen is a former social worker who created and leads a project in the neighborhood that has moved into the Theater of Container, teaching impoverished women how to sew. Finally, Dentinho is a social worker and artist in the area who presented his first exhibition in the Theater of Containers and, due to his past experience with crack addiction, can give us a perspective on what art really represents to those living on the streets.

It is worth mentioning that some liberty has been taken when translating the interviews, especially those of Dona Carmen and Dentinho, as I tried as much as possible to maintain the patterns of speech that represent their street vocabulary. The challenge here was safeguarding the translation from doing away with their specific approach to language, as the use of short sentences for example seems to reveal a certain relation to time and urgency of people in the area who are struggling to survive without any resources.

VINICIUS TORRES MACHADO: Verônica, Lucas, thank you for agreeing to talk to us. First of all I want to express my admiration for your project; The Teatro de Contêiner (Container Theater) has been one of the most successful cultural projects developed in São Paulo over the last few decades. The way that it was conceived and built without any support of the authorities and even against their will is remarkable. So, could you please explain the construction of the Teatro de Contêiner (Container Theater) in that particular area?

LUCAS BREDA: We are a group from São Paulo that in 2014 won our first call for funding and managed to rent a space for the creation of a new performance. So, we realized that part of this public resource that was delivered by the Secretary of Culture was, due to the nature of the real estate market, being drained for the lease of a space. We then tried to partner with the city hall to build a theater.

We tried to develop this project through political conversations. This was very much denied, *a priori*. Then we thought about taking over a publicly owned space. Unlike many illegal occupations in downtown São Paulo, where you just use the property as is, we wanted to build a really theatrical space. In fact, it's a hybrid space, right? A wide open space both in its architecture and also in its Socio-artistic conception, set against the backdrop of Cracolândia.

And then we decided to build it out of containers, because it was a fast, clean, sustainable construction. As a strategy, we started telling local authorities that we would go on the land and stay there for two months, justifying it as an artistic action that would take place there, and that it would host the first festival of performance and architecture in the city of São Paulo, called *Arquiteturando a Cidade*. So we came up with this excuse and asked to stay there for 2 months, and in the penultimate week, the event would take place.

VTM: So, as you didn't have any support from the authorities to create an artistic space, you decided to make up your own event, knowing that they could approve it more easily, so that you would have time to prepare the space for the placing of the containers?

LB: We said that we would leave after making some improvements; like fixing the fences and so on. But the containers needed 3 months

to be built in the city of São Vicente near São Paulo. So, before even knowing whether or not we would have the land, with the permission from the sub-prefecture for the event (since we would receive the result of the application one month before it started), we had already started building the containers, because we would have to arrive with them practically ready, with doors and everything to be assembled very quickly right under the authorities' noses.

VTM: For me the act of leaving the theater itself as a long lasting legacy of the performance is a clever strategy when working in countries where you have so little support from the authorities for cultural enterprises. How did you prepare for this?

VERÔNICA LO TURCO GENTILIN: Since there were 10 containers … there had to be some way to assemble it quickly, right? So a run-through using cranes was necessary in the city where the containers were being produced, because we needed to know how to do it quickly. We literally set it up in downtown São Paulo, at dawn, as if we were putting together a big Lego set. The assembly took place in the early hours of Sunday morning, and the process took around 4 hours.

VTM: And what did you do the weeks before the containers got there?

LB: Besides the practical goal of preparing the concrete area where the containers would be set, we also articulated a *rapprochement* with the surrounding community: shopkeepers, the residents, the homeless, and the police. So, during this period, we would go there and talk to everyone, and when we finished we would all go and eat-in somewhere nearby, just to do something together with the community at the end of the day. So even before the construction of the theater, the social groups working in the territory already knew about our idea, and they were aware that we were going to build it. Dona Carmen knew, for example, as did other social workers that were working in the area. So when we settled there, these people started coming over, these people started to use it as a [communal] space, because before there was no physical space where they could meet, and that was socially and artistically important for us. And then these groups started to enter and become a part of that space.

VTM: I will interview two representatives of these groups that have expanded on the opportunities they could take up due to having the Teatro de Contêiner as a safe space. But as they were already working in the region, I think that their experience was different from when you first came to the district. Although Mungunzá Cia has a long tradition of working with political theater and impoverished communities, I would like to know what your initial reaction was to what is one of the most impoverished areas in Brazil?

VLTG: In the beginning we dreamt about this space; we could've never imagined that it would be dismantled within the first month for not being functional, as we had idealized it so much. Like, you go there, you put on a cute little thing, an aromatiser, for example, and the next minute, it's not there anymore. Those in need take it away; you clean everything nicely, and then the homeless go to use the bathroom … And how do they leave the bathroom? It's different to how one of us leaves a bathroom. So you also start to change yourself: I want to go with this simple outfit, but this outfit is too much for that area, so okay, I'm going to wear this ragged blouse. Do you understand? Then who takes care of your image, and in a broader sense, the aesthetic aspects of what is produced there is not you anymore, it's the territory. And that's when the territory not only starts taking over your visible aesthetics, but also the concepts you want to work on in your performances. Because, suddenly, the subjects you want to include, the guidelines you wanted to bring, begin to be characterized by your surroundings.

VTM: I think that it is one of the key points we need in order to understand some issues related to the project we developed there. The space is already full of content and demands that need to be brought forth.

VLTG: I think the encounter between a prior aesthetic project that we already had with a space like that is not just a physical one, but also thematic, you know, a conceptual aesthetic. So, yes, there was a change in our initial dreams for the space, and we ended up creating projects that we could've never imagined. For example, we didn't go there saying "we want to put on an art exhibition created by crack users" – it was imposed on us by the reality of the neighborhood. When we arrived, there was something a bit 'missionary' about it,

right? Deep down inside, I think the artist thinks, "let's go there, let's bring our shows, let's put on a show that the homeless can also enjoy." We had this thing of bringing culture to the community by performing. But what we didn't realize, was that there, culture is also a football field that we made for children; that there, culture is also related to the fact that a person can use a bathroom, because culture is how you cultivate a space. In the beginning we felt that we had failed every time we put on a show and the street population didn't turn up. And then we thought "why do they need to watch a show here, if they are making use of the space in other ways," right?

VTM: In our experience there, we struggled with more or less the same thing, because when we got there we were so unsettled by seeing the differences between our backgrounds and their possibilities in life, that we tried to get rid of our differences by creating a false communal space. Nowadays, I think that while we were trying to do that, our behaviour might have been even more oppressive, because we reinforced our dominant position, as the ones who could choose which direction to move in when we can't stand a situation, instead of staying with the problem.

VLTG: I always wanted a lot... we wanted these people to be mixed, that our public, our audience was full of users, homeless people, artists, intellectuals, and researchers and that it would be hybrid in that sense. But it's obvious that once a queue of people forms for the show, most of them artists and researchers, the people that live on the street will line up, not to watch the show, but rather to ask for money. I remember a request that was made by people living rough on the street, from the moment we started trying to put on shows and bring in the homeless to watch. "Put on a show one day just for us. We don't feel comfortable getting in the same line as the other people, because we smell different and we don't have clothes." So, the desire to unite ended up scaring them away even more, you know? Because this thing of inclusivity is also cruel, because they are at a disadvantage. You are including a person in a territory that he does not feel he belongs to, which is quite perverse. So, sometimes, the segregation that we often think of as cruel, can simply make the person feel like they belong, because you've created a space for them and for those like them.

VTM: Dona Carmen it's a pleasure to have you here today. As I've already asked Lucas and Verônica, I would like to know what do you do, and how did you come to work in the Luz Neighborhood, where the Teatro de Contêiner is located?

DC: I'd like to talk a bit about our project. So I currently coordinate the *Tem Sentimento* ('Feel') collective, which is an income generation project for cis and trans women. I came to the region at the end of 2013 as a socio-educational advisor – the person who makes initial contact with those living on the streets. I started working in an organization and I left it but continued to carry out self-care workshops in the neighborhood, every Saturday for cis and trans women. In these workshops they would have their nails done, do their make-up, and draw pictures, you know?

VTM: Oh, and at the beginning were you working there alone or with a group of people?

DC: I was alone, just me and the vulnerable women who helped me a lot, so I thought of doing something for men, right? At the time I was thinking about doing a workshop to help men living there, so I thought about doing up their sandals. Then I thought, "Wow, it so easy to think of something to do for men. And how difficult it is to think of something for women, right?" Then I started thinking about what they needed most in this neighborhood. Then I thought: "Wow, what they need are panties, right?" Because women menstruate, you know, and they don't have anywhere to wash their panties. So I did a workshop around sewing panties. We would make a template, cut the fabric, and then sew it by hand. So, when I did this workshop, I realized how sewing brings out our memories and emotions, right? My mother sewed, my aunt sewed. So, the subject ended up being this memory, right?

VTM: So it was an artistic project that you began to develop in a similar way to what we tried to do when we thought about fostering a creative environment together before going back to perform there. But the difference is that you also saw it according to their needs – I mean in terms of having a real impact on their lives.

DC: Yeah, that's when I thought about the project to generate income through sewing. It started with a workshop in General Osório square in the open air, and now I have – [*she stutters*] No, I have a … space: the Teatro de Contêiner from Mungunzá.

VTM: Your relation to the Teatro de Contêiner is important for us, because it reveals different layers of the artistic work that have become possible since the space was set up. You mentioned that listening to the radio together was a way of drawing out memories and emotions. If we consider, alongside the income generated, the kind of relationships that sewing can form, what kind of affection do you think people in these workshops are looking for?

DC: So I think that in the beginning, when I started working here, it was difficult on both sides, right?

VTM: To establish a relationship you mean?

DC: Yeah, but I think I was very well received in this place, also because I look like one of their relatives. Everyone says: "Oh you look like my aunt, you look like my mother." So there's that. It's comes from that memory of someone's mother or aunt. And they also have this need, you know, you get close to them, you touch them, right? Receiving a hug – it's important because they don't have that contact. Unfortunately, quite the contrary – people want to distance themselves from them, right? I see some here who, even when going to buy something at the bar … they have the money and the merchant serves them on the sidewalk. Not even inside the bar. So it's not even about having money.

VTM: What's your take on the artistic perspective of the work that you have been doing?

DC: I think that since I've been working in the Mungunzá space I've been thinking more about it. I've realized that sometimes we do a lot of work related to culture and we don't have a clue, right? We talk about our work a lot like: "Ah, it's social assistance work, right?" And it's not, sometimes you're there too, promoting culture,

but you don't have a clue that you are; when we turn on the radio and listen to music it brings out memories; or we see art when we have a free space for them – like free painting sessions. So we are also promoting art – and we have no idea about that, right? I think that being there, in that space today, I see art in everything, I see the culture involved in different things. Sewing, for example. Because you're creating. Yeah, so I see the culture there in the sewing, too. While we sew, we listen to the radio.

VTM: Dentinho, I am glad I have the opportunity to talk to you. I would like to kick things off by asking if you could explain what the experience of living in the surroundings of Teatro de Contêiner is like, even before the theater was set up there?

DENTINHO: So, right now I'm living here, in the Luz neighborhood, my name is Cleito Ferreira, known as Dentinho on the street. Dentinho is the guy from the street, it's a political name, which was born on the streets, right? I lived on a sidewalk for a few years here, but I've lived in the center of the city for seven years already, right? The guy on the street, he lives in a state of flux, he lives in a community, an active community that works in a highly collaborative sense. Like, it's a living co-op over there. Everyone is helping each other. So, I've lived in several places, several contexts, several sidewalks there, where we made this family, this *maloca*.[3] And then, knowing how to articulate yourself in the city, knowing how to live in the city, breathing the city, is living in it. So I am one of those residents who has lived in this place, and still lives here today. I've been in the city center for over 10 years.

Today I am a visual artist. I graduated from *De Braços Abertos*[4] (*With open arms*), which provided this workshop environment where we did various activities. It starts with things like sweeping the streets but they also offer other activities, such as haircuts, bicycle maintenance, and art workshops. So, I trained as a visual artist within this context, before the arrival of Dória's government, which ended everything.[5] And now I'm a visual artist because of *De Braços Abertos*, because of the project … So today I work at *Birico.Arte*,[6] which is a street art and culture collective which works with us, and has an average of 42 artists, which made up the collective during the period of the pandemic. I am also part of the *É de Lei Coexistence*

Center, where I am a harm reducer. I know harm reduction like the back of my hand, as I was on the streets too. The great woes of people living on the streets today are due to a lack of public policies, where housing, education, work, and other issues that would bring security are not offered. And security just discards all the work that is done by the people who work here, because there is this sea of violence, and I am one of the bodies that was violated when I lived there. I was partially blinded in my left eye because of a gas bomb[7], and I spent a year inside that place, without seeing.

VTM: And how did you get into art coming from this background?

D: So, I've always had this inner fantasy world, and then I started to understand political empowerment. When I had a crack pipe in my hand I wasn't seen, but when I was reading a book people noticed me. Any reality, any difference, I feel that I am the same being. And I brought culture into the *fluxo*.[8] I started to take a book stand that I used to sell from on Paulista Ave into the *fluxo*. Because I used crack, I smoked, you know? My relationship with the substance – I was always thinking about how I would get money to buy more drugs. But I started to see another side, man, I started to see that the people who were there also had the right to culture. My alias within the *fluxo* and in the prison system (because I was arrested already for stealing books, so I've been through the prison system) is 'teacher'.

VTM: Dentinho, I found this word *fluxo*, 'flow', especially interesting because somehow it is also related to a movement in theater, it's a term very much used in theater practice when we want toemphasize the non-rational aspects of the group's involvement in an exercise. I know that in the Luz neighborhood it is used in a different way. Could you please talk a bit about that, and what your take on it is.

D: Without wanting to romanticise it, the *fluxo* is also a cultural flow. A person who comes to *manguear*[9] is not just asking for money, but is also exchanging a good story for money, like I give you this story and you give me your money. Nobody is just asking for things, they are being creative. Because the term *manguear* comes from the hippie movement in the 70s, when people came to sell their art,[10] exchange ideas, and create stories, in places like that to earn money. And to this

day they do it. And then when you go around restaurants, making up stories and telling them to people before asking for some change, you are making art. You're creating art there, creating a character. You create a character, even if it's not true, but there you are acting as a character. It's an act. These guys are artists, man. It's called the art of the invisible.

VTM: It's an interesting idea to think about the values of a creative process when the urgency of survival doesn't offer any possibility to think about an autonomous space for creating your art. In this way creativity is deeply embedded in your immediate reality. There is this urge to make yourself visible, making up stories in order to get some change to eat, and I assume that's more or less what you mean by 'the art of the invisible'.

D: The art of the invisible is where you only see it from one angle, as if it's something ordinary, but you don't even look at it from an artistic angle. But it's an everyday kind of art, the very life of the person living there is an art. He makes his life there art. The art of the invisible. And it's every day, it happens every day, in our midst.

VTM: And how do you find a way to make your art visible? Because it seems that your art is also engaged in building up a critical discourse about the immediate reality, so it's also necessary to create a more distant perspective where one might be able to reflect on it.

D: So, I make interventionist art, and I have some works where I look at the city and make artistic interventions on the landscape. One of my paintings that went viral, which everyone wants (which is cool), is a can saying that it is a pipe.[11] It was inspired by Magritte's surrealist work, in that you take the object , and put a painting on it saying "That's not a pipe." It's actually not, it's a portrait, right? I took his idea and used it on a can of Guarana.[12] First I crushed the can, then drilled a hole in it, and took a picture of it, writing: "This is a pipe." And then, sort of showing off the art, showing off that, while Magritte brought surrealism, we bring the art of realism.

VTM: Again, I think your perspective is interesting because it seems

to imply a critique of a piece of art that, although playing with reality and representation (as is the case in Magritte's painting *The Treachery of Images* (*La Trahison des Images*)),[13] is a closed circuit about the values of art, whilst your creation seems to create a clash between the fields of art and immediate reality. In your practical life how do you feel the set up of an artistic venue such as the Theater of Containers created a juxtaposition with the tough reality of the luz neighborhood?

D: The Container Theater emerged out of a demand to bring art and culture to people who do not have access to it. It was there that I entered a theater for the first time in my life, when I was in an extremely vulnerable situation. And I wasn't questioned for sitting there. Today I have access to theater, and other things thanks to this cultural space that has guaranteed me this bond. Look, my first art exhibition was in the Theater of Containers. After that I had five exhibitions. But they gave me access to a place and made other people look at me differently; I wasn't just the crack addict anymore. Sometimes when talking about this place, before it took the name Cracolândia, I used to (and still do) say that we lived in the Luz (light) neighborhood. And it's really cool that you take it like that, "I am from the Light." And then for us there is "Ah, he is from the darkness," "No, I am from the Light."

You use a metaphor like that, and you already bring a wealth of soul and value. People say, "Oh, that place is full of darkness, zombies … etc.", I don't know… so I respond "No, no, I am from the Light." This name [Cracolândia] was created by you, but I'm from the light, I live in the Luz neighborhood.

VTM: After talking to Dona Carmen and Dentinho I have a better idea of the impact the creation of the Theater of Containers has had on the area. Lucas, Verônica, how do you see the creation of so many opportunities emerging from that space?

LB: I would like to talk about the creation of the space through my understanding of performance, because at first one might've thought about it as a play – I mean the creation of this space as a one-night event, because we came from theater and it was easy to think of the creation of the theater as a play, an instance. You go there, you

perform and you finish. In our case, we would finish by welcoming people inside the theater we created. But we don't think about it as an event anymore, because we were already treating the space as a performance alongside everyday life. Now, because of the theater, it's possible to think about art integrated with life. So, for us, the Theater of Containers is really a space that facilitates the building of relationships. The Theater of Containers facilitates the relationship between various subjects and actions. For example, there is a healthcare facility there, which galvanized different situations for us where the theater could be a place to gather people and art collectives.

So, when you have collectives moving around all the time, you have a melting pot of aesthetics, meetings and transversal subjects. In the sense that you have mental health programs, damage reduction, architecture, theater, music, and visual arts – everything gathering there.

VTM: I get what you mean; the space becomes a creative hub in and of itself because it needs to shelter different perspectives and the goals of the artists and people who live in the area.

LB: I think that we, the Mungunzá Company that created the Theater of Containers, are just one more element in the area that gives way to other possibilities. We end up being one more element inside this performative protocol that is the space, which triggers people within that context to make their own propositions.

VTM: And what is the development process like when you make a new play? How does the area itself perform within your creations?

LB: We work according to a conception of art that is mixed with life, so it's necessary to respect the creative process because that's what gives form to the play. It's important to live the creative process. For us to come up with the new performance *Epidemia Prata* (*Silver Epidemic*),[14] we had to spend a lot of time in the Teatro de Contêiner. So the area ended up embedding itself in us, then we'd get into the creation space and began to build the world of the performance. So this was our flow, our 'fluxo.' So there is a lot of this

change in ourselves which is surprising because we were creating a performance to establish a direct dialogue. And it was a bit prickly, because there was no direct representation of that community in the piece, although they were part of the process, they rehearsed with us and gave us ideas: Dentinho for example directed a scene. So the vulnerable people living there would follow the rehearsals, commenting on some scenes and helping us create the new play.

VLTG: You talked about representation, but I think the important thing is that in *Epidemia Prata*, our new play, we don't talk about them – we talk about us in relation to them. That's why I think the play is fair to the topic presented. In fact I think *Epidemia Prata* is our truest work because we are talking about ourselves, our incompetency, our inefficiency, and our hypocrisy, we are talking about ourselves in relation to them.

The interviews made it possible to understand that the powerful work carried out in the region by these artists reveals not only an art that intends to be relational, –or an object that is not autonomous and therefore strongly linked to the need and practical objectives, such as the sewing workshops of D. Carmen –, but also an artistic process in which the creators intend to act with as little mediation as possible, courageously inserting their body into a risky reality.

These artists are less concerned with the object that can be created than with a process of engagement, in which presence is always stronger than a mediated representation. Not only is the constructed work not autonomous (that is, detached from the implications of the reality in which it is inserted), but neither is the artist.

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Notes

1 Link for the video recording the action can be found here. https://youtu.be/X9HCnTj9oF4.

2 The action includes a long period of planning in order to carry out mass protests to be fast enough to go unnoticed by the police. For more see the documentary *Dia de Festa:* available https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4b9-sSb31AU and https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xn2um8xhc4o.

3 *Maloca* is a Brazilian word used for describing a shanty.

4 De Bracos Abertos is an organization that takes care of homeless people, usually addicted to drugs or alcohol.

5 Doria was the mayor who ordered the destruction of the derelict houses mentioned before and a great enthusiast of the project Clean City.

6 Birico.Arte, to be found on Instagram.https://www.instagram.com/birico.arte/?hl=en

7 In some contexts, a gas bomb is used to evict people from their tents so that they no longer can shelter on the streets, and would be forced to move.

8 Fluxo is the name given by the population that lives in the neighborhood to the gathering of people using substances.

9 *Manguear:* Brazilian slang for 'to beg'

10 Usually inexpensive jewellery.

11 Cans are usually used to smoke crack in the area.

12 One of the most popular soft drinks from Brazil. Cans in general can be used for smoking crack when the person does not have a pipe; sometimes made from pens and bottle caps.

13 It's a 1929 painting by Belgian surrealist painter René Magritte. It is also known as *This Is Not a Pipe* and *The Wind and the Song*.

14 This play talks about impoverished teenagers that paint their bodies silver to get the attention of passers-by to ask for money at traffic lights or sell candy among other things.

Like the Space In-Between Beats: A Dialogue on Dialogues

–– Lotte van den Berg
–– Marije Nie

This article transmits a dialogue between two theater practitioners: theater-maker Lotte van den Berg, co-founder of Building Conversation, and performer/creator Marije Nie, co-founder of the Parliament of Practices and the Cross Pollination collective. The dialogue is not an argument or a debate, it is an encounter in the space in-between, in-between our practices, experiences, professional ethos and praxis as theater-makers. It is an exercise in inviting the swirls and eddies of thoughts and impulses and following them, with care. The text follows the meandering path of the dialogue, both an exchange and a search for a state of being together that allows thoughts to emerge and take flight while staying connected to our centers, like in a physical theater training.

Keywords: dialogue, theater, practice, building conversation, parliament of practices, praxis, space in-between, cross pollination

This is a dialogue between two theater practitioners: theater maker Lotte van den Berg,[1] co-founder of Building Conversation,[2] and performer/creator Marije Nie,[3] co-founder of the Parliament of Practices and the Cross Pollination collective.[4] Both have professional practices within the field of theatrical performance.

The dialogue that follows is not an argument or a debate, it is an encounter in the space in-between, in-between our practices, experiences, professional ethos and praxis as theater-makers. It is an exercise in inviting the swirls and eddies of thoughts and impulses and following them, with care. There is no defending of points or building of arguments, instead there are responses and thinking-with.

Figure 1. Interior of the barn where the dialogue took place.
The barn is owned by van den Berg's family, © Lotte van den Berg

There is space for searching, silence, walking, eating, laughing. We also make occasional reflections on how the dialogue is developing, allowing ourselves to shift and rustle, moving towards a place of balance, of being-with that hold presence and action in equal measures. I (Marije Nie) have transcribed the dialogue from a recording and lightly edited it for length and readability.

In 2020 I was invited to make a short video piece on the question: What do you really know? It was part of the Holland Festival online art piece of choreographer Bill T. Jones titled *I Know ... a Digital ritual.* I started confidently but most of what I approached evaporated until finally I was left with the following: "I know that the space in between beats is infinite even when it is very small, because it holds an infinite amount of potential change." I know this through my experience of 25 years of tap dancing, where you are always negotiating this in-between. It is where syncopation lives, but also it is that point where you can shift your physical body to change direction. Likewise in this dialogue we were lightly and playfully filling, seeding and fertilising the space in between us. This lightness allowed us to follow our impulses and curiosity, trusting that in time concrete results will appear.

The text follows our meandering path, both an exchange and a search for a state of being together that allows thoughts to emerge and take flight while staying connected to our centers, like in a physical theater training.

MARIJE NIE: What is dialogue for you in your work?

LOTTE VAN DEN BERG: Dialogue was not my interest at all, at first ... it was more about participation for me. Daan[6] signaled that many people in the audience felt the need to participate. He suggested the question: what is participation? The kind of participation where you bear responsibility for how the content develops. So it started with curiosity about participation, doing together.

MN: It is such a radical letting go of the result ... Were you already working on that?

LvdB: I was – and am – busy with my position in the work…what is the hierarchy you create in the space of making? And in the more traditional setting, in which you as a director decide when it is finished and then you will show it … There was also a desire in me to join in. Then I realized during the Oerol festival[7] in 2014 that, for me, it is not only about audience participation, but also that I want to participate myself …

With Building Conversation we – Daan, me and a lot of other artist – actually created a performance setting where we were participating and vulnerable too … searching, not knowing yet … A part of it.

Conversation appeared to be a very fitting possible form in which to investigate this doing-together, because the conversation is something you actually do together, so if we look at that conversation and see what's happening, who's responding to whom and why and how, we can maybe understand something about what that is. To listen, to respond, to predominate, to gently put something in the middle … How you are together. What composition, what hierarchy, what kind of body you become together. So it didn't start from a fascination with conversation, but the conversation became a kind of way to investigate.

LvdB: Are you specifically engaged in dialogue?

MN: Yes actually … It started with Radio Kootwijk Live,[8] another group I was founding member of, with Bart van Rosmalen.[9] It was really about meetings inside work. [*the word 'meeting' in Dutch is constructed as 'un-obliged'.]* In those meetings, dialogue was a necessity to find some kind of shared space. I felt a power in that way of exchanging that creates new spaces. And also the techniques that are effective in creating that new space, without determining the desired outcome or problem solving. A technology of deepening the questions instead of answering them. Often, the goal of a meeting is to be productive. For me, this points to what we miss in how we treat each other.

LvdB: The uncertainty.

MN: Yes … very few processes are aimed at investigating what the

question actually is in itself, how deep it is, how it connects to other questions, and how the combination of questions can open up new spaces. Often it is about making the question as defined, concise and effective as possible as quickly as possible, cutting away what doesn't seem to be productive as if this will lead to the best result…

LvdB: I am in an in-between space right now, a peculiar vacuum. After ten years I decided to stop working for Building Conversation. Now I'm on some kind of sabbatical. A space in which things can arise, in which one can react to others, in which there is openness. Open pores where things can come in. Where one is able to grow, in which things can be experienced. I am more interested in words like that than in dialogue in itself. The opportunity to participate and contribute, to be part, to become.. That is related to positions, hierarchies and whether or not the roles are fixed… an audience can start participating, there isn't the fixation on one person sitting still and another doing the action. That there is greater reciprocity actually.

But at the moment I also really feel like fewer words. I have made works without words for a long time. Movement, on presence and relationships between bodies, space and things. Very visual. People asked why isn't there text being spoken? I replied, "You wouldn't ask a photographer why they don't use speech bubbles, would you?" It is not necessary at all. It is full of itself, and does not need to be interpreted. As a theater-maker, I don't like rehearsed text. I don't want to rehearse with an actor until it no longer sounds rehearsed. It just doesn't interest me.

In Building Conversation all text is generated live, it is a jam session, I could do that. I found that very exciting. Also because I felt that I was learning a lot all the time. About being in conversation, being in contact … I'm not looking for dialogue … I look for responsiveness.

MN: Responsibility – response-ability… The ability to answer.

LvdB: And reciprocity. In the dialogical artwork I have done the past years I have come to understand role-fluidity, reciprocity, listening, participation, actualization … When you feel like you are there or not. When the conversation becomes an action. Experienceable. That you are not only talking *ABOUT* something, but that you are also experiencing it. The topic actualizes within your own experience.

MN: When will that happen?

LvdB: That requires some kind of zooming in and out. You have to be in the conversation, but also watch it. That you have a reflection on the moment you are in yourself. You can talk about contact, but you can also make contact. You can make contact while talking about contact. You can also talk about contact while I don't feel any contact with you at all, while we've been chatting here for an hour and a half.. Can I touch you?

MN: And then it's really going to happen…

LvdB: That pulls the entire conversation to a deeper level and the conversation itself actually becomes the case, the research area. This happens very often in Thinking Together (a performative conversation developed by Building Conversations). We often talk about white privilege, but what does it really mean that you've been talking all this time and she hasn't said anything yet. It's about openly and collectively seeing that what you discuss is also going on in how you discuss it. That it's already happening. Then you can use it as a shared case study to explore what that is.

MN: I like that too. Often when we are in conversation we are talking about things outside of the conversation, a book or an experience and you can never fully explain or bring that in, I can't quite pass it on to you in all its complexity. In Cross Pollination, with artists from all kinds of different disciplines we start with doing things together, responding to each other. For example, through exercises: I start with a tapping exercise. I have to shape it as I offer it, in a way that it's accessible to everyone, that it connects to what we're already doing and that it brings a new perspective to it. Someone then responds to that with a physical theater exercise, then someone brings in a song that can add something or create contrast. After two hours we are together in a kind of complexity, but everyone has experienced it from a completely different experience and position of knowledge. The conversation that happens after the work is intertwined in such a deep way with what we all just experienced and built together… And at the same time the differences between us are almost magnified.

LvdB: Then the verbatim conversation follows a complex physical exchange in which the body is present. I have also applied this in my last two performances, in which the conversation still is important, but also moves out of the center. The embodied experience without interpretation, experienced, comes first anyway. But to be honest I'm also really looking forward to making things that don't have words at all. Which are mystery, signless and unnamed.

MN: For me the image of the oracle is very central. Where in fact you are always on the verge of the unknown, which can't be named, but you can respond to it. That's so fascinating. You can make a powerful exchange without ever feeling the need to ask "what do you mean?" And that's explosive. In a gentle way.

LvdB: To feel that you can respond to each other without hurting each other, to understand that you can be together without understanding or interpreting anything, that is amazing.

MN: Yes … And fertile. It's actually quite addictive. What I find very fascinating is the difference with the argumentative nature in academic writing, with its demand for logic and rigour. That your argument is well thought out, your references are watertight. With writing that is more open, mysterious, inspired, speculative and emergent, the question is, in fact, where is the rigour …

LvdB: I am reminded of a performance for young people that I made a long time ago, I would like to give myself away but I don't know to whom. It was about religion, for me. About the need to follow a guru, but not to do it. That's also about the mystery. It was made for young people and I made it at Huis aan de Amstel,[10] which often makes quite didactic performances for young people. I didn't feel like it at all and thought I'm going to make something that really for me is about the desire to surrender and the fear of doing it. Four men who are always making noise and who were very busy, and now and then they came to sit with an old woman. A very mysterious work, but well thought through.

And then the youngsters came, 15-16 years old … and one of them said, "I really didn't understand what this is about at all, but I found it very fascinating …" and then I thought: yes, that! I want that! That

combination! That you feel that. That you can find something very fascinating, precisely because you don't understand it.

00:28:00

MN: And I think that's where the rigour for our kind of work lies … in that awakening that fascination … That's actually the only thing that matters. Much more than that everyone 'gets it', or like with the musical *Billy Elliott*[11] that everyone sits on the same roller coaster. Because there is a technology of mysteries and of making oracles. There's something that works.

LvdB: Which makes it share-able.

MN: Yes … also make-able … In the work with Cross Pollination there are moments that work and some that don't. It works, when everyone's input is brought in with integrity, not with the aim of trying to score or win.

00:30:30

LvdB: But that's what I'm wondering now, with regard to that question of actualisation… Why are we talking now? Do we talk because we are curious about each other, or because we have nothing else to do, or because we have an article to write? Is the article the goal or is it an alibi for a meeting that has wanted to happen for some time? Why are we here now?

MN: The last for me …
(laughter)

LvdB: Yes, just because we are curious about each other. Then we don't have to talk about dialogue at all. We don't actually have a set mission.

MN: No. Also because this talk doesn't have to be about something particular.

LvdB: It doesn't have to be about anything. It's so funny that we notice 'we're here now', because the dictaphone is on and then we just keep on talking, so you're also talking because you started talking. Because I also think, could we get into [communicating through] movement now?

MN: Yes I have thought about it too.

MN: The dictaphone asks us …

LvdB: … For word.

MN: There's that whole architecture of the situation again which determines what happens … but you don't have to surrender to that …

LvdB: No!

MN: I would be curious how we can make an oracle … Now … in half an hour..

LvdB: Ok … what is an oracle?
A divine message? It's not a message, is it? A statement, a trigger, a slap in the face or something.

MN: A zen clap with one hand… Phlats!! Enlightenment!!
The Greek word oracle was something like 'speaking the truth'. In any case, to me it's something that's open, that needs interpretation… Not a concrete prediction of the future, like "you're going to wreck your car tomorrow." Have you ever consulted an oracle?

LvdB: No.

MN: Could your performance be an oracle?

LvdB: *Dying Together*[12] maybe … Not for telling the truth, but for looking at something from a different angle.

MN: Perhaps inviting?

LvdB: To turn yourself around?

MN: But maybe also for that boy, who said: "It was fascinating but I don't know what it means."

LvdB: This I recognise, when something is set in motion or when something new is tapped into.

MN: For me the point is really in those two things: "It's fascinating but I don't know what it means." The fascination means that you stay with it despite not knowing why.

LvdB: You also learn that you don't know everything

MN: Yes! Exactly … which can be unbearable and exciting at the same time … .

LvdB: I made *Braakland*,[13] based on the works of Coetzee.[14] Circling around the question what happens if you accept death. The performance takes place on a huge wasteland at the outskirts of a city. Performers appear and disappear in the distance. As an audience, you feel left alone by them. You see people who kill and bury each other. With no reason. It is a kind of nature documentary in which you see people being violent towards each other, without any resistance. It just happens.

MN: There is no moralising either.

LvdB: It's like the zebra who is caught by the lion while a bird flies overhead. Everything is taking place kind of just behind a bush or just out of sight … I think it's the most beautiful piece I've ever made, very early on in my career. I was asking, what happens if we accept death and don't resist? You long for acceptance, but if you don't resist at all then life will also become worthless … Then there was a man who became really angry, who said: "These people are not dying, they are slaughtered …" and then I asked "huh, is there a difference? Aren't you dying if you're slaughtered?" That was very interesting to me. He wanted to moralize it …

I don't know how it has to do with what we were just talking about.

MN: It doesn't have to.

L I think it says something about what words do, when we categorise things differently. A person has killed a person, and then it is not dying … Dying is natural, we cannot help it; it happens when we fall from a mountain or a rampart. If we kill each other, it's something else. But we are part of that very big happening … So finally it is also just dying.

MN: I do feel there is something active in dying. If you die, you're the subject. If you are killed then you are the object.

LvdB: But eventually you die.

MN: Maybe dying and being killed meet in the reality of death.

00.47:00

LvdB: I think it's about allowing things to be what they are, and then there can also be a certain interpretation. So we come back to the idea of action. When is something an action?

In the same performance (*Braakland*) we worked with the performers in the field for three days to prepare it for the performance. That's how we got to know that piece of land. Because sometimes it was in the sand in Belgrade, in the drought in Brazil but also in the rain in the Netherlands or in Ireland. All different surfaces that you walk on differently. It was really about walking, that performance … A new actor was trained and I asked her to walk towards me, the audience. After watching her doing that walk of a few hundred meters I said to her: "You shouldn't perform that you're walking. Just walk."

MN: Eugenio Barba[14] would have said the same.

LvdB: It was an amazing moment for her and for me when we realized: oh yes it really is a very big difference. When she did it again, she walked … Actions can go to the bare bones of what they are. And then to me being killed is the same as dying.

MN: Then it all comes together in one fell swoop.

LvdB: And at that moment, it doesn't matter for a while if it's dying or being killed. It's about conciseness. It is interesting when on the one hand you try to capture things in a kind of essence, the nakedness of the action, and at the same time it is enigmatic, undefined. Those two are really intriguing together.

MN: I like this nakedness, it shows the organism alive and intact, it has no clothes on but the whole unknowable miracle is still there.

LvdB: Maybe that's also with dialogue that you move away from the opinion, the assumed, the expected … The bare bones of dialogue, where are they?

MN: I think this lies in a way of speaking where you can hold your thought carefully in cupped hands, so that it is still alive and able to move. Being concise does not mean that there should be no space left inside the words. 'Getting to the core' of something implies going for the singularity of the thing, to the smallest and most dense point of definition. But you realize that it actually disappeared and there is nothing left alive.

LvdB: It's about being present.

MN: Yes, undefined presence is powerful. Sometimes dialogues can get a little tiresome, when anything that happens is dissected and dissected and that presence seems to disappear, like with the 'getting to the core'.

00:52:00

LvdB: You can't always control it. We're very often unable to let something be. There are magical moments, in dialogue, when that happens, but you can't have it all the time.

MN: As a dancer, I have often been to the improvisation sessions in Amsterdam with musicians and dancers, where it happens too that everything is just moving in presence all the time.

LvdB: That can be unbearable, for the public, because you are not inside it yourself.

MN: Maybe… but when it works well then it's also fascinating to witness! Sometimes it allows me to escape my need to always be critical – this is good, this isn't, now it's happening, now it isn't.

LvdB: You are able to also witness as an improviser

MN: Yes you escape the cleverness and the critic… And that also has a lot to do with being allowed to be present as an audience.

LvdB: It reminds me of a teacher of mine, Dragan Klaić.[16] He used to sleep during performances.

MN: Oh, nice! What did he say about that?

LvdB: You can be with each other, and then sleep and wake up again.

MN: Yes wonderful... and the most beautiful moment actually, waking up inside a performance! With music we have much more permission for 'letting go'. With Radio Kootwijk Live we once made a concert where we aimed to put people to sleep.., The first snoring sounds were really a victory … It has something very intimate.

LvdB: That would be nice too, if we could fall asleep here together …

00:55:00

LvdB: I'm brooding on something … Being With. I think it's a response to a lot of the dialogical work that I have done. I see an image of a woman and a chair. They're both being present, before the solving, understanding and changing begins. This shared presence might be a dialogue too.

You could also say that we are talking now because we find it very too intense to just sit opposite each other. But in the end it's two of us in this room.

MN: Yes … And … being doesn't necessarily imply inaction. Being present without wanting to 'solve it' doesn't mean one should be passive. To me it means that you are following simple and direct impulses. I've been juggling a lot lately with the words complexity and complicated.

Complexity grows through simple straightforward actions. Complication is clever: a plan to control and solve the whole thing at once, in one complicated move. Like that great definition you've worked on for a long time and then you have described that one thing.. Like an encyclopaedia. Complexity is made of all the very simple things that work and shift together and are flexible to grow and change. Like a tarot deck.

LvdB: Complexity *IS* and complication *WANTS TO BE.*

MN: Yes, it wants to control everything. The desire to understand and grasp it all.

LvdB: Then you come back to 'not wanting to walk, but walking.'

MN: I think Being-With is very much connected to that, to this simplicity, this nakedness. I just watched Donna Haraway's[15] documentary[16] with the jellyfish that keeps swimming by. Complexity through simple actions.

LvdB: And it is also about the frame that is imposed by the arts. That you ask someone to walk in a performance.

MN: Yes, there is a paradox in that.

LvdB: You're eating now, but if I put a camera on it.

MN: Then I won't be eating anymore.

LvdB: It's already a bit different because of that dictaphone … I'm also worried about the sound of the cheese slicer. Again the presence of the viewer, listener, future audience. Being concerned with the future audience, that you're going to share it. I've been wanting to escape from that all my life.

MN: It is a paradoxical question to ask someone to walk on the stage. If you don't walk functionally like you do in daily life to go to the toilet or the kitchen, is it still walking? Now you walk for another purpose, which belongs on a poetic level. A parallel thing happens in mime when you push against an invisible wall. You move the action of pushing from the hands to the back of the heel, redirecting the energy down into the ground. With the walking, you also transform the reality of the action and it becomes an equivalent force, redirected but with the same energy.

If the Woman and the Chair are just being present on stage, they might transform into an Oracle. The action of 'being present' could invite the same kind of shift as happens with the walking or the pushing. The action transforms from the functional to the theatrical and oracular... or from the personal and intentional to the bare bones, enigmatic action. If I just see you sitting here, I don't have a question. But if it's in a work of art or on the stage, then you become a question mark. That woman and that chair. Strangers. Maybe also to themselves.

LvdB: It is about being-with. I once saw a chair by a window in the sun. Snow outside. I looked at that chair, I was also in that room. It looked so peaceful. That chair was really there for me. I thought about dying. When you die you become part of the world in a different way. So you're not leaving, I guess. I could just suddenly very well imagine being present in the way that chair was present. So when I think about that woman and that chair, they're really two entities. The body of that woman and the body of that chair were there together. How can you visualise that, in dialogue? In a kind of reciprocal, equal way?

MN: Do you have the same feeling sometimes about a human? That peaceful being-there.

LvdB: The images that come to my mind are of homeless people, whom the city passes by. You?

MN: The image that comes to mind is a kind of horror. That was my mother's body when I first saw it. When she passed away very suddenly. It's strange because it's actually a not-being. And present in the worst way.

LvdB: Why do we say that? That it is not-being?

MN: It hit me like a hammer blow, the absence of life, of movement. And of course that is very much about scale as well. About where you are looking.

LvdB: Yes, that is bizarre, right? The absence of movement, of breathing. I saw a frozen sea once. I couldn't really look at that either. You think that there is something wrong with your perception because it is impossible.

MN: Yes, that's the horror. Or a frozen waterfall. And there, too, when you look at a different level, there is plenty of movement. I'm also thinking about knitting. I've noticed that I can knit really big things if I just think. "Ah, nice to be knitting." And as soon as I think of the result it's really impossible to continue and I have to stop immediately. That could also be a kind of being, which is quite active and focused, in a flow. I often knit patterns with beautiful colours and I feel the pattern growing while I'm actually only busy with that one stitch at a time.

I know it also from when I'm completely absorbed in music, when I'm dancing. I don't think about what I'm giving to people or how long do I have to go or oh my god, is this good enough? That's all gone. And you are present with the simplest next step, just like with complexity. But then it is the total situation, I'm either completely here or there. And at the same time I feel the richness of the complexity around me. The music is completely present in all its incomprehensibility, while I'm swimming in it. One step at a time, one stitch at a time.

And then I sense all the possibilities because there is a moment in between the steps, no matter how long or small that is, with an infinite potential for change. But only in between the beats, because as soon as you are actually committed to the next beat, the moment of infinite possibility has already closed, because then your whole body is committed to moving towards that one point. It's like the stillness of the trapeze, at the end of the swing, where the energy is free and can be used for a somersault or trick. And that is also there in that very simple moment of taking the next step. There is also the infinite potential for an action.

LvdB: And again and again, right? Again and again. And always different. And at the same time ... I'm also thinking now that it's nice that we started talking about dialogue and now we talk about this. And about being present. And in essence you need that presence to enter into a dialogue. When we began our conversation, we were very much searching for the other. We were much less present with ourselves and our own centers, with our own stories and feelings. So that you use all your tentacles in that interaction. What happens quickly in dialogue is that you move out of your own center. So you become a bit of a painter on top of a staircase painting a wall that is just out of reach. You're just out of your center of gravity. That might also be the case with the walking... Gravity goes down with every step. And you are there with your attention, not with what the other person might be thinking. You are with your own body and from there you are in relation to the other.

MN: I was with a Mensendieck[19] therapist the other day for my knees. She said that I always stand like this: (*Marije stands up and leans forward slightly*). This is actually the basic tap dance position, weight forward, on the balls of the feet and ready to go... But then she said it causes my weight to put pressure on my joints. So I have to find my center...

LvdB: But that's funny, because now that you're center-ing, it looks like you're falling backwards.

MN: Yes! Does it look like that?

LvdB: Yes, you have that feeling, don't you?

MN: Yes, but I didn't know you could actually see it.

LvdB: I see you are afraid to fall backwards.

MN: Yes, that's exactly the feeling that overwhelms me. I can't do it very well either. I'm so used to always be in that forward mode.

LvdB: Ready to go.

MN: But also always ready to change direction and accommodate ...

LvdB: Yes, and in the beginning, we were both very ready to accommodate so we were moving towards the other immediately. But then you're both kind of in a vague middle, right, trying very hard to make something of it.

MN: There has to be a lot of trust when you're just being there together.

LvdB: You're leaning backwards now, aren't you? It's not actually backwards, but it feels backwards when you sit straight up. Because we are leaning towards each other all the time, it feels like backwards.

But we are already enough.

MN: Yes and that is the trust ... Men often sit like this (hangs back in the chair with legs stretched forward). It's a whole different position. "I'm there, but I'm not there. Yes, you go ahead and I'll see if I can come along."

LvdB: Yes, if it's nice enough. Convince me.

MN: Yes. I once read a nice observation about men and women: The tendency to set up secret societies and cults is often a male affair. And initiations, things like that. Women already have built-in rites of passage in their bodies, that you're going to menstruate and then when you have a child, and then the menopause. You can't actually get around it.

LvdB: Women have anchored that in their bodies, men have to create it. I have made a work on the Senses in Germany and there was a reviewer, Renate Klett[20], a feminist, who said: "Finally I understand what female art is." And then she added, and I thought that was a big compliment: "Men are either on earth or in heaven, but women have the ability to combine them." So that you're in the shit and at the same time in the clouds, bringing those two forces or those two forms of being together with your body, in your body, literally. And that they don't have to compete.

MN: Yes, you don't have to make the choice. From dialogue to being-with, that could be a nice title. The question is, of course, is anything going to happen in between that chair and that woman?

LvdB: Ha! Should something be done?

MN: Does something have to happen in a performance? Nothing ever needs to happen in a painting. Painters have found a clever take on that …

LvdB: Not much needs to happen here for me. I once made a performance with prisoners in Antwerp with the Toneelhuis.[21] We had a small podium on the third floor of the prison and there they had all taped the floor plans of their own cells on the floor. We had worked with maps for a long time. Maps of where they were now, those prison cells, but also maps of the places or houses where they had once felt very comfortable. Which were often the grandparents' homes, remarkably enough. Then I asked, where do you sit all day? How are you here? They answered, I lie there, or I sit there, with my cigar. Then I asked, so where is your chair? There's a window there, how are you there then? Completely honing in on that "being there". And then he sat there. I still remember those rehearsals, it was so wonderful. It was really Jan's expertise to sit in his way. And then I would say: "Ok guys, let's look at this for five minutes now." Then we all sat there looking at Jan for five minutes. And at the end I would say, "Jesus, Jan, how beautiful that was." And it was just sitting there, like he's been doing in that damn cell for years. It became some kind of delayed photography, that you make a 'photograph' by looking at it together… that's what I like about theater, that you actually create value with the gaze and the attention. Together you literally capture something.

MN: Catch something that is uncatchable.

LvdB: Yes, and not so much in the theater lights as through your shared attention. So the one who wants to show herself and the one who wants to watch it, that is also dialogical, you really do that together. Or at least if dialogic is something that you need each other for.

MN: Yes, and I imagine, in that situation it's not about some kind of perverse way of seeing and being seen, that it becomes the exhibitionist and the voyeur. It feels like he's sitting there. Not to impress anyone or to say, hey I'm great at sitting, but just to share actually. Yes, this is how I am. And with the certainty of really knowing that sitting. And the audience doesn't come to be wowed by spectacle or emotions but for shared attention. That might be hard with the

woman and the chair. With Jan, the whole context is very important, this is a prisoner and he always sits there like this.

LvdB: The question is how to give the context. How empty can it be? I haven't solved that yet either.

MN: No. But the painter doesn't have to solve it.

LvdB: I have that too sometimes with the montage of a work. Then it became such a narrative. There were several scenes and six people of different ages. And then it became like a little family. I got really annoyed. I said to the dramaturge: "But I want it to be an exhibition. A white wall, seven paintings. Not some kind of drama, a different kind of montage."

MN: Yes, that's what Odin Theater[22] is very good at, breaking narrative impulses.

LvdB: You can use it, just for a moment.

MN: Narrative can be there, in small chunks, but it's never worked out or pushed to its end… to convince or anything like that. A narrative, a story with a beginning, a middle and an end is also kind of an easy solution, to be able to say something

LvdB: Yes, it can also distract from the core. Like "We are talking about so many things, but it's really about nothing. Where are you?" I've felt that way with other works as well. That the narrative, which may also be the opinion or the subject of the conversation, distracts from the conversation itself. Or that the narrative actually distracts from what the performance is really about.

MN: Yes. And in an almost irresistible way.

LvdB: Yes, you are so drawn into it.

MN: Yes, that is perhaps also where poetry and the poetic come in again. The poetic is not bound to a narrative.

(*Marije, standing*.) Oh, I'm swaying back and forth with my weight now. I'm continuously asking "where is my center now?" Or "where am I?

Going forwards or backwards or am I about to fall?" Searching for the point where your toes just touch the ground, but don't push against it.

LvdB: If I think about it then I would like it if you, as a spectator, could also sit in your center. And you know that if you want you can respond. That to me is the greatest value of the work I've been doing over the last ten years with Building Conversation. The reciprocity of the relationship between those who show and those who are willing to watch. And that those roles don't have to be fixed. That it is possible to say, "Oh but now I want to show you something, now I will tell you something and then you can watch." It's important that everyone is present and participates.

MN: Juggling roles.

LvdB: Yes, not sitting backwards with your legs stretched across each other. But also not all the way forward either where it's not about me but about you guys doing fun stuff. It is also always the question "Where am I?" And that is also sincere, it is also about me. I can also stand and say "Stop, I don't like this," or, I don't know ... I think the 'being' of the audience is also really important.

MN: With Cross Pollination, this basic horizontality with fluid roles is really the starting point in the work, so to speak. But we are with peers, equals.

LvdB: Yes, then it's different.

MN: Yes, and it is also very easy and very natural.

LvdB: But don't you really want that kind of gathering with the audience?

MN: I think it can be done with dialogue because it's the whole point that everyone present is part of the oracle. If someone withholds their input, the oracle no longer works. And also there is no judgement inside a dialogue about good or bad, or about the quality of your input.

Performance is a different situation, in which you also have an exchange of time, to a certain extent. So the time we put into making and becoming able to perform, we give this to the audience in a very

concentrated form, just like in a poem really. It's almost like putting pressure on time. And you release that concentrated time in the performance, that is really a gift, the surplus, the potential. While in a dialogue we all exist in the same compression, in the same air pressure.

MN: If you go to the concert, you don't want to hear a bad piece of music. But if it's your niece that plays, then it's fine, then it doesn't matter.

LvdB: The piece of music is determined by the way it is listened to. You really create the moment of sharing with each other.

MN: You mean in any situation where something is shared, you accept it if it aligns well with your intention.

I was in Denmark for a meeting about art in rural areas. A rural area asks us to work differently. We learn to take more time, to integrate what we want to do into the community, to make the moment together, to make sure that it is really carried by people. It's not that all roles have to be equal, but in a rural area the artistic project has to be really accepted by the people before it is meaningful.

And I just had to think about it, because that's often what makes art difficult in our time, that in the cities there's often no integration of the why of this performance with the people sitting there in the room.

LvdB: You can consume anything in the city and it is exchangeable. And something is lost. Then you have to work very hard inside the theater to be present in that way because if you are there firstly as a consumer, it is really much more difficult to become more actively present with everyone. In an emergency, if someone passes out or something, we're all here.

MN: Our village projects with Cross Pollination are a sort of co-creation together with the community. And at a certain point we found the idea of a half-mask, where we are between representation and reality. We were in costume and character, but not completely. We played all kinds of 'half-games' with the people. Not rehearsed but playing with interactions. Because we were half in character, we could lift up the moment. But there was not this feeling of a performance. I found it fascinating. Again, to be on that border between what can happen and not, that the roles were never clear or distilled.

LvdB: So everyone stays awake?

MN: Yes, everyone was awake. There was a real buzz.

LvdB: Being awake is so important. I think that's what matters to me too.

MN: Yes, and that has to do with that boy at your performance, that you are fascinated but you don't know what it is. So you also remain curious. If a kind of poetry can then arise, then I think it is a state in which you can be for a very long time. With each other. Without anything actually happening. Like some kind of party.

LvdB: Reminds me of what you just said about music … I also experienced it once. That moment when you make the performance together … There was a wedding of a friend of mine and there was a rumour that the bride's sister was going to dance. There were quite a lot of people, and we created a kind of space in the middle for her. She arrived and we all sat around her. You want it to succeed. It's the bride's sister! I could see that she also found it exciting. And then the music started. It was the wrong piece of music, a false start. And we all thought, "We can do this. We can just hold this moment. It'll be fine." And then the right music comes in and you really feel that you carry it together. Because if you don't, it's gone. Because in the end it's nothing … It's so beautiful when it is actually nothing! It's so beautiful because it is so fragile. And what you describe from your experience with Joop van den Ende's[23] musical, that's so complete, you can't do anything there![15]

MN: There is no space for you as co-creator.

LvdB: It's a steamroller … I think it's beautiful when it's fragile and when we all have to be on the tip of our toes in order to let it happen. Because then it's everything. Because then you make it together.

MN: Just like that space between the beats. It really has an infinite possibility.

like the space in-between beats

Figure 2. Exterior of the barn where the dialogue took place, © Lotte van den Berg

Notes

1 Lotte van den Berg uses the theatrical form to make relationships between people visible, not only within the walls of the theater, but also beyond. She works in the public space of cities all over the world to make visible what is already there. Images, movements and scenes are reduced to the essence with attention to detail. Van den Berg moves between the worlds of dance, theater, performance and film, creating an open, very individual style that invites the audience to different perspectives and perspectives. She works with professionals and non-professionals, on location and in theaters and chooses to be inspired by what goes on around us, in everyday life. For more information on her work visit her website.

2 From 2013 to 2022, Lotte van den Berg, together with Daan 't Sas, Peter Aers and many others, worked on Building Conversation, a long-running Dialogical Art project. Inspired by conversational techniques and rituals from all over the world, Building Conversation has gathered a repertoire of conversations/performances with participants from all over Europe. At the end of 2022, Lotte van den Berg stopped her work for Building Conversation. The collaboration was concluded and celebrated with a book: *Building Conversation – The Scripts.* For current information and the book visit their website.

3 Marije Nie is a tap dancer, performer, researcher, facilitator and educator. She is co-founder of the Parliament of Practices and the Cross Pollination collective. She has worked with many styles and genres of music, film, theater, interdisciplinary art and community arts in The Netherlands and internationally. For more information on Marije Nie visit her website.

4 Cross Pollination collective was founded in 2017 by Adriana La Selva and Marije Nie, to bring practitioners from all disciplines of the performing arts together in a nomadic theater laboratory to engage in the dialogue in-between practices. For more information on the Cross Pollination Collective visit their website.

5 *I Know... Digital Ritual* was created by Bill T. Jones for the Holland Festival in June 2020. Bill T. Jones is an American choreographer, director, author and dancer. He is the co-founder of the Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane Dance Company and artistic Director of New York Live Arts in Manhattan.

6 Visual artist Daan 't Sas is Lotte's partner, both in life and in art. Together they founded Building Conversation, which he currently runs as a platform for dialogical art.

7 Oerol Festival is an annual ten-day cultural festival held in June on the Dutch island of Terschelling. This festival was founded in 1981 by Joop Mulder, owner of café De Stoep in Midsland at the time. The first edition took place on June 18, 1982 and it is still running to this day.

8 Radio Kootwijk Live was a network of musicians and artists who created new forms of concerts that existed from 2009 till 2015. They organised interdisciplinary labs, bringing together classical musicians with makers from other performative and artistic disciplines, writers and scenic designers and light designers. Besides the artistic research and creation they also worked on forms for exchange and reflection through dialogue, often bringing in professionals from outside the arts who were both participant, dialogue partner and audience.

9 Dr. Bart van Rosmalen was originally a cellist and theater director, and has been Lecturer in Arts and Professionalization with HKU University of the Arts Utrecht since 2014.

10 Huis aan de Amstel was a theater company that existed from 1990-2009 in Amsterdam. The company made performances for children, young people and adults, with a particular interest in the way in which changes in the world affect people's lives and their immediate environment.

11 In 2014 and 2015, Nie was involved as a tap dance coach for the Dutch version of the musical Billy Elliott, produced by Joop van den Ende Theaterproducties.

12 *Dying Together* by Lotte van den Berg premiered on October 12, 2018 at the Rotterdamse Schouwburg in Rotterdam, the Netherlands. Performed by both performers and spectators, the audience is invited to participate in a physically executed thought exercise in which contemporary situations and images are experienced from the inside. The theme of dying together is central and sheds new light on the way in which we relate to each other.

13 Braakland by Lotte van den Berg / Compagnie Dakar premiered July 2004 at festival De Karavaan in Alkmaar. Braakland tells a sober, visual story about nine figures who roam on forgotten earth. They surrender to the laws of life and death without protecting or defending themselves.

14 John Maxwell Coetzee is an Australian writer and literary translator of South-African origin. On 10 December 2003 he was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature.

15 Eugenio Barba (1936) is an Italian author and theater director based in Denmark. He is the founder of the Odin Theater and the International School of Theater Anthropology, both located in Holstebro, Denmark.

16 Dragan Klaić (1950-2011) studied drama in Belgrade and majored in theater at Yale. From 1978 to 1991 he taught dramaturgy in Belgrade. He moved to the Netherlands where he was a lecturer at the Amsterdam-Maastricht Summer University, director of the Theater Institute of the Netherlands and permanent fellow at Felix Meritis, professor at the Central European University in Budapest and the Academy of Arts of the University of Leiden.

17 Donna J. Haraway (1944) is an American Professor Emerita in the History of Consciousness Department and Feminist Studies Department at the University of California, Santa Cruz, and a prominent scholar in the field of science and technology studies. She has also contributed to the intersection of information technology and feminist theory, and is a leading scholar in contemporary ecofeminism. Her work criticizes anthropocentrism, emphasize s the self-organising powers of nonhuman processes, and explores dissonant relations between those processes and cultural practices, rethinking sources of ethics.

18 Donna Haraway: *Story Telling for Earthly* (2016) is a documentary by Fabrizio Terranova and features Haraway in a playful and engaging exploration of her life, influences and ideas. Best-known for her ground-breaking work on gender, cyborgs, animals and post-colonialism.

19 Mensendieck therapy aims to improve posture and exercise based on conscious observation, awareness by the patient, analysis and systematic practice of daily movements and postures. It was founded by Bess Mensendieck in the early 20th century.

20 Renate Klett (1946) is a writer, theater- and dance- critic, lives in Berlin. She has worked as a dramaturg (Frankfurt, Tübingen, Cologne, Stuttgart, Hamburg) and as program director/artistic director for the Theater der Welt festival (Cologne, Stuttgart, Hamburg, Munich).

21 Toneelhuis is a theater company in Antwerp that was founded in 1998 from the merger of the Royal Dutch Theater and the Blue Monday Compagnie. Lotte van den Berg was connected to Het Toneelhuis as part of the artistic team between 2005 and 2009.

22 Odin Teatret is an avant-garde theater group based in Holstebro, Denmark. It was founded by Italian theater director and investigator Eugenio Barba in 1964. Until 2022, Odin Teatret was part of the NTL, Nordisk Teaterlaboratorium, founded in 2002. In 2023, Odin Teatret is an independent group.

23 Joop van den Ende is a former producer for television, film and theater. Joop van den Ende Theater Productions merged in 2015 with Albert Verlinde's musical production company to form Stage Entertainment.

on dialogues

Talking to Myself: A Dialogue Between Practice and Performance

–– Julia Pond (KINGSTON UNIVERSITY)

This playful, performative dialogue, a take on the self-interview format, brings together Julia, a practicing artist and mother, and her performative alter ego Julia Pond, founder and CEO of the fictional company BRED. Together, they navigate the blurred lines between professional and personal practice and performance. Departing from Schechner's definitions of practice as 'doing' and performance as 'showing-doing', the self-interview problematizes the idea that practice, more than performance, has the power to affect our real identities (Spatz 220). It proposes that, rather than 'performance' being fake and 'practice' being authentic, the two co-affect each other, influencing both artistic and personal spheres. What happens when we must show everything we do? Julia and Julia Pond discuss the performance of subjectivity, individuality or affect that is now integral to contemporary work culture but that might have once been considered the territory of the 'personal' or 'practice'. They consider how the roles we perform each day blur into personal identity, imprinting into the body and mind through daily repetitive labour. This phenomenon can include the performance of mothering as well as performing an artistic identity. Julia Pond and Julia also consider how these themes function in the fictional company BRED's participatory

performance installation, and its excerpt "The Manager-festo" which both embodies and critiques notions of 'value' and 'productivity' through the body, Powerpoint, and bread dough.

Keywords: practice-as-research, performance-as-research, creative practice, performance, dialogue, motherhood

*The following dialogue is a performative self-interview that explores tensions between performance and practice in artistic and personal life. I write as both **Julia**, an artist, researcher, and mother, who speaks from the point of view of practice (both artistic and as a mother) and **Julia Pond** who speaks from within the artistic performance of the role of CEO at the fictional company and performance installation BRED. (This character was developed out of a real experience in an senior role at [a global corporation]). Understanding performance[1] at a basic level as a 'showing-doing' that happens both artistically and in the sphere of personal and business life (Schechner 28), here it also has an element of fictionalising and exaggerating reality. Further, my CEO-self blends the personal and performative in a hyper-individualistic display (Van Assche and Schaffer 208), blurring the lines between Julia and Julia Pond, truth and fiction. Kunst's notion of contemporary subjectivity turning outwards, away from an authentic core, and therefore opening to new gestures of speech and movement that are intended to be observed, is key (20). Practice, on the other hand, is understood as the daily, personal, activities outside the "pressure of production" (Schuh 80). In Schechner's terms, this is the "doing" (Schechner 28), and, for me, is accompanied by a level of sincerity, privacy, or vulnerability. Bread dough – a domestic, tactile, almost fleshy substance, and the working object at BRED – references personal, repetitive, practice even as it is repurposed in service of corporate productivity and performativity. The 'doing' that relates to personal identities like motherhood is recognised as invisible labour, also experienced here as unproductive performance. The dialogue seeks to take play seriously, and to expose the theoretical aspects of the research within performative, sometimes humorous, dialogue, joining discourse and materiality of practice (Arlander 137).*

JULIA: It's been said that practice 'raises the stakes' over performance because it has the power to affect our identities (Spatz 220). In contemporary dance, practice – understood as personal activities that provide continuity and support – also, "brings about a subtle, gradual shift in style and in the aesthetics of dancing" (Schuh 90). This seems to make sense. The sincerity of practice makes a difference to who I really am, and underlies my performance capabilities. As an artistic performer I can inhabit a performative role, then cast it off without it affecting my personal identity. But through knowing you, Julia Pond, I have begun asking the question: what happens when what we practice *is* performance? And further, what parts of our lives remain today that are NOT performance? How does it work when I am always, at some level, showing what I am doing to someone? When I worked at [global company], I performed the role of an executive each day, creating Powerpoints, sending emails and attending meetings. I was performing a public, professional self: a part of my work was performing my own personality, being bubbly, creative, and even critical (Kunst 28). It mattered who saw it. None of it felt authentic – like my real identity – but this didn't matter in the end. As such, for Spatz it might have remained on the surface, but as I repeated my performance of my professional personality, it began to affect me at deeper levels, penetrating my muscle – and mind – memory, if you will. Over time, the performance inadvertently had the effects of a practice. Maybe something like water soaking slowly into sand – eventually, you end up saturated.

JULIA POND: Huh. For me, it's actually the practice that lies underneath the performance and supports it. One practice that really supports my performance at work is my morning routine, which I share openly about in my talk (some people call *that* a 'performance') "The Manager-festo"[2]. Having a practice like a morning routine is SO RELEVANT to being a top performer. What can seem like a simple combination of checking emails, applying face cream, and obliterating the soul gradually, day by day, is actually what can keep us performing at cadence, no matter the cost to our identities. It's so important to figure out YOUR UNIQUE practices for success. How did I develop these ideas? Well, I had to let go of my own self as the 'locus of truth' –- to perform my own subjectivity rather than feel it (Kunst 20). Only then was I able to really *perform* as a manager.

JULIA: Yes. Behind the performance of my role at [global company], I certainly developed my own 'pseudo-activities' to support constant meaningless productivity (Kunst 7): call them coping mechanisms or morning routines, they were, often, also effective methods for pissing away time and income while making me feel worthwhile and productive: lunchtime-organic-face-products-shop or appointments-with-the-expensive energy-healer, donating-to-the-Maasai and going-to-yoga: whatever it took to get back in there the next day and keep hitting my targets. Ultimately, I was developing my own self as a product (Schuh 81), while also maintaining the need for ever more income, what the Marxist thinker Postone called the 'treadmill effect'.

Thanks for mentioning the 'morning routine' – this reminds me of a micro-performance in the office: something I call the calculated personal share. This is the performance of vulnerability and openness – without any actual vulnerability. For example, when you engage in small talk at the office, and a colleague drops some highly personal bomb without changing their facial expression, only to turn back to work as if it's ultimately the more important issue: "Great weather today! … How am I? Well my mom just died so that's been hard but I'm totally coping. Let's dive into these metrics!" It's like a confession stripped of angst - but there's something essential to the performance of the working-self about this revealing or disclosure of the personal, you know? (Kunst 29)

JULIA POND: I love the way you articulate that. I use the calculated personal share all the time – I find it really helps to build connection with my team.

JULIA: One thing that has been really interesting to reflect on is that through the process of creating you I realized that my time at [global company] was really accidental performance-as-research. The knowing-through-doing I accumulated in that time, combined with my artistic performance knowledge, was what made it possible for me to create you. So, when I *thought* I was performing a role which would remain on the surface of my authentic self, the performance was actually getting into my bones, my whole self and subjectivity was becoming performative… and that deep knowledge is what allowed me to … spawn you.

Figure 1. Julia Pond in *The Manager-festo*, June 2022, © Julia Pond

However, through this act of creating you, I also freed myself of you. I created a separate space – the fictional company and performance project BRED – where I could perform you but disable your power over my felt identity. That space was no longer interwoven with my personal life. At that point, my professional identity was no longer impacted in the same way as when I was fully involved at [global company] and this in turn gave me space to reclaim a more authentic artistic identity.

JULIA POND: It's so interesting that you mention creativity and art – because at BRED we also see creativity as very, very important to our work. We're all about bringing our whole creative selves to the office: this helps us to be our most productive. It's not just about what you do at BRED – it's *how* you do it. In fact there is definitely a

Figure 2. Julia Pond screaming into bread dough, *Manager-festo* performance, Gallery Lock-In Brighton, UK © Julia Pond, July 2022.

virtuosic element to what we expect of ourselves. It's getting your dough to rise, yes, but it's also showing how much you care about the work – demonstrating your passion – choosing a beautiful position for your body while you work – developing an upbeat, yet authentic persona in the office. One of my top tips is to define what it is you are really *practising* when you are performing your work at BRED. When you lie down with the dough on your skin, are you practising 'waiting-with'? or 'waiting-for'? [the bread dough]. It's actually not enough to just '*perform*' – you've got to mean it.

JULIA: But what if you *don't* mean it? Sometimes I feel my best performance work is as a mother. And it's also my most fake performance. I wake up and I'm *on* – lights, camera, action: mom. What I perceive as my 'authentic' identity survives beneath the surface, surfacing in moments of quiet where my attention is turned to myself. Only sometimes, the two layers merge and I feel present …

JASPER: Mom? Mom? Mommommommommommommommom.

JULIA: Excuse me.

(*soft whispering sounds*)

JULIA: … to the practice of this role. The next day, I read a bedtime story on autopilot again without having any idea of what it's about. I miss shows, professional opportunities, because they don't align with the schedule and needs of parenting. My work is largely invisible and definitely uncompensated. The blur between life and work, and art and life makes my head spin. I keep my voice modulated, pleasant, when I'm interrupted for the 17th or 27th time, even when what I want to do is to scream.

JULIA POND: And then I take that scream and put it – literally – into the bread dough!

JULIA: (*laughs*) Exactly. Obviously I also love my kid. But these are the complexities.

JULIA POND: Which brings us to one of BRED's recent, really disruptive ideas to empower working parents: the baguette. When I launched BRED, the dough was first and foremost a symbol of that messy, fertile territory where really iterative thinking can happen. It seemed to hold time in its folds, and to have layers of meaning (Baraitser 33) – it was both a restrictive object and an object of care. A lot of our early publicity shots showed me with the dough on my skin, partially obscured by a pile of Legos, so I was barely visible.

JULIA: Yes. Sometimes I wasn't sure what was dough, and what was flesh – but I could definitely see the hoover behind you.

Figure 3. Doughflesh © Julia Pond, July 2021.

JULIA POND: Totally. But all that dough was creating a lot of waste. So, as part of our exponential growth trajectory, we have moved forward and upward, baking the dough into baguettes. In this form, it becomes a prosthesis – a dough dildo, if you will – that sets us free from preconceptions about the mothering body and its natural, doughy, shape – while remaining on-brand. Not only is the mom-at-work nurturing, soft, creative, and of course growth-oriented, she is also now penetratingly powerful. The baguette can attach to an arm, a leg, a waist, avoiding any performance of maleness (Hamming), yet it creates this aforementioned sense of power, penetration, and, hopefully, precarity - our acronym for this is PPP*[3], sometimes augmented to PPPP to include 'position'. It's allowed our working mothers to increase their performance ratings, in most cases smashing their goals. Blending the best of the domestic and professional they are really changing our field and challenging expectations of what a working parent looks like. Plus, the baguettes have a real day-into-night function, doubling as excellent sandwich material after work – my personal favourite is the French classic, the jambon-beurre.

Figure 4. Julia Pond and Mia Schmitt in a rehearsal of the 'meeting'. March 2023, © Julia Pond

Figure 4.1. Julia Pond and Mia Schmitt in a rehearsal of the 'meeting'. March 2023, © Julia Pond

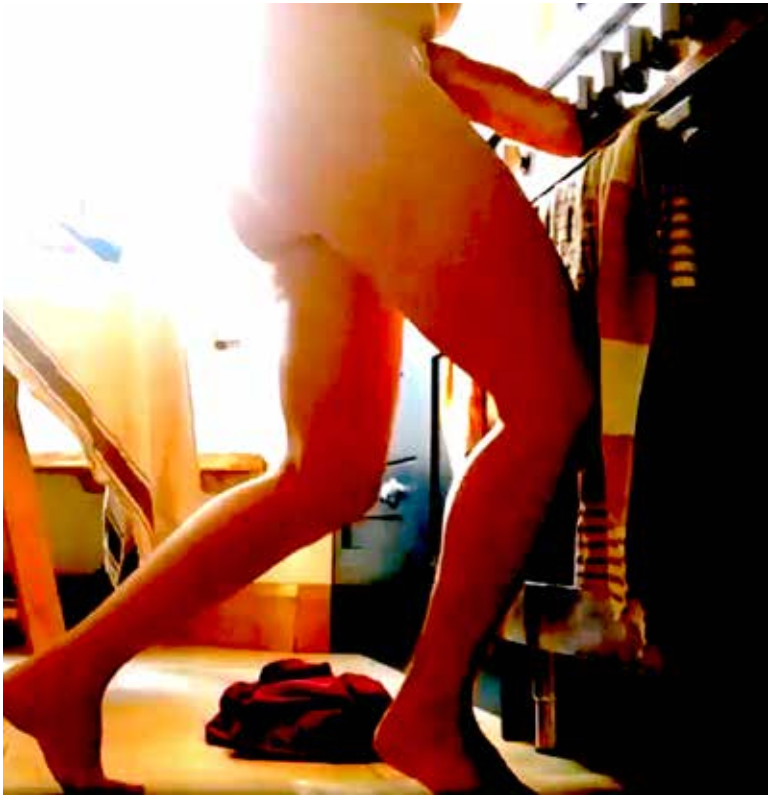

Figure 4.2. Julia Pond using a baguette to 'work from home'. May 2020

JULIA: That sounds amazing. It's so refreshing to see a company walking the talk when it comes to empowering its female team members. Now, if I can change the topic slightly, let's talk about performing practice. I like what Deborah Hay says when she talks about "allowing you to witness the performance of her practice …" She's talking about allowing you to witness her practice, in a sense allowing you in to witness something personal. This makes me think about how I perform my identities: 'contemporary dancer' or 'quirky artist' or even 'cool mum'. I put on the costume of me, and this helps me become myself, to perform my practice. I think about what's invisible here, what's not part of the performance of my practices: stuff like nose-picking, the way my hips hurt. Yet, both the visible performance *and* this invisible stuff is what I bring to the studio. It's what I bring to the work of practising my art, the work of practising myself as a mother, as a person. Through repetition, it becomes more real. This is stuff that also exists "out of focus" (a term Simone Forti uses) (De Spain 56) in an official sense, while at the same time actually being constitutive of the reality of our artistic or personal selves because of what we're practising – and how this private space is, against our will perhaps, perceived. What's hidden and invisible are, sometimes, running things behind the scenes.

JULIA POND: Thanks for that. At BRED, we certainly want the performance of our practice to be evident. The practice that allows us to perform so well is clearly reflected in our company values:

Dough comes first.
Practice virtuosity at work.
Activity is never finished, only suspended.

Figure 5. BRED Values poster (installation decoration), © Julia Pond

The dough comes first – each team member at BRED is tasked with their own piece of dough. The care of this dough is that worker's ultimate responsibility, to wait-with it, putting their own desires and needs aside, until this dough is ready for the oven … I touched on this earlier, but for those of you who might be hearing about us for the first time, let's elaborate a little: the main work for our employees at BRED is to allow dough to rise on their bare skin. There are three simple rules for this work: choose a beautiful position, try not to disturb the dough, and to place it skin-to-skin. Our team then practises waiting-with (not waiting-for!)[4] the dough, a simple, yet profound, act.

On practising virtuosity, well, we genuinely see our work as art. We see the act of working as a satisfaction in itself – we don't think about actually producing anything. In the words of Italian theorist Paolo Virno, we are dedicated to the performance of "work without a finished product" (7). Finally, suspension of activity is key. If we

Figure 6. At work in BRED installation. Still from video by Gani Naylor, © Julia Pond

finish, we are finished. We pause, that we may be refreshed. Think of it like a big in-breath: you take a big inhalation when you leave work, and this remains suspended until you return.

JULIA: So you are actually practising what you are performing.

JULIA POND: Yes. Let's face it: there's a reason BRED has been so successful and it's that we practise what we perform. To support this, our training includes an innovative, body-based strategy where we really imagine our flesh *AS* the dough that we work with, and move this 'doughflesh' as it grows, allowing for a visceral experience of exponential growth. Sounds 'woo-woo' – but the basic idea comes from a dance technique called Skinner Releasing, which offers vivid images to work with imaginatively in the body, for example, imagining that your whole body's tissues become silk. It's well known for actually transforming how people experience their bodies by using their imaginations in movement. So building on this, at BRED, we are able to become what we envision. It's a revolutionary new way to think about – and do – branding. Involving their bodies as well as their minds has also really helped our team members to stay dedicated to the company.

JULIA: It shows how seriously you take the brand that you have used this artistic practice - Skinner Releasing Technique - which is very sincere, and used it to help internally activate your brand. It just speaks to your aesthetic of authenticity and deep work, and willingness to repurpose and even mess with established practices in service of your company. Let's not pretend we're too pure, right?

JULIA POND: Right. Fuck purity.

JULIA: Work is play, play is work! One of the tools that helped me to create you was infusing a sense of play into the creative process. In a way, undermining myself as a 'serious artist' and destabilising the ego. I was definitely inspired by Deborah Hay's writing here – especially when she talks about beginning a lecture by barking like a dog (12). At the same time, there's a letting-loose, there's also a remaining-attentive (Clarke 301). With a state of playful attentiveness, I was able to draw on a much wider range of movement, and language. I was also able to incorporate humour into my perfor-

mance work: while I've always been 'funny' in real life, I had been very 'serious' as a performer. Play became a way to toggle between performance and practice as well as playing between and through disciplines of moving, image making and writing, which were all involved in creating our fictional company.

JULIA POND: I'd say that's accurate – and playing between movement and speech as well! Humour is a great way to get your team to be a little more vulnerable, to open up, leaving space for you to throw in a real zinger to make them think again. It's okay to model a little absurdity, to make yourself larger than life. One way I love to express playfulness is through double-meanings: in my talk the Manager-festo, for example, I unpack the term "KPI": it's a key performance indicator – or, "how *YOU* know that I'm performing". I play in the territory between improvised and choreographed, all the time. Of course, the term 'play' is also a theatrical term.

JULIA: So perhaps we could say play is one possible bridge between practice and performance.

JULIA POND: 100%. To be honest, however, I would say that in some ways, I might even be the more authentic of us two. Your work is playful and mine is very serious. People say that you are the more authentic, the real one. But I'm not so sure: these days, how do we know what's real anymore? Even those of us who like to pretend we're real – like you – are always performing, working bodies. I often think of the Marxist theorist Nina Power who talks about the "choreography of the zero":

> […] we move our body to abstractions that are in turn, incarnated…we are always on display, at work and at play… we are performing all the time for…the market-other - we cannot express what we feel because we can no longer feel what we feel because our feelings have been simultaneously externalized and commodified. (52)

It is precisely my state of constant performance which speaks to this, and what allows me to fully inhabit the reality of our time. My main practice is, in fact, incarnating capitalist work processes – making them fleshy, fleshing them out.

JULIA: Mmm-hm.

JULIA POND: This feels like a great place to sum up: What would you say in conclusion about the relationship between performance and practice?

JULIA: Performance, ultimately, cannot work unless it's based in practice. But, performance, repeated, can transform identities, whether we want it to or not. Performance can also act as a kind of practical research, in this way: I come to know – and be – something by performing it. My performing self and practicing self co-exist and co-affect each other in layers. This tension feels like an interesting space in which I can expose what is hidden – where I can let what is hidden lead.

JULIA POND: Can I use that for my upcoming TEDx talk?

Figure 7. At work in BRED Installation, July 2021. Still from video by Gani Naylor, © Julia Pond

Figure 8. Participant and "The Manager-Festo" Powerpoint, BRED installation, July 2021. Still from video by Gani Naylor, © Julia Pond

Figure 9. Manuela Albrecht at work in BRED installation. Still from video by Gani Naylor, © Julia Pond

This dialogue has tried to expose the tension between performance and practice, and personal and professional life, as well as points of tension between mothering and artistic and professional life. It is written from between layers of personal performance and practice, having grown out of my practice-as-research process in creating BRED. BRED itself was developed through engagement with theoretical texts on art, work, and capitalism by authors I cite in the dialogue such as Bojana Kunst and Paolo Virno, and pop-culture texts such as the column "My Morning Routine" on Gwyneth Paltrow's lifestyle website Goop or Harvard Business Review thinkpieces on how to be a great manager, as well as somatic movement research (improvised movement led by the senses and internal instinct) with bread dough as artistic source material. BRED included Manuela Albrecht as a principal collaborator and received invaluable feedback and support from Kirsty Alexander and Florence Peake. The initial development was part of my MFA in Creative Practice: Dance Professional at Trinity Laban/Independent Dance. BRED and excerpts of it have been performed at festivals and galleries in London and Brighton. It is still not clear who is more real: Julia or Julia Pond. https://juliapond.com/bred

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Notes

1 Many readers may think of Judith Butler's famous theory on performativity; after all, I am talking about the way we perform identities, which could be seen as a parallel to how Butler theorises gender as performance, and the power of language to act as a constitutive force. While it's impossible to cover Butler in a footnote, I want to briefly note how this work sits in relation to her theory. In short, my main concern is how the *intentional actions* of performance and practise *co-affect* identity and a sense of 'reality' of the self, rather than how external social languaging and conventions do this job. As such, I chose to focus on Schechner's notions of 'doing' and 'showing-doing'. Similarly to how Butler might consider the performance of gender according to pre-rehearsed social norms to have an effect on the person, I consider the repeated performance of 'mother' or 'executive' to affect the person: however, in BRED, by transposing the performance of CEO into an artistic / theatrical context, I also disable its power to affect my own identity, taking what *was* a performance of an identity into an artistic performance. Overall, play and humour, alongside artistic performance and its parallels in theories of work and labour, also take a more central role in my work.

2 Here I nod to the spirit of the Maska journal article (2016) "Become the Ideal Cultural Worker. A Handbook" by N. Arhar, P. Brezavšček, K. Čičigoj, S. Rakef and J. Založnik as well as popular thinkpieces on what makes a great manager such as What Great Managers Do from *Harvard Business Review*.

3 I would like to acknowledge artist / scholar Pirkko Husemann's essay on PPP (Project = Process = Product) here as well as the political economic term 'purchasing power parity (PPP)' which denotes prices of identical items across different currencies.

4 The act of 'waiting-with' was arose out of embodied research into 'waiting' and 'staying' drawing on Lisa Baraitser's words: "perhaps the maternal relation, and perhaps maternal time, suggests simply a willingness on the part of one to stay alongside another regardless of outcome" (91).

UNFOLDING A SERIES OF SUGGESTIONS

A Reflection on a publication practice permeated by dialogue between practices

–– Leonie Persyn (Ghent University)

How to share a process with peers and an audience is a valuable and urgent question to both academia and the artistic field. This article aims to contribute to an answer by questioning how within academia the process can be re-evaluated. In order to do so, it focuses on how the notion of unfolding provides the publication format A Series of Suggestions with the power to become a tool for sharing and thinking. This article does not only bring the perspective of the researcher into the discussion of collaboration within performance studies, but by doing so it shows the importance and consequence that result from a methodology in listening rather than composing.

Keywords: unfolding, research processes, a tool for sharing and thinking, listening, researcher-as-dramaturg

Introduction

Talking about collaboration within the scope of performance studies happens mostly from the perspective of the artist and in a context of performance as research or practice-led research. The main focus of edited volumes such as *Artistic Research in Performance through collaboration* (Blain & Minors, 2020) or *Performance as Research: knowledge, methods, impact* (Arlander, Barton & Dreyer-Lude, 2017) reflect upon collaboration within rehearsal spaces or artist studios and how they function as research by indicating the nuances and differentiations in the balance between artistic and reflective strategies. Within the current arts field, especially in Flanders and Brussels, one of the most urgent questions is how to share artistic research among peers and with an audience. It is a question which does not only concern artists, but also art schools and policy makers. The discussion about the status and different accounts to artistic research is definitely not over yet. But having said this, it must be addressed that overall, the perspective of the academic researcher on these artistic collaborations remains too often a posterior addition to the actual collaboration.

This article thus questions how, within academia, the process can be re-evaluated. In order to so, I have a look at my own research process and the strategies I have developed to share my process. While working at S:PAM (Studies in Performing Arts and Media, Ghent University) over the past six years, I have positioned myself as a researcher-as-dramaturg, which implies a "hyphenated thinking, [in which] knowledge is not situated in one individual or in one privileged center, but resurges from the hyphens in-between thinking entities, with thoughts evolving in perpetual modulation" (Stalpaert 80). Working as a researcher-as-dramaturg in a context of hyphenated thinking does not favor the researcher or the dramaturg as the singular figures but celebrates and embeds the richness of dramaturgical strategies in academia in order to activate and engage in long-term and sustainable collaborations. This results in dramaturgical work not focusing on a particular production but on the processes in-between those productions, with the aim to find certain essence or life-lines.

The identification as a researcher-as-dramaturg within the scope of my doctoral research titled *The Sound of a Shared Intimacy* implies that if I want to learn more about the re-evaluation of the process, I have to look into the (dramaturgical) collaborations at the base of the project. In my exploration of how listening functions in the field of performance and performance studies, I write about works of artists with whom I invested and still am investing in long-term and sustainable collaborations. In order to acknowledge the importance of these collaborations for and within my research, I developed the publication format *A Series of Suggestions*. The idea for this series originated during the Covid-19 pandemic and is an answer to the question of how to give back to the artists I am working with. At that moment and to this day those artists are the Polish-Belgian choreographer Kinga Jaczewska, Dutch in situ artist Rita Hoofwijk and Belgian theatermaker David Weber-Krebs. Although their work might appear very different at first glance, due to their difference in training or discipline, their practices do share for me a certain essence: a particular way of coping with listening. On top of that they all work within that Flemish, Brussels context in which I question the importance and urge of sharing processes.

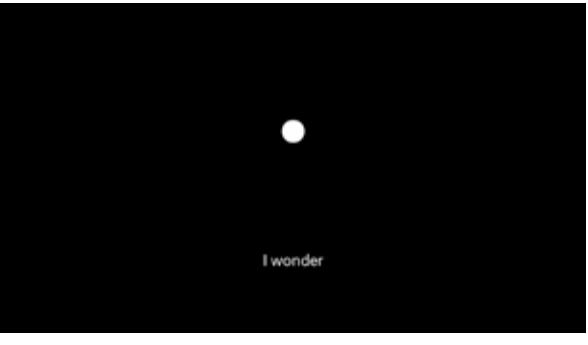
The artistic practice of Jaczewska, with whom I made the first editions of *A Series of Suggestions*, titled *The common texture is our body*, is a continuous exploration of "the relationship between the event and the non-event" (Jaczewska). While working with different media, going from dance, over drawing to video and installations she invites to bring "the focus to the overlooked [...] by exposing presences and movements hidden besides such focal points" (Jaczewska). For the first edition of the series we selected five materials with specific textures that were often addressed in our conversations and working processes. By exploring those textures, we engaged in "both a de- and recontextualization of thoughts and imaginations" (Jaczewska & Persyn). The first edition became an attempt "to destabilize preoccupations and reorient our habits [about these materials] towards new possibilities and questions" (Jaczewska & Persyn) for the future of our practices and the upcoming editions.

Figure 1. Kinga Jaczewska. *Time it takes* (2019), © Diego Franssens

The next artist with whom I took up those questions was Rita Hoofwijk. Over the years, she developed a space-oriented practice, in which a particular work always roots in a defined place or context. By spending time she generates strategies through which her work opens up a revealing or disturbing perspective upon that place or context in which it originated. Due to its situatedness her "work [has been] varying [in] shape and scale" (Hoofwijk). She herself described her artistic practice as "an attentive way of relating to what – and who – surround us" (Hoofwijk). By developing the second edition of *A Series of Suggestions* we tried to get more grip on that attentiveness at the core of her practice. *Here (not anywhere)* can be read as "a recipe, averse to ingredients. It is a field guide that is inspired by the idea of a cookbook. It focuses on the experience of creating, starting from the place where one cooks to the digestion of the meal. *Here (not anywhere)* [...] reveals how the works resulting from her practice originated in a specific here that wasn't anywhere and neither could be everywhere. [...] It shows the richness and intimacy embedded in the encounter between a place, an artist and an audience member" (Hoofwijk & Persyn).

Figure 2. *I wonder is time blue.* Fragment from Rita Hoofwijk's Jean (2023), © Rita Hoofwijk

Last but not least, my collaboration with David Weber-Krebs goes furthest back in time, from when I was working for him as a production manager in the context of *The Guardians of Sleep.* Weber-Krebs is a purebred storyteller, who mostly works in the black box. By creating specific set-ups and situations in which these stories are told he "questions the traditional relationship between the work of art and its" audience (Weber-Krebs). We started our PhD-research simultaneously and in the third edition of *A Series of Suggestions* we try to hum along to each other's practices. Our understanding of humming heavily relates to Deleuze's concept of the *ritournelle*. By humming along, we try to mark the moments when we leave our own territory and stretch our agency. In this edition we "do not aim for meaning immediately, instead our humming is after presence, a presence of being, a state, of a feeling, and meaning seems to [reveal] later" (Suk-Jun Kim 7) in the resonance between stories, drawings and our individual work. Through his storytelling Weber-Krebs zooms in and out on situations, bodies, their behavior, thoughts and environments.



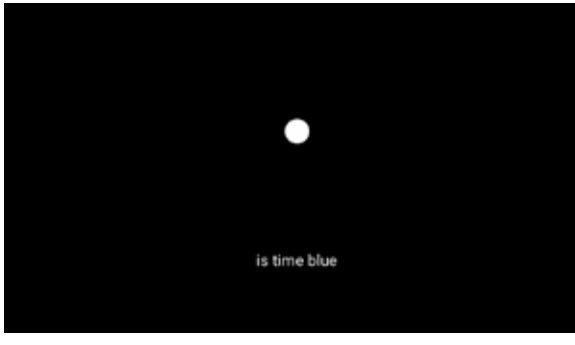


Figure 3. David Weber-Krebs, *The Guardians of Sleep*, theaterschool Amsterdam, 2016, © David Weber-Krebs

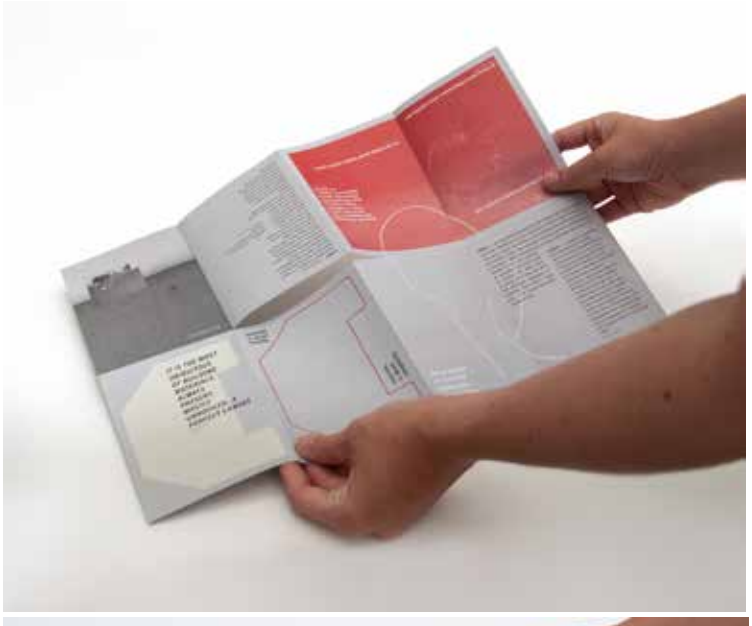
What binds these three practices for me is that what they do highly embeds and relies on listening, although they don't necessarily work with sound or are aware of this themselves. *A Series of Suggestions* has been a way for me to explore this hypothesis while engaging in a direct collaboration that acknowledges their agency and the importance of our collaboration within academia. On top of that *A Series of Suggestions* has been a way to take care of these artists by giving back, while providing myself the space to develop a methodology that allowed me to make working in academia more sustainable.

At the moment the series is compiled of three editions, one for each collaboration behind *The Sound of a Shared Intimacy.* In what follows I will present to you the format of *A Series of Suggestions* and how it embeds the notion of unfolding. Afterwards I will mainly focus on how the notion of unfolding provides A Series of Suggestions with the power to become a tool for sharing and thinking. This article does not only bring the perspective of the researcher into the discussion of collaboration within performance studies, but by doing so it shows the importance and consequence that results from a methodology in listening rather than composing.

The Notion of Unfolding in the Format of *A Series of Suggestions*

I built the format of *A Series of Suggestions* on the action of unpacking and unfolding. Together with graphic designer Laura Broux, we refined the format so that each edition comes in an A6-sized box that is wrapped in a sleeve. Once opened the box contains two postcards and five booklets, which are actually five A3 posters folded into a Mini-Zine, which is why they contain eight pages each and 40 pages in total. The eventual format and especially the packaging simultaneously hints towards a book cover and a jewelry box. The sleeve has a soft material quality and a particular form that invites the reader to engage in the precious act of unpacking. The first thing one encounters while unpacking is a pile of booklets in-between two

Figure 4. The Format of *A Series of Suggestions*, showing the packaging and the Mini-Zine fold, © Laura Broux



A Series
of Suggestions
#1

postcards. The first one contains an introduction that addresses the collaboration and intention at the core of the edition. The second one at the back of the pile provides the reader with context on the artist and the researcher with whom they spend time.

Although you can read each edition of *A Series of Suggestions* as a book which tells a certain story over five chapters of which the middle one always inserts a certain twist or even a disruption, the box immediately invites the reader to completely unpack and unfold the entire content. That invitation is stressed by the slightly uplifted corners and the gaping in-between pages. The form invites the audience member to unfold the pages, and to start to play with the content. The invitation aims at the activation and engagement of the reader. When the reader unfolds the booklet, they reveal the same content in a different constellation. This shifts the sense-making and breaks open the linearity of the narrative that has been read before. The unfolding thus creates room for the imagination of the reader. The reader starts thinking through the unfolding, therefore it is no longer only a conversational tool for artist and researcher by which they try to understand each other's practices but equally functions as a tool for the reader. In the unfolding *A Series of Suggestions* is passed along and implies the possibility of modification and adaptation to each body it encounters, even that of the graphic designer as is exemplified in the following words of Laura Broux:

The Mini-zine fold of the five booklets embeds both the action of folding and unfolding as they can and must be opened by the reader into 5 A3 posters to completely grasp the essence of each edition. Due to the importance of these actions, *A Series of Suggestions* highly resonates with the art of origami. In the Japanese word origami, the first syllable *ori* not only means fold but also indicates an "opportunity, change or suitable time" (Japanese Dictionary, 2023). Therefore, origami should be understood as a process of folding and unfolding in which especially the act of unfolding is important, because it gives time and direction towards the following fold, the following possibility without having a destination in itself. This etymological interpretation of origami implies that within the context of *A Series of Suggestions* it is the unfolding that makes dynamics, textures, dimensionality, volume and depth possible. More precisely, the unfolding transposes the strategical aim of dialogue towards the reader. By doing so, it functions as an invitation to bodily engage

Antwerp,
February 24, 2023

Dear Leonie,

Unfolding in A Series of Suggestions can be addressed from different points of view. Presumably, as a graphic designer, I experience the unfolding most literally. In my case, your chosen format serves as the formal playground for a "curated" encounter. The folds are the chalk lines of the terrain; and thus crucial. They do not serve as a rigid boundary, but rather as a stimulating suggestion. It is clear that you see the graphic form not as an end result but as an active player within the process.

As a designer, I try to transform the research into a physical precipitation in order to allow the reader to become a spectator of our dialogue. The folds in the paper provide different perspectives, both for me as a designer and for the reader. The viewer can zoom in on the artists' work while reading from left to right or can throw everything open. Because of that your format encourages new ways of looking and thinking.

Your beloved
Laura

Figure 5. Letter from Graphic Designer Laura Broux written after the release of *A Series of Suggestions #2*

while reading. The unfolding provides the reader with time to pause, to experience the textures behind the ideas by opening up its main strategy to laymen. By doing so, it creates room for (un)foreseen resonances.

Unfolding from the main strategy of the researcher-as-dramaturg towards a tool for sharing

In the previous section unfolding has been defined as the action that enables a shift in sense-making, because it breaks open the linearity of the narrative. Both of these qualities heavily relate to the work of both the researcher and the dramaturg. Both constantly break up the narratives they encounter, in order to share their experiences of particular performances with an artist, peers or an audience. For both their biggest aim is to open up equivalent forms of sense-making and possible meaning, which often result in the formulation of suggestions, which "are never clear-cut answers or solutions for a problem, but which hover between a recap of what has already been done and a forecast of undiscovered paths" (Jaczewska & Persyn). Therefore, unfolding isn't a strictly deduced or unambiguous activity, because each narrative and underlying collaboration demands a diversified form of unfolding and carries a manifold of possible paths.

Each of the editions of *A Series of Suggestions* stems from a practice of listening. In previous work I addressed how listening is a multi-sensory act that demands the listener to appear and disappear at the same time and how that makes listening fragile. The fragility embedded in listening demands care for the I, the other and the ways in which different senses, bodies, stories, temporalities and imaginations interact. It stimulates listening to expand across borders and in-between the lines. Therefore "listening is a process that impacts ethical discourse [..., because it] gives space to speaking, inviting other people into a dialogue that impact the discursive environments that then impact us" (Parks, vii). Therefore listening and the resulting collaboration is the acknowledgment of the agency of the other and the embedded dynamics of responsibility. But how can one reach such an acknowledgment?

According to Jean-Luc Nancy, "listening comes at the unity and disparity of sensorial dispositions sideways. It makes the perceptible registers and the intelligible register resound among themselves" (26). He defines listening as following: "To listen is to enter that spatiality by which, at the same time, I am penetrated, for it opens

up in me as well as around me, and from me as well as toward me [...] To be listening is to be at the same time outside and inside, to be open from without and from within" (14). In this definition listening proves to be an excellent research strategy because it enables us "to have a relationship with knowing and not-knowing simultaneously" (Rajni Shah 49). Due to this particular simultaneity, all forms of judgement get suspended, leaving us on the edge of meaning. Consequently, listening and the resulting collaboration at the core of *A Series of Suggestion* can be defined as a conversational way of undoing and unlearning. In the book *The Practice of Dramaturgy. Working on Actions in Performance,* Andrea Božić and Julia Willms describe "undoing (...) as an exercise in attention" (228), which they divide in two different phases: looking in-between and dividing one's attention. This is exactly what I do when I listen and when I engage in the development of *A Series of Suggestions.*

In other words, being at work as a researcher-as-dramaturg means I am looking in between the individual productions or creations of an artist while dividing my attention between my own practice, the practice of the artists and the different contexts and environments in which these practices arise. Due to its suspension of judgement and its allowance of not knowing, listening also feeds into collaboration as a way of unlearning, because for both the artist and the researcher involved the development of the publication functions as a way to "repeat and reactivate what others have already said, established, performed, written" (Azoulay 44). According to Ariëlla Azoulay unlearning therefore equals "a withdrawal from the quest of the new" (16). In this sense, each working session throughout the creation process and even each reading session of the final result functions as a rehearsal [of one's own practice] with others" (15). Applying this to the collaborations and conversations between the artist and the researcher-as-dramaturg this means that a format like *A Series of Suggestions*, which incorporate unfolding, enables both a search for the depths and overlooked essences at the core of their practices. In order to further explore and understand the ambiguity and complexity of unfolding I will have a look at the different collaborations and quests at work in *A Series of Suggestions #1- #3.*

A Series of Suggestions #1: The common texture is our body, a shared practice of collaging with Kinga Jaczewska

The collaboration with Kinga Jaczewska has been the slowest process of all three. Part of this slowness can be attributed to the fact that the format was in development while creating the content. Nevertheless, it is an inherent characteristic of our overall way of collaborating. The creation process of *A Series of Suggestions* started while already being engaged in a more traditional production dramaturgy for her installation *Meanwhile (2019)* and choreography *Time it takes (2021).* The sessions we spent time around the same table or physically working together exclusively focused on the development of *The common texture of our body* were limited. The kick-off of this project took place during in-between moments of rehearsal or while being isolated due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Our collaboration was characterized by a continuous contact of sending each other fragments of texts, images, drawings, quotes, et cetera of work by each other or others.

In what I call our breakthrough session, we brought together all the material collected throughout this continuous conversation and started to literally cut and re-combine all of it in connection to the five selected materials (concrete, paper, red plastic, silk and breath) that in one way or another characterized our practices. We started juxtaposing and assembling texts, quotes, images, drawings for several months in order to build a narrative telling our story. The collaboration with Jaczewska can be defined as an intuitive collaging based on material qualities. The further our process evolved the less clear it became what material belonged to whom. We both experienced this mystifying of authorship as something refreshing and fruitful, because the more we engaged in it, the more we understood the format and the unfolding embedded in it. Although the recognition of authorship is often claimed to be a condition for an ethical and sustainable collaboration we experienced this the other way around.

Of the entire series, *A Series of Suggestions #1: The common texture is our body* relates most to Azoulay's understanding of unlearning as "repeating and reactivating what others have already said, established, performed, written" (44). The collaboration with Jaczewska taught me to focus on the non-event of the dramaturg, the time outside the rehearsal or the production of a particular performance. By actively engaging in what Jaczewska would call the non-time of the dramaturg, our shared unknowing and struggle with the format

was revealed. In its rigidity we could now recognize the necessity of these rigid chalk lines as borders of a playfield to work within. Finding this room to play around with our practices and bringing them into a readable conversation indicated that we understood the agency of the format. This understanding mainly roots in the allowance to work with each other's material and inspirations without claiming authorship over a particular meaning that resulted from a certain juxtaposition.

A Series of Suggestions #2: Here (not anywhere), a collaboration with Rita Hoofwijk

Compared to the first edition the material and its authorship in *Here (not anywhere)* remains distinguishable. This does not necessarily have to come as a surprise as Hoofwijk and I started the development of this second edition with the aim to get to know each other's practice beyond the surface of the blind dates preceding this collaboration. *A Series of Suggestions #2* roots in curiosity and stems from the initial bodily reaction and the resonance I experienced to Hoofwijk's small publication *On a Monday I walked the same earth as you (2020),* which I received in my letterbox during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Over a period of nine months, Hoofwijk and I engaged in a dialogue, where we tried to get a hold of what exactly makes Hoofwijk's practice her own. On a regular basis we sat down and talked about her work, in-between I drew and I painted in reaction to these conversations and her work. During the process we both wrote each other short letters or messages to share how we digested the addressed topics of our preceding conversations. Hoofwijk herself describes our way of collaborating as follows:

Hoofwijk's description shows how the second edition of *A Series of Suggestions* mainly focuses on the aspect of unfolding and unlearning which Azoulay calls "a withdrawal from the quest of the new" (16). It also highlights how the conversation behind the development is non-hierarchical but can be defined as horizontal, which does not mean that there is no distribution of labor, but rather indicates the reciprocal engagement and "distributed creativity" (Blain & Minors 124) *Here, (not anywhere)* functions as a documentation of our conversation. Due to the simple decision that all left pages contain my voice and the right ones Hoofwijk's voice, *Here (not anywhere)*

Brussels,
February 25, 2023

Dear Leonie,

For A Series of Suggestions #2, and later for 'Here (not anywhere)' we sat side by side, not across from each other. We literally often sat on the same side of the table, or one of us at the corner. For me this exemplifies the content of our conversations. Together, from a different background but a similar position, we looked at what we would call 'my practice'. Even though it was no more mine as it was yours at the moment of conversing. Step by step, a little further, a little longer, we unraveled what happens in the stages before the showing of the work, during and after. In fact it was as if we looked at this practice in the same way as I would look at a 'here' to come to a work. You didn't interview me, nor would I have had the answers. It felt as if we together tried to unfold what was happening already. We looked at a hidden knowledge that was within the work and that might be insightful in creating future work. Or, inevitably this unfolding of an artistic method, from the start to the finish, unfolds new work would the unfolding continue endlessly.

With love,
Rita

Figure 6. A letter from Rita Hoofwijk written after the launch of *A Series of Suggestions #2 Here: (not anywhere)*

in itself reads as a dialogue. Consequently, it functions as a witness of the care for each other's practices by "disseminating the (initial embodied) mode of knowing" (Blain & Minors, 122) and encountering.

Where the first edition transmits my own methodology of listening, the second one shows how through unfolding and by sharing my methodology of listening, the essence of another practice can be found and shared. The baseline *Here I am listening to it. It will take us nowhere else* (Hoofwijk & Persyn) running through the five booklets is testament to this embedded reciprocity. The collaboration with Rita Hoofwijk reminded me of the importance of generosity and the richness of reciprocal engagement and dialogues between practices.

A Series of Suggestions #3: The Invisible geographies of resonance (work title), in collaboration with David Weber-Krebs

My collaboration with David Weber-Krebs goes back to 2017 and the production of *The Guardians of Sleep*. Our way of collaborating roots in the relation between an artist and a production manager. In 2017, I spent a lot of time in and around the rehearsal room while listening and experiencing without intervening. Next to the practical organization, working as a production manager has a lot to do with being present and available for all those involved in the production process. The most important task here is to listen and hear explicit and implicit needs while restricting and postponing intervention to the most suitable moment. The intervening and presence of the production manager can be defined as humble and subtle. Nevertheless, the agency of the production manager is crucial for the process and the well-being of all those involved. As a production manager one has to sense the atmosphere and environment of a production process and act upon it. In this sense, the agency of the production manager and the responsibility that comes with it highly resonates with what Weber-Krebs expects from his audience. This resonance enabled us to transpose expand our collaboration beyond *The Guardians of Sleep* into a dramaturgical conversation focused on the experience and agency of the audience.

Up until today our conversations are not frequent, on the contrary they are as limited as possible. They are based on a comprehensive acknowledgment of each other's agency and the conviction that one honest remark or rather question can subvert a process or a problem. The suggestions in this collaboration are considered but not less generous and root in the engagement of a similar listening attitude as the one of the production manager who is present in and around the rehearsal space.

Consequently, and comparable to how Weber-Krebs is working, we started the development of *A Series of Suggestions #3* from stories he had written. Because I couldn't get a profound grip on the constellation of these narratives I fell back on my strategies of drawing, sewing, collaging and painting I developed throughout my years of research, in order to search for resonance. During our breakthrough conversation it turned out that the forms of my material research highly corresponded to drawings Weber-Krebs has been making for years without showing them to anybody. Due to this unexpected resonance I became invited to engage in the strategy of writing stories, a practice I have done since my adulthood but have not shared up until now. The process with Weber-Krebs taught me that when engaging in listening and thereby acknowledging other's agency the possibilities and strength of vulnerability and humbleness show.

At first glance, this collaboration might seem less horizontal than the other two, but it is not. Due to the full and challenging acknowledgement of each other's agency, which consequently will play a crucial role in the third edition, we have become able to share aspects of both of our practices which have never been shared before. The encompassing acknowledgement of agency roots in the allowance of not-knowing what the other will suggest and demands a constant openness to possible subversion which brings along a lot of vulnerability.

In conclusion of this section and before taking all of this back to the notion of unfolding, there is one more thing about these collaborations that needs to be addressed. In retrospect it became very clear that the way in which each of these collaborations took form in the development of *A Series of Suggestions* heavily reflects the status in which both of the practices at stake were. Consequently, the entire series posits the possibility to evoke the evolution of my research trajectory towards an audience. From collecting and playing around with material and content trying to understanding one's own practice and the agency of the method with Kinga Jaczewska; to sharing one's methodology and practice with someone else in order to make it readable and valuable for an outsider with Rita Hoofwijk, to acknowledging each other's agency including that of the audience through writing. These insights suggest that the series is a tool in the making. But how does that function and who benefits from such a tool?

A Series of Suggestions as a tool

According to Tim Ingold a tool, in the most general sense is an object that extends the capacity of an agent to operate within a given environment" (2021, 315), which means that

> [n]o object considered purely in and for itself, in terms of its intrinsic attributes alone, can be a tool. To describe a thing as a tool is to place it in *relation* to other things within a field of activity in which it can exert a certain effect. Indeed, we tent to name our tools by the activities in which they are characteristically or normatively engaged, or by the effect they have in them. Thus, to call an object a saw is to position it within the context of a story […]. To name a tool is to invoke the story (2011, 56).

Taking Ingold's definition into account and considering *A Series of Suggestions* as a tool in the making would mean that it extends the capacity of both the artist and the researcher-as-dramaturg to operate in the world of Performance and Performance Studies and that the activities of listening and unfolding would define its name. In order to explore this hypothesis, I want to focus on the perspective of the researcher-as-dramaturgy, because I prefer not to speak on behalf of the artists.

A Series of Suggestions in relation to other strategies within academia generating a re-evaluation of the process

Within the format of *A Series of Suggestions* academic strategies such as the publication of books, articles, conference papers, conversation with artists or more in general reading, writing and dialoguing are being put in conversation with each other. This conjunction is fully revealed whenever *A Series of Suggestions* is put on display and unfolded into the embedded exhibition dispositive.

In *A Series of Suggestions* it is the format itself that puts the object (the box with the booklets) in relation to the academic context. But what are the effects it exerts? First and foremost, the format opens up the rigidity of the more traditional academic formats by providing space for artistic or dramaturgical strategies like drawing,

Figure 7. The unfolded version of *A Series of Suggestions #2: Here (not anywhere)* during Beyond the Black box 2023, © Alex Heuvink

painting in juxtaposition with writing, referencing and quoting. During the development of an academic research process like *The sound of a shared intimacy* I encounter several knots and each time I encounter such a knot my thinking starts to materialize. I start to draw, paint, fold, and sew. I become intimate with my own thoughts and experiences in order to unravel or unfold the tangle. *A Series of Suggestions* therefore gives me the opportunity to show and share my full process inclusive the hesitations and struggles, that would otherwise remain invisible. In this sense, it serves as a tool to share and re-evaluate the process within academia and as a tool to actualize the situation of struggle.

Re-evaluating the process, *A Series of Suggestions* as a tool for acknowledging agency and collaborations

The hesitations and struggles in my research trajectory often deal with my experience of an actual performance and root in real existing relations between people embodying different functions (artist, researcher, dramaturg, audience member, performer, human being). Therefore when I consider *A Series of Suggestions* as a tool to actualize the situation of struggle, I consequently consider it as a tool for collaboration. As seen in the previous sections, these collaborations can be defined as processes of unlearning by putting one's practice into dialogue with another, in order to suspend knowledge and engage in a multi-sensory way of sense-making in which unfolding generates dynamics of exchange and allows for depth.

By putting my practice into dialogue, I was able to create room to listen beyond my own words and thoughts. The dominance of listening over speaking can be recognized in the folding lines because it is exactly the act of folding and unfolding that provides space and time to not-know what the other will suggest. The folding lines are symptomatic for how one can "perceive the nuanced and ever-changing relation in which self [being it from the artist, the researcher and or the audience] is always embedded" (Labelle 8) and multiple.

Therefore, *A Series of Suggestions* possesses the quality to question how I work and simultaneously reveals that my work as an academic in performance studies is a relational and responsive practice, which "first emerges and becomes specific in particular collaborations and situations" (Peeters 11). Due to this quality *A Series of Suggestions* promises to become "tool for thinking through what is happening" (Stengers 185), a tool that "addresses and actualizes this power of the situation, that makes it a matter of particular concern, in other words, makes us think rather than recognize" (Stengers 185), because it aims at new possibilities for [practices] to become present, or in other words to connect. Consequently *A Series of Suggestions* does not approaches practices as they are "[...] but as what they may become" (Stengers 186) through dialogue and by listening to them.

In this sense and through unfolding *A Series of Suggestions* encourages to engage in "a sensibility tuned to the energetics of being [and working] in [a certain world]" (Labelle 8) and by doing so it becomes

a tool in the making to reveal resonances that possesses the possibility to become an analogue "technology of belonging" (Stengers 186) by combining strategies from what Stengers indicates as the major key or stage, into a tool for thinking in minor key that brings forth an ecology of practice and collaboration.

Following Stengers, this implies that *A Series of Suggestions* takes into account and brings forth ethics. Because of the series roots in a methodology based on listening the ethics it produces can be understood as an ethics of listening, meaning that they "do not become a pattern of rules, of commandments to be obeyed, but a contingent negotiation and participation in the generation of a concurrent ruling and the morality that it might trigger" (Voegelin 75). Ethics are especially at stake when allowing for the not-knowing of the upcoming suggestions and the acknowledgment of the other's agency which generates dialogues of vulnerabilities between practices.

All of this contributes to the fact that the act of unfolding *A Series of Suggestions* encourages us to engage in "a sensibility tuned to the energetics of being [and working] in [a certain world]" (Labelle 8) and by doing so it becomes a tool in the making to reveal resonances.

Conclusion

After introducing you to the format of *A Series of Suggestions* and the notion of unfolding on which it is built, this article had a look into the collaborations at the core of both *The sound of a shared intimacy* and *A Series of Suggestions,* before considering if *A Series of Suggestions* has the potential to function as a tool. The presented exploration of *A Series of Suggestions* brought to the surface that its functioning as a tool is multiple and more complex than I initially thought. This has to do with the fact that the act of unfolding at the core of the format testifies to its possibility to be passed along and functional to each body it encounters, be it a researcher, an artist, a graphic designer or an audience member, without losing its essential form. *A Series of Suggestions* has proven to be a tool with agency.

Consequently, and despite its multiple functionality and ability to open up a range of fields to play with and within, it must be addressed that *A Series of Suggestions* is a tool that cannot be taken up by one singular person alone. On the contrary it has proven to be a tool for collaboration

which demands reciprocal engagement. From the context and collaborations in which the tool arose it could be deduced that this reciprocal engagement roots in listening and therefore the use of it demands care for the I, the other and the ways in which different senses, bodies, stories, temporalities and imaginations interact. *A Series of Suggestions* can only function as a tool when all those involved allow themselves to not know, to unlearn by which they acknowledge the agency of the other and create room for a vulnerable engagement with the practice and material of the other. By doing so, they open up the possibility to discover the essences, the life-lines of the practices involved and reveal resonances. When such a sensible attunement can be reached *A Series of Suggestions* carries out the potential of a tool in the making for fruitful and sustainable dialogues between practices and the people embedded in them.

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‘Slow Togethering’ as a Tool for Dialogic Development amongst Dance Dramaturgs

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This article is an experiment in ‘slow togethering’ between two dance dramaturgs. It investigates dance dramaturgy practice beyond the making of a creative product, in which dialogue *about* practice occurs simultaneously with dialogue *as* practice. Thus, the authors propose this article itself as practice research. We understand ‘slow togethering’ as a form of dialogue over time: the article presents a series of exchanges by the authors which were written over a period of one month. Alongside these exchanges, there is a commentary reflecting on these texts and the overall process. With this format, the authors aim to disrupt the conventions of linear and sequential thinking, offering an opportunity for the reader to explore different ways of encountering the narratives of the article.In this vein, the authors suggest the reader takes up the role of a dialogue partner in their own right, acknowledging that a reader’s dialogic response resides in a space and time beyond that of the article.

Keywords: dance dramaturgy, dialogue, collaboration, practice research, process

18 – 21 January

On 'slow togethering'

Dear Sara,

It might seem odd to use the break-up of two lovers, in this case also artistic collaborators, to open up our discussion on 'slow togethering'. But what I would like to present in the following is that the idea of 'slow togethering' is already concealed in its very opposition, that of decoupling.

When Marina Abramović and Ulay stood 5,955 km apart on the Great Wall of China and began walking towards each other only to come to an end of a twelve-year collaboration (*The Lovers*, 1988), they used a long walk as a tool and a tactic to reflect on their common past. The distance and duration allowed for other factors to have influenced them – their encounters not only with nature, but also with the locals, stories, myths (Johnston 19-23), all of which have helped them sharpen their thoughts on this journey. We might see the result of this walk in the separation of the two bodies. Simultaneously, through this separation, the physical act of equal travelling has constituted the now two individual entities, induced by their togethering-action, that of a mutual decision.

Togethering, this is the word that I chose to start with. Together + ing, we made it into a word that doesn't really exist, to be a bit mysterious perhaps? Or maybe toemphasize that it is a form of doing, not a form of being. Our together-ing is surrounded by doing: by many messages and emails to determine times and dates to meet; last minute contact to reschedule because we or our children or our partners are sick. All these surrounding activities are also a form of our togethering. And the thinking that happens for us individually, as we respond to an email from the other, or look at a text the other has written, and comment on it, is continuing the togethering, so that it doesn't just become one point in time when we are able to have a conversation in real time, but the conversation stretches across time. The response forms in my mind over time, each time I think about my response I'm thinking of you too, so we are together at least in my mind, because my response is shaped by what I know of you. The togethering is conversation, as much as conversation is togethering.

Even though the word togethering presupposes at least two or more bodies, I would like to propose that the 'slow togethering' can actually manifest itself within one single body.

Take butoh for example. It is not my intention here to talk about the slow hyper-controlled motion butoh is traditionally based on. Nor about the "slow dramaturgy" (Eckersall 178-192) one might observe in many of the butoh performances. The slowness that fascinates me the most came from observing a butohist in process and preparation. Right there, I could witness the 'slow togethering' in action. To reach butoh, one must first go through a separation of reason and emotions, in other words one must get rid of all possible structures and put one's instincts to the forefront. These instincts then inhabit the empty body. Only then can you really start practising butoh. What this example portrays is that a beginning starts with a separation in order to bring together a new 'truth' through awareness.[3]

I perceive a process of 'slow togethering' as an attentive participation. I would argue that the attentiveness of 'slow togethering' chooses, or at least emphasizes, listening over hearing, thinking over reading, watching over seeing.

> And it feels like an active verb now, not just something that happens to us, but something we make happen – dare I say it – something we practise. […][2]
>
> The idea of having two dramaturgs for one artist, or one show, has long been something I assumed to be a bad idea. How could I carefully nurture a relationship with an artist, and the unfolding work, if there was someone else also in that role, but perhaps working quite differently, with different input and ideas? I assumed this would be undermining for me, and confusing for the artist. In making this assumption I had been nurturing the idea of me, as dramaturg, in a rarefied role: *I* would be the person the artist would turn to for support, maybe guidance, that was *my* area of expertise. And also there is a sense of exclusivity about being someone's supporter if it all goes wrong. *I* would be the final fall-back, and *I* would be there to pick up the artist if they felt like they were falling. If there were two people doing this, who would the artist turn to? And would that make the other one redundant, or less important? Would that mean the other one was less trusted? And since the ideas offered by a dramaturg are so fragile and subjective, what

Also, I understand the principles of 'slow togethering' not so much as a method of Q/A, but more of Q/Q or A/A, both Q and A standing for an equal (in power) X, which represents thoughts, impressions, experiences, doubts, truths etc. As such, slow togethering is not based on hierarchical and/or power relations, because there is no hidden authority in between. To be more exact: the Q/A presupposes a relationship of dominance. The most basic example would be the "expert" disseminating "knowledge" or "good practice" to those who "need" the knowledge. […]

Let me reiterate that 'slow togethering' commences already in the very detachment from set and established relations/ideas/views. It holds a potential to lead towards an autonomous and emancipatory practice (existence). This practice embodies less determined power relations, less product driven actions …

would happen if I put forward an idea, and the other dramaturg had the opposite thought? Well, now I write this, I realize this all has to do with the fragility I feel, and have felt, about my own worth and status as a dramaturg.

[…]

Why did I fall into the trap of assuming that, out of all the other kinds of collaborators I sought out to work with – to conduct the process of togethering – it wasn't possible with another dramaturg (at least, not when working with an artist on a production)? Why do so many others seem to have this often unspoken assumption? Does it all come back to the fragility of the dramaturg, which seems related to the fragility of the single author and their subjective view of what feels right and wrong for a production?[3]

Dramaturgs struggle to imagine their practice autonomously: as a dramaturg, one's work is almost always practised in relation to the creative process of another artist. Developing a dialogue as two dance dramaturgs, we were intrigued by the question posed by Nienke Scholts: "what exactly constitutes … [an] independent dramaturgical practice[?]" (111). We asked ourselves why space for dialogue between (dance) dramaturgs was difficult to find. Imagining

what such a space might look like has led us to pursue the question of what dance dramaturgy practice is beyond the creative process of making a piece of (art)work, and how dance dramaturgs might collaborate to conceptualise and develop our practice.

In response to these questions, we propose the idea of 'slow togethering' as a tool, a tactic, and an ecology (La Selva et al.) to offer a method and a practice of thinking about dance dramaturgy. For us, slow togethering takes the form of a dialogue over time. Dialogue as part of dramaturgy practice is well-documented in scholarship and practice; indeed, Scholts's question, on which we build, arises from an account of her ongoing dialogue with fellow dramaturg Igor Dobričić.[4] However, our interest is specifically in understanding what dialogic practices are *in relation to* dance dramaturgy practices – investigating dialogue itself as a method, a practice, and a tool. Aligning with La Selva et al's "dialogue-between-practices … praxical dialogues" (17), we see dialogue *about* practice occurring simultaneously with dialogue *as* practice.

Following on from Scholts' exploration of "what kind of dramaturgy can develop between two dramaturgs that "do not work for a work" (111), this article is the first iteration of an experiment in 'slow togethering', employing this dialogic practice explicitly to research dance dramaturgy *beyond the making of a creative work*.

For the purposes of researching and writing the article, our method was a framework in which we exchanged responses in writing, over a set period of time. Each author wrote an initiating piece during the same time frame, the two pieces were sent to each other on an agreed-upon date, and then each author wrote a response to the received piece, and we exchanged the threads on the next agreed date. After four such exchanges we met to discuss our experiences and reflections of this process, setting it into the context of our wider professional experience and the scholarship with which we engage. This discussion resulted in a 'third thread', which you are reading now.

We have presented the two 'live' dialogue threads alongside each other, reflecting the time periods in which they were written (simultaneously, and without the authors' interaction during each period). In this way we attempt to acknowledge how the *communication* of

this experiment is an ongoing part *of* the experiment. We would like to invite the reader to experiment themselves with reading the content of this article: for example by time period; by 'voice' (of each author); or by 'thread' (of responses). In this way, we invite you to engage in the logic of time passing within which we worked, and which conditioned precisely how the dialogue developed and how our thoughts were organised. At the same time, you have the privilege of ignoring restrictions of time passing. You can move laterally (Protopapa and Georgelou) between the elements of this slow togethering, and in doing so you may form an understanding of the progression of ideas from the perspective of shared time *and/or* shared thought. This 'third thread', or commentary, which you are currently reading, signifies a time in which the two authors' ideas mingled, as we looked retrospectively at the dialogue of the past weeks, as well as looking prospectively to the time when the article would be read. Those lateral connections emerging in the reading are part of this dialogue, but as yet out of our authorial reach.

22 – 26 January

[...]
The picture or feeling I get from the idea of 'detachment' is something about how you and I might have drifted towards each other in a way that enabled the togethering process between us to start. We 'found' each other, we togethered, because of some kind of separation we each felt from the status quo of how we each understood our surroundings of the 'dance dramaturgy' world.

Is 'separation' the same as 'segregation' though? In your example of the butoh preparation, what you describe is perhaps a form of

Thank you, Miranda, for opening up the conversation on together+ing and for connecting it also to other key elements such as distance and proximity, but also support, care, and fragility that, at least from my perspective, all seem to be subsumed under the term.

With the utmost respect, I will first paraphrase your question about working as two dramaturgs with one artist, as I would like to enter into this debate on relationships from yet another perspective – that aside from both being drama-

segregating different parts of the way we act and exist in the world – reason and emotion, as you put it. Is this where you see the 'attentiveness' being useful? Attending to parts that are separate, which we can only do if we segregate them. […]

And I'm especially interested in how we can have that attentive focus to more than one layer simultaneously. How many layers of being, doing, thinking (Nelson 45) can we attend to at the same time, and what does this simultaneous attentiveness bring to, or change about, our modes of listening/hearing, watching/seeing?

On returning to your text a few days later, I am struck by two things that stir a response in me.

Firstly, responding to 'attentive participation':
What would inattentive participation look like? Or attentive non-participation? Or inattentive non-participation? Is this something that is habitual in my or your daily life? Would that mean that attentive participation entails a specific kind of labour, a specific kind of activity, skill, expertise, … and are these things which are related to the specific activity, skill, expertise of being a dance dramaturg? I feel that this exercise, of a slow dialogue across time and space, is a form of attentive participation. I

turgs we also share – of being a parent. I offer instead the question: 'How could I carefully nurture a relationship with my child, if there was someone else also in that role, but perhaps working quite differently, with different inputs and ideas?'

In support of my substitution of the word artist with a child, I will borrow a short reflection from Guy Cools ("Distances"):
As I grew older and became, hopefully, a bit wiser, I started to discover more and more crossovers between being a parent and being a dramaturg, and with that I don't mean I take a parental role with the artists. Both as a parent and as a dramaturg, you have to stay humble because it always remains unpredictable how your guidance and support will be received and what will actually contribute to the other's development.

What I would like to add to Cools' comparison is that I perceive the child-parent relationship as an everyday example of the process of the slow togethering:
i) Slow togethering is a durational process (in a way of growing (up/old) together)
ii) The distance and proximity don't affect the togethering (I am as much of a parent when I am living together with my child or,

feel that it is hard work, to attend to your writing, and to participate by contributing the development of thoughts I feel, to 'move forward' this generation of ideas. Not just listening – my default mode when I am not sure what *I* have to say.
[…]

Secondly: Q/Q is the underpinning philosophy of our current exercise, I think. I like to hear your questions, they raise questions in me, which I ask you. In 'responding' to each other's questions, you and I are not 'answering' them (which presupposes existing knowledge to be found out, as you said). So for me, this clarifies the difference between responding and answering, and it makes sense of why my work of shaping responses to things so often materializes in questions. I once wrote that my practice consists of asking questions. And I think that there is a great amount of skill and experience needed to consider how to ask questions: that is whether to ask it; when to ask it; what to ask about; how to phrase it and how to frame it; how to act with the asking of the question; who to address the question to; and understanding why I am asking it.[5]

later on, when living separately)
iii) The togethering emphasize s an open process with no fixed structure (there are plenty of guidelines to parenting, each one also telling you there are no rules really)
iv) The slow togethering affects not only the (doing of the) relationship but also the (being of the) individual (a parental role is ever-learning, ever-evolving, ever-changing in its being and doing. Also, you don't simply become a mother by giving birth. It is much more of an ever-lasting work/support/care, in fact, giving birth is not even a necessary condition to *become* a mother.)

If I now return back from this detour with an excerpt from Marianne Van Kerkhoven ("European Dramaturgy"): "Approaching each other takes a long time. … We have to give time to the talks, so that slowly hesitation and fear can turn into clarity and pleasure. Sometimes it will succeed and sometimes it will not. Will we get somewhere? We'll see if we get somewhere." (10)
[…]

We find it important toemphasize that we are not just *writing about* slow togethering; this article itself is part of the *practice* of slow togethering. We propose that this article is a piece of practice research.[6] Not only do we present our practice research into dance dramaturgy (Scholts's "independent dramaturgical practice"), but we perform (or practise) it.[7]

In practising slow togethering, we found that how we responded to another's ideas and perspectives mirrored practices which we each consider important when we work individually with our collaborator artists. In this experiment, we embraced the dramaturgical principles we would normally apply in an artistic research process, but in a context in which our 'product' is an article, rather than a performance piece.[8]

In this context, we note Cools' evocation of a dramaturg as a "silent witness" ("Correspondence" 96) proposing that you, as reader, could be in a relationship with us that mirrors that of a dramaturg's relationship with the creator. Our dialogue, presented to you more or less 'as it happened', is a form of open rehearsal.[9] Thus, in this article our original intention of 'performing' a dialogue – showing what happened in real time – instead of writing 'about' it, has expanded to propose the possibility of inviting the reader's participation in the dialogue, and thus practising with us.

The significance of the reader's active presence or participation in the dialogue is twofold: first, in the context of 'slowness'. That is, we offer an opportunity for the reader to experience the way in which our thought was organised in and through, and conditioned by, time. Secondly, in the context of 'togethering', in which we attempt to activate the quality of non-hierarchical dialogic practice. This became a key part of our thinking around what, precisely, the principles of our dramaturg-dramaturg collaboration might entail. A reflection on slowness and togethering emerges in the text exchange (demonstrating how the *content* of this particular dialogue-in-process is intertwined with the *practice* of it as a method). The key aspects of togethering which we have discovered through the process of dialoguing – both in terms of experience and in terms of the way in which our thoughts developed – is moving from a 'question-answer' model (which is a core principle in conventional scholarly discourse, of the hypothesis-results structure), and continues past the 'question-response' model, which we consider

to be a core principle we each utilize in our dramaturgy work. We have come to the 'question-question' *and* 'response-response' model (Q/Q-R/R), which we consider to be a key finding of the significance of a dramaturg-to-dramaturg dialogue as a practice in its own right.

22 – 26 January

On oppositions
[…] To respond to your question on attentive participation: I would say that for me attentiveness presupposes all your combinations, because it has the ability to recognize what is needed. […] I am also thinking of the very common situations when dramaturgs (deliberately) step in and out of the studio. When we choose to detach ourselves from work, from space; and it is not always because of practical (economical or other needs). Don't we, right there, attentively participate in the very act of consciously not participating?

I just returned home, after spending a few days with artists working on a new piece.[10] I was surprised to notice how much our dialogue has influenced my thoughts while in the studio, but it might as well be the other way around.
[…]

Humans always tend to search for logical and familiar situations, patterns, relations, pre-

I am so surprised and delighted by the way you shifted my perspective so unexpectedly and eye-openingly, proposing the analogy of being a parent in the framework of my question about collaborating with another dramaturg.
[…]

Rethinking the dramaturg-artist relationship in the context of my ideal parent-child set-up, underpins what I have always known, that what I offer is something specific to the relationship between *me* and the artist. But it comes back to the way in which the value of those labouring in the arts world is judged according to the criteria that are perhaps more applicable to manufacture and commerce in a purely capitalist mindset. That is, the assumption that there is something that can ultimately be named (a skill, a capacity for transformation that is not person-specific), that signifies the value of a dramaturg to the artistic process. In this worldview, consequently, if a dramaturg does not *have*

dictable reactions or behaviour, whatever recognition that seems possible. It makes us feel comfortable; it gives us a sense of 'I know, I understand'. Not-knowing seems to have little, or maybe even no value in our (belief) system. We like to know and experience everything immediately. We plan in advance. We prepare in advance. We like to know in advance. What is it like to keep coming back to the moment *before* we know or understand, to push our minds as well as our bodies to forget, in order to allow for the illogical, irrational, unexpected to happen? To clarify: with the moment of 'not-yet-knowing', I mean the state of *not yet* being familiar with a situation, event, relation, or even movement. This landscape of unknown potentiality, unpredictability, openness, magic, *fantasma*. A place of no right or wrong feelings and expressions. Those innocent moments of not-yet-knowing (how, when, who, why, where).

This time we don't write to (explicitly) say something. We write to explore unpredictable states of being but also not being (in dialogue) with each other. But what might come out of it, could also be *something*.

If I may I will paraphrase a dialogue that happened between a dancer and a choreographer in the studio:

this skill or this thing, then they are of less or even no value to the artist as a dramaturg. […]

If we saw things a bit more in the way we might see parenting: the relationship comes first, and you negotiate what you need and what you can offer and how you behave in relation to the other person, from that basis. And there is an ultimate fragility to us saying that we are working as a dramaturg, but not necessarily with the "useful thing" that labels us as good value dramaturgs, as an entity that can plug a gap in the artistic making process which would otherwise leave the process incomplete and the product of lesser quality. "What is it we miss that we need a dramaturg to compensate for?" asks Van Imschoot (58). In fact, you and I are perhaps deliberately, or knowingly, setting that conversation aside by wanting to practise dramaturgy *without* the work.

Van Imschoot proposed the taking away of the dramaturg in order to concentrate more on the artistic process and perhaps, the work (63, 65). What step are we proposing, by taking away the artistic process and product, and leaving only the dramaturgs?

How do you know, it is the right thing?
I don't.
But when is it then working for you?
When I feel that it is worth it.

The Q/Q-R/R idea demonstrates the potency of non-hierarchical dialogue. Firstly, instead of in a conventional dialogue model, in which one dialogue partner initiates a conversation about a theme that is important to them, and the second partner offers their thoughts, answers and responding questions to that initial idea, our dialogue begins with *two* initiations, independent of each other. Secondly, the continuation of the dialogue requires the activity of 'attentive participation'. Reflecting our practices as dance dramaturgs, our work in responding to the other's text lay in attentively participating in a dialogue with our conversation partner's ideas. We created responses, sometimes in the form of questions, which would facilitate further thinking in our partner about their original idea.
Where it *diverged* from our usual dance dramaturgy model of practice, was that each of us also took time to attentively participate in the dialogue *as originator* of an idea. We each had to think: in what ways do I respond to the responses of my dialogue partner to my original text? And how does the development of my own thinking interact with my facilitation of the development of my dialogue partner's thinking?[14]

Unlike in our usual professional context of being the sole dramaturg in a creative process, in *this* dialogue, the conditions of our work were the same (the agreed time frame, the space, and the attention we each had from one another). We also have the same relationship as each other to the outcome of our process, in terms of responsibility and accountability.

We propose that the Q/Q-R/R model is a quietly radical re-imagining of dance dramaturgy practice, simultaneously developed, practised and performed through slow togethering as a method of dialogic exchange.

4 February – 22 February

Because we both had family situations which took time away from our other work, this break between responses has been longer than previously.
In her audio work *This walk is a pause* (2022), Nienke Scholts explores the idea of the pause, proposing that it is not just a silence or a stop between more productive activities, but that a pause itself can be generative.
A couple of years ago, I started to wonder about the role of the pause dramaturgically: the way in which a pause can be dramatic because it builds anticipation of what is to come, for example. Or the way in which we might use a pause to close off one thought, and open another.
Our slow dialogue is forefronting this experience, and I wonder about how it generates thoughts (for example connections, tangents, insights) and how those thoughts, or even that way of generating them, is or isn't different from the way in which thoughts are developed in a different style of collaborating on an article.
In my reading experience, and more recently in my movement-inquiry experience, I have found that pauses are a way of enabling layers that create new ways of thinking. I don't think this would have been my response if I had written

I am looking at the gap between our last and current writing. From the outside it seems like a good portion of time, definitely longer than what we had before. But we both know it took more time solely because so many unpredictable factors emerged throughout this month. Today is 22 February and this morning I took the early train from Ljubljana to Hannover. It is a long journey, about 11 hours, so I imagined I would have enough time to transform my draft into a final version and send it to you. I started to write immediately after the first train departed, but already an hour later it turned out that the trip will *unfold far from what I have expected.*

1. Time is relative and only valid for the person that experiences it in a concrete state and situation.
So, what actually determines slow-ness in our togethering? And what does it bring to the togethering? […] Are we (you and me) embodied together in the same slow time (pace and duration)? Do we perceive it as a necessary 'setting' to favour quality instead of quantity? And furthermore, what about the connotations that the word

immediately after reading your text. I am interested to poke a bit more into your proposal that there is 'a moment of not yet knowing', that this is associated with forgetting, but also there is something innocent which is 'before right and wrong'. And that this enables the illogical, irrational and unexpected to happen.
[...]
But there is nothing that is inherently unexpected – only inasmuch as it is unexpected in a certain framework of normality in which we participate. I suppose what I am perhaps getting at, is that this process we are experimenting with is both setting aside some of the patterns we might conventionally work with (for example, trying to plan and write a whole article at once, instead of letting it grow slowly over time); and also is making visible those patterns with which we frame our thoughts, which perhaps we don't always share with one another. The form that we use – of the response to each other over time – allows me to develop thought in a meandering manner (or as Tim Ingold might say, "alongly" (154)). This is a new pattern of thinking, meaning that perhaps it allows for something that might be called illogical or irrational or unexpected.

A small coda, responding to a point you made which I find very

'slow' brings? Consider how often nowadays we connect it to un-efficiency, weakness, a sort of disability and failure? And how, very contrary to this, 'slow' (e.g. living, food) became a luxury created by and made for those who are socially or financially superior?

2. What might seem sustainable, can also be non-sustainable.
The train journey I experienced today made me delete my draft. It seemed unaligned with my most current state of being-doing-thinking. With this erasure, I *deleted my work* done in those rare available moments of the month. Is the idea of slow togethering bringing any sustainability to the dramaturgical thinking, to the dramaturg's work, and, if so, what would that be? Or is it just the maintained level of pace that already opens space for certain qualities to emerge?

I apologize for not reflecting on your previous thoughts. I will return to them on the next occasion. The unexpected very much affected me and my work.

beautiful: maybe this practice of slow dialogue is a way of attentively participating in dance dramaturgy, precisely by not participating in dance dramaturgy.

Through this experiment – part of which continues here, now, on this page and in relation to you, our reader – we present a methodology-in-the-making, through which we can explore, develop, *and* articulate dance dramaturgy practice. We have proposed that it is possible and indeed generative to practise dramaturgy beyond the creative process of making a work, and have offered some initial thoughts about what kind of knowledge this practice generates *about* practice: how the element of practice that is in process can be practised and communicated in process.

We also posit that this method offers a possibility in which dance dramaturgy practice itself can become a tool or a tactic for non-hierarchical knowledge exchange, simultaneously generative and communicative. Finally, we offer an idea of what dance dramaturgy practice research can look like, in the context of the notorious invisibility[15] of the dramaturg and by implication the dramaturg's practice.

There is more work to be done on this experiment for which we do not have the space or the scope in this article: for example, looking more closely at the entanglement between our reflections on our experience of the dialogue and the content of the dialogue itself. We are curious to think more about the relationship between our emerging slow togethering practice and questions about value, and the potency of the unexpected. As we develop this work, we will specifically look at the way in which thought developed *in dialogue and over time*, to explore further the significance of both togethering and slowness to the work of dance dramaturgy practice-research-into-practice.

As we draw to a close, we acknowledge you, our third dramaturg of this dialogue. You may be in the role of silent witness, but we should also not forget that as we were performing this experiment, you have been a presence. Having cast you into the potential role of

dramaturg, we propose framing your ghostly presence not so much as a spectator or a reader but as a dialogue partner.

We have been interested in exploring the possibilities of slow togethering as non-hierarchical; however, we also acknowledge that you, as ghostly presence and silent witness, do not have the same choices in terms of responding to our dialogue and bringing your own thoughts into conversation with ours, to fully participate in the creation of the joint imaginative process.[16] One way we begin experimenting with disrupting this is to present our dialogue as it was written, the thoughts as they developed through time, with its unknowns and unexpecteds, its unresolved ideas and unanswered questions. It has been important to us to evade, to some extent, the editorial choices that we might conventionally put upon such a collaborative dialogue; in this way, we tentatively offer a mode of 'presentness' in which the reader may encounter us, a little like a dramaturg who is present in the process of making, over time. Indeed, we could figure this presentness itself as a dramaturgical 'third element'.[17] As reader, you may not be able to literally enter into dialogue with us (though you may, by writing to us or meeting us). Instead of imagining the question you might pose, and attempting to answer it, our experiment invites you to come together with our text in its time, in your time, and over time.

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Notes

1 Interestingly, one of the basic exercises in butoh is called a 'slow walk'. A certain distance, which is very disproportionate to the time, must be covered in complete concentration. For a basic slow walk, they would usually walk five meters of a straight line in one hour.

2 *Note to the reader:* the [...] represent thoughts written in the live dialogue exchanges that cannot be included in the article for reasons of space; but along with white space on the page, also represent the thoughts emerging 'live' in the moment of reading. Both are intended to provide space, time and opportunity for a reader to journey around the questions and responses offered through our article.

3 This train of thought was inspired by a talk given by Konstantina Georgelou, Genevieve Murphy, and Nienke Scholts about the process of making Murphy's *The Spot where I find myself* (2022) in which Georgelou and Scholts both participated as dramaturg, in the context of an existing friendship and professional relationship.

4 For examples of dialogue in dramaturgy practice, see e.g. Profeta 180-181; Trencsényi 264; Graham 97-101; Cools (2019) 48-49.

5 See also Georgelou et al (42).

6 This article's scope does not allow for an extensive discussion of practice research. We align ourselves e.g. with Barton, who cites amongst others Lynette Hunter and Estelle Barrett & Barbara Bolt, with concepts such as "intersection between subjectivity and interaction", the "emergent nature" of Practice Research, and its "situated sites of interaction" (12).

7 See Nelson's "onto-epistemological model for Practice Research" in which practice research is an interaction between "know-how", "know-that" and "know-what"; the latter being "the tacit made explicit through critical reflection" (146). Instead of this article being "an evidence-based "exposition", by means of a rational argument"" (28), we perform the exegetical in our 'third thread', presented alongside the abridged actual dialogue, together as one experiment.

8 Specific examples of dialogue as dramaturgical practice presented in written form include Rutgeerts & Müller, in which Müller adds responses to Rutgeert's initial text in the form of marginal notes, and Protopapa & Georgelou, in which the dialogue between the two authors is presented as an "experiment with the notion of lateral movement on the page ... seek[ing] to iterate thought laterally, parenthetically and in mutable temporalities, instead of requiring a process of looking for depth in a linear progressive way" (118).

9 There is more to explore in this metaphor, particularly in how it could imply the change in relationship between reader and author/text through a sense of inclusion. See e.g. Ali-Haapala on how "... the knowledge developed during rehearsal, while limited, shifted the spectators from outsiders ... to insideroutsiders ..." (194). We wonder how this understanding of spectator as insideroutsider may also relate to Rancière's emancipated spectator, who "participates in the performance by refashioning it in her own way" (13).

10 This is during the making of the piece *LOST TITLE* (choreographer Fabio Liberti) with LANDERER&COMPANY (artistic director Felix Landerer).

11 Georgelou et al discuss related thoughts (47-54).

12 For further thoughts on the value of dramaturgical work in a capitalist context, see a discussion on 'commoning' in Georgelou et al (57-59).

13 Other writers have also argued for this 'dispersed dramaturgy' where dramaturgy is the responsibility of everyone involved in the process and thus a 'dramaturg' is not needed, see e.g. Midgelow, Stalpaert, Vass-Rhee, Georgelou et al.

14 We are interested in the affinities between our experiment and the activity described by Georgelou et al as "mobilizing questions" (40-46). We find ourselves aligned with some of their principles: for example, moving the intention of questioning away from the finding of a resolution, as well as scrutinising the assumption of questioning as being "inherently good" (43). However, in our experiment 'togethering' is different from Georgelou et al's "togetherness", as we do not aim towards attempting to "start *thinking together*" (41). Instead of the sense of moving forwards, with or towards a shared idea, implied by the idea of "mobilizing questions" (44), we found ourselves moving in multiple directions and dimensions, by unfolding thought through being attentive to one another's thoughts-in-unfolding. The scope of this article does not allow for an extensive discussion, but in the future we would like to further investigate the parallels between their "state of questioning" (42-3, citing Cvejić 2015) and slow togethering as a 'state of dialogue'.

15 "One of the difficulties in defining the dramaturg is that the outcome of his or her work is hard to see. The world of the dramaturg literally dissolves into the production, it melts and becomes invisible" (Van Imschoot 57), referencing Marianne Van Kerkhoven (1994).

16 "In dramaturgy as 'co-'collaboration, imagining takes place not alongside the creation of an artwork but at the very core of the collaboration itself" (Scholts 114).

17 See Peeters. Compare also with Rancière: "the third thing, that is owned by no one, whose meaning is owned by no one, but which subsists between them" (15).

Looking at Theater Through the Performers' Experiences: Practices of Political Engagement in Teatro do Vestido

–– Gustavo Vicente (UNIVERSITY OF LISBON)

In this text, drawing from my participation as an actor in *Juventude Inquieta* [Restless Youth],[1] the latest of my collaborations with Teatro do Vestido,[2] I begin by acknowledging the ethical implications of my personal experience within the creative process. I then build on this reflection to further explore the possible ways of looking at theater projects, differentiating between ones that are oriented exclusively towards scenic outcomes and ones that put in motion a process of political engagement of the performers that transcend artistic results alone. I follow this proposal to foreground the importance of distinguishing between making theater that resembles the politics we can only envision and a theater that relates to another form of artistic circulation, in which the practices of learning, self-discovery, and critical thinking are privileged alongside the final stage performance.

Keywords: experience, acting, creative processes, dramaturgy.

Prologue

A few years ago, I collaborated as an actor in a theatrical project called *Labour* by Teatro do Vestido.[3] This project addressed histories of work in three towns marked by the industrialization processes put into place during António Salazar's fascist regime in Portugal, which ran from 1926 to 1974. Following the documentary nature of Teatro do Vestido's projects, each performer was responsible for interviewing a set of retired local working people from the dictatorship period. The personal testimonies of these individuals would, then, establish the groundwork for the final performances' dramaturgy – one performance for each town.

In the small city of Tramagal, the last of the *Labour* series, I contacted a man called José, who shared with me various local histories of political resistance and his own memories from his working past. José answered all my requests, told me countless stories, showed me several influential places, introduced me to other countrymen and women and even welcomed me into his home. During the period we were in contact, he decided to rehearse an old waltz on his clarinet, which was the first piece of music he had learned in his youth and that he, at the time, had shared romantically with his fiancée (who would later become his wife). After rehearsing the piece for several days, he invited me to his house to hear him play and record it – just as I had proposed to do with his consent, expecting from the outset to recommend its later use in Teatro do Vestido's final performance. I will never forget the moment when José played for me in his living room, after many years of not touching his instrument. I remember noticing his daughter and granddaughter peeking through the crack in the door, eager to hear him play a piece of music so reminiscent of the family past.

However, in the middle of the creative process, for reasons external to Teatro do Vestido, this project was abruptly cancelled. To my surprise, I only thought about José, his family, and the sudden interruption of his narrative. On my mobile phone, a piece of clarinet music retrieved from the confines of his memory was now suspended, unfulfilled. As I called to inform him about what happened, I asked:

- And now José, do you want me to delete the music from my cell phone?

To which he immediately replied:

- No, it's for you.

This episode made me realize how much Teatro do Vestido's projects had impacted me, as a person, beyond my role as an actor. I found myself wondering about this transformational itinerary that, although articulated by the creative process, led me to a process of self-questioning, nurturing in me the kind of political awareness that anticipates action – taking the shape of either scenic material or some other form of social interpellation.

In this text, drawing from my involvement as an actor in *Restless Youth*, the latest of my collaborations with Teatro do Vestido, I begin by acknowledging the ethical implications of my personal experience. I then build on this reflection to further explore the possible ways of looking at the creative processes, differentiating between the ones that are oriented exclusively towards scenic outcomes and the ones that put in motion a process of political engagement of the performers that points beyond the artistic project's lifespan.

A choreography of engagement in Teatro do Vestido

Teatro do Vestido's documentary approach has been, since its inception in 2001, characterized by a determination to fight against political oblivion by focusing on the memories of the forgotten, of those silenced by the macro-narratives of historicization or made invisible by the cacophonic noise of contemporaneity, offering them a central role as protagonists. In this context, the attention given to research and information collection is a constant feature of the theater company's working methodology – where information takes the form of existing documentation (texts, photographs, videos, or other media) or oral testimonies gathered by the artistic team. In fact, it is common to resort to both, even when the project does not address a particular community.

That was the case in *Restless Youth*, a theater performance that premiered at the National Theater D. Maria II in Lisbon in 2021. Differently from the *Labour* series, in this project, the dramaturgy

was inspired by a book – *The City of Flowers*.[4] Written in the late 1950s by Portuguese author Augusto Abelaira, this book represented a form of resistance to the totalitarian regime ruling the country at the time. To elude the inquisitorial eyes of governmental censorship, the author situated the book's action in 1930s Italy, using Benito Mussolini's fascist historical context as a metaphor for what Portugal was enduring. The main objective of Joana Craveiro – Teatro do Vestido's director – was to shed a light on Abelaira's original political purposes. Not so much to re-enact the oppressive past of Portugal, but rather to take the book as inspiration to question and problematize current autocratic discourses re-emerging all over the world.

To begin with, Joana Craveiro assembled a generationally diverse cast of actors to juxtapose older people's memories and political discourses with the anxieties and uncertainties of the present day. The book was the source from which the performers (considered in the project as co-creators) set off on their research – however, this was complemented by several other activities, organized to increase the performers' knowledge and critical reflections regarding the issues at stake. These activities included reading several other texts, watching films about Italy and Portugal's despotic historical backgrounds, and talking to various people that fought against the dictatorship in Portugal. This all served to engage the performers politically, thus expanding their abilities to articulate potential arguments, fostering in them the kind of *disputability* – to use Bruno Latour's term – that prompts an urge to act in the public sphere.

These engagement strategies became clear from the beginning of the creative process. On our first day in the rehearsal studio, the performers were invited to participate in what Joana Craveiro called a "casting session" to (allegedly) explore the performers' ability to play *The City of Flowers'* main characters. As we soon realized, this simulation was much less about the performers' "roles" and more about our thoughts and feelings regarding the issues raised by the book. At the time, driven by a determination to affirm myself within the "casting session", I used the floor to make a speech about my political beliefs and life frustrations, setting the personal groundwork that would guide my following contributions. This dramaturgical provocation set the tone for what would become a recurrent practice throughout the creative process: the implication of the performers within the (ethical, political, and affective) questions at stake.

This beginning was so influential that some parts of the "casting" videos ended up being used in the final performance, including my own passionate testimony. It was, subsequently, hardly surprising that the artistic outcome resulted in a combination of the fictional dimension of Abelaira's book with the texts and actions proposed by the performers during the creative process.

A cultivation of the performer's personal voice is the basis from which most of the company's performances are built, and this process has become one of Teatro do Vestido's most renowned creative strategies. These voices may reflect either the performers' personal experiences or third-party narrations and texts that emerge during rehearsals. This strategy reflects the fact that the company was founded by a group of performers moved by an urgent need for individual expression, by the desire to tell their own stories, present their perspectives, and question the world surrounding them.

In fact, it is common in Teatro do Vestido's performances to hear the performers using their real names on stage – as was the case in *Restless Youth* (Fig. 1). All of Teatro do Vestido's performances bears the mark of its performers, which is usually the result of a personal involvement that goes beyond traditional methods of dramatic character composition. Therefore, the priority is never to create a naturalistic illusion, even when a particular process requires that the performers embody another person's perspective. In the latter case, the performers are asked to let those testimonies sound through them and to work on their presence and expressiveness as a function of the intimate reverberations that contact with an outer stimulus conveys. In short, creating a version of themselves – a mask, in the social sense given by Erving Goffman, where a mask is just an everyday form of *presentation of the self*.

In this sense, rather than working on the mimetic concept of 'character', in Teatro do Vestido, one engages with the idea of *personas* – a term that derives from the Latin *per sonare* ("to sound through").[5] For the performers, this means opening themselves up to a personal experience of contact with others, thus developing an empathic sense of alterity and, ultimately, exposing the result of that affective transformation. The development of personas is considered here as a means of exploring the performers' self-awareness and personal expression and not as a technical tool used to compose

Figure 1. Scene from *Restless Youth* (2021) where the performers revealed to the audience their real names and other personal facts. Actor on screen: Gonçalo Martins. Photograph by © Filipe Ferreira

scenic figures. The primary goal is then to commit the performers to a critical attitude based on their own life experience, opening up the possibility for their development as politically engaged artists.

Along the same lines, the term 'role' is also not adequate, for the simple reason that there is no 'role' acquired from the outset from a fixed dramatic text, but rather through a process of transfiguration that is the root for the development of individual scores made up of action and generated text, which will eventually form part of the final performance. But the artistic outcome is not what I want to discuss

Figure 2. Scene from *Restless Youth (*2021) where I can be seen using a megaphone to incite the young to action. Visible actors (from left to right): Francisco Madureira, Inês Minor, João Raposo, Gustavo Vicente, Gonçalo Martins, Estêvão Antunes. Photograph by © Filipe Ferreira

here. Rather than debating the effect of all these creative activities on stage, I want to interrogate how it affected the performers – not the image of the performers confined to theatrical space, but the reality of the performers beyond the theater.

As mentioned above, in Teatro do Vestido, the performers are usually convened from the start to take part of the development of a common ground for sense-making, which often implies experimenting different ways of working together, as in a community. In *Restless Youth*, for example, right at the start of the creative process, the

artistic team spent a week together in a house located in a small town in the countryside. This artistic residency was Joana Craveiro's strategy to simulate an environment whereby everyday decisions had to be made collectively, thus foregrounding, in a more intimate atmosphere, the kind of conversations, discussions, compromises, and complicities that arise in shared spaces. Steeped in the politics of communal life, the performers rehearsed some of the central excerpts of *The City of Flowers* and found the time to reflect and give voice to their impressions on the subjects raised by the book. It was, perhaps, during this period that the contrast between the younger and the older performers' care most clearly to the fore. Simple actions in terms of how we organized our rides or how we chose our seats at the restaurant where we ate every day revealed a predisposition to be amongst our generational peers. A recognition of this sense of belonging associated with age made us realize and articulate more subtle distinctions across generations regarding the political matters at play – which led us to discover new dramaturgical relationships based on the crucial differences between "older" and "younger" perspectives on the past and expectations for the future (Fig. 2).

Working together is one of the most important common threads that link all of Teatro do Vestido's projects, and from which every other activity departs. This does not mean the performers are engaged in a sort of "chorus dance" but rather working between themselves and the others: moving in permanent negotiation with others, even if "out of step" from the rest. Building on the dance metaphor, I would suggest that Teatro do Vestido's creative approach is not one that promotes consensus but one that summons personal engagement within the collective. It is through what I call a *choreography of engagement* that the performers are led to search for and develop their political consciousness, striving for action within and beyond the artistic project.

Work implications for the performers outside the theater

As Matteo Bonfitto pointed out, the once utilitarian relationship between creative processes and the production of artistic results has become increasingly complex, particularly concerning the training of performers (2016). For a long time, training served exclusively

to prepare performers to embody dramatic characters; this has gradually changed, assuming a value that goes beyond the artistic needs of theatrical projects. Bertolt Brecht was one of the first theater directors to address this issue most assertively, defending the distancing effect of the actors in relation to their characters. For Brecht, performers should nurture and mobilize their knowledge of the world to pose questions in a dialectic form throughout the creative process. But even with Brecht, the ultimate objective of the actors' work was always the play, its aesthetic materialization on stage, and its potential impact on the audience.

What happens, though, to the performers when the play comes to an end? What becomes of them in the world beyond the spectators' gaze? How does the knowledge acquired by the performers, their internalized feelings and their incorporated memories, manifest? What is left of their political awareness? Can the performers' accumulated experience be seen as a training in human relationships? As ritual passages for different (and more subtle) ways of perceiving the world?

Jerzy Grotowski was probably one of the most vocal directors on this issue, as at a later stage of his career he questioned the very purpose of the performers' role, opposing the traditional notion of *theater as presentation* – where the "stage" is the end in and of itself – to *art as vehicle* (2007) – through which, in the words of Peter Brook, "theater is a vehicle, a means for self-study, self-exploration; a possibility of salvation. The actor has himself as his field of work" (66). Within this idea of *art as a vehicle*, a term Grotowski ended up adopting, borrowed from Peter Brook, the desire for action, for realization, is not directed towards the spectators' perception but is located rather in the performers' experience. In this context, the tone of poetic action moves from acting for a theatrical audience to performing for oneself. In *art as a vehicle*, theater is seen (primarily) as a platform to affect the performers subliminally, by which they can transform their everyday life into more subtle experiences. This does not mean, though, that the performers are exempted from trying to piece together the potential effects of their creative practices – from trying to configure something meaningful. On the contrary, for Grotowski, only in the confrontation with an aesthetic and/or ethical result, in some form or shape, can the performers reveal themselves, channelling their impulses for expression and affirmation with the same rigor as a theatrical presentation.

Transversely to the theatrical realm, Joseph Beuys had already addressed the possibility of applying the artists' critical spirit and exploratory drive to all sorts of social interaction – which was the premise that led to his notion of *social sculpture*: a paradigm that expanded the concept of art and the artist to daily actions (2011). For Beuys, all aspects of life could be approached creatively. As in Grotowski's *art as a vehicle*, Beuys also considered the way we conceive and relate to experience to be the central element of artistic transformation, inciting artists (which, for Beuys, could be anyone) to give themselves completely to their involvement in everyday life – with all the possible limitations each one has and the contingencies in which each one is enclosed. Only then would artists be able to take a step forward towards what Beuys called *self-determination*.

Following an acknowledgment of the social reach of the performing arts, recent decades have witnessed a surge of experimental initiatives dedicated to exploring the possible ramifications of the creative practices of performers – especially when considered separately from the closed circuit of artistic distribution. Founded in 1986, the Workcenter of Jerzy Grotowski and Thomas Richards was one of the first laboratories to fully embrace this kind of research, especially at the beginning of the 21st century when *art as a vehicle* became a relevant mantra for its exploratory projects and activities. Meanwhile, the growing field of artistic research set up the grounds for the epistemological problematization of art-making approaches, extending the possibilities for experimentation and collaboration within academia. This has enabled the appearance of several research platforms and networks that develop their work in close contact with art professionals, including performing artists. A paradigmatic example of this type of initiative is Cross Pollination – an international laboratory founded in 2017 that positions itself in the "dialogue in-between practices, both scholarly and performance-based, as an integral and essential part of a politics of embodied research in theater and performance" (Cross Pollination). Here, the aim is to bring forward the possible relations of acting with society at large as a way of challenging and transforming both the artistic and social fields – generating what the group calls "ecologies of knowledge" around the work of the performer.

Conversely, the search for new relationships between creative pro-

cesses and the world beyond theater is not an exclusively academic affair changes in the way dramaturgical approaches are increasingly being considered is playing a role, as well. The notion of *expanded dramaturgy* advanced by Peter Eckersall was already a response to the growing forms of dramaturgical practices that revive theater as a forum for social critique, thus taking the institutional, political, cultural, and economic contingencies of theater-making as central facets of the creative processes. As Gad Kaynar reinforces, dramaturgy, in this sense, is "predominantly 'circumstantial' rather than play-oriented, accounting mainly for the contextual performance conditions" (Kaynar 245). This turn in dramaturgical theorization and operationalization has opened a broader field of social concerns that transcend immediate artistic aims, revealing the inescapable intertwinement of theater-making and the material realities of everyday life. This entanglement is even more evident in the work of the performer, through which dramaturgical strategies may closely resonate and affect personal processes of subjectification.

In *Restless Youth*, we were continuously prompted to address our thoughts about the ideological stances and political attitudes raised in the book – including our own stories concerning personal doubts, aporias, or decisions that, at some point in our lives, had changed our way of seeing the world and acting within it. The work was steered by a constant sense of sharing and discussion that led to a permanent process of self-questioning from the performers (Fig. 3). We were regularly reminded to project ourselves out of the theater environment so we could come back to it with a different sense of commitment. As if the artistic question "What can I do with this?" was overruled by an ethical one: "What should I be doing with this?"

It was imbued with this spirit that, at one point during the creative process, in the middle of the night, I found myself sending a heartfelt message to Joana Craveiro about my urge to give a greater depth to my role as a performer: "I can't sleep. I'm very sleepy. I don't know if I am making sense anymore, but I really want to express my own voice of reflection. I do not want to be the ghost of the play. I'm suffering from it …" (G. Vicente, personal communication, September 28, 2021). In the message, I went on and on regarding my anxieties about building a body that could transcend the confinements of the stage and my wish to create a different reality for myself. Joana's response was direct, integrating the message literally into the final

dramaturgical score – thus, creating a perceptive disruption that blurred the gap between my image on stage and the image of my own memories off stage, between myself as presented to the theater audience and my perception of self beyond the stage.

A few notes on experience

Etymologically, the word 'experience' comes from the Latin *experiri*, which means 'to taste'. It is the repetition of this 'tasting' that enables us to acknowledge the singular over the regular, contingency within order, or the ineffable permeating the cognoscible. In this context, the attention given to 'tasting' is a central preoccupation of the performer, for whom a cultivation of lived experience has taken

Figure 3. Rehearsal of *Restless Youth* (2021) where I share some of my thoughts while testing different modes of discursive articulation. Photograph by © Filipe Ferreira

a historical role in their training. As performers, this attention is, of course, mainly channeled towards the creative process but, as Paul Rae reminds us, the acting experience cannot be isolated from the personal and social life of the ones who live it. Looking back at the Latin etymology of experience, the root of *experiri* is *periri*, which is additionally found in *periculum*: danger.[6] In this sense, to experience is also to put oneself in peril – to expose oneself to the unexpected effects of the event in which one is involved.

When thinking about the implications of acting in everyday life, the etymology of experience is significant. Not so much experience thought of in terms of productivity, efficiency, legitimacy, or other regulatory forms of neoliberalism (including the ones that have dominated artistic production), but experience as a movement that opens up possibilities for something affecting oneself. As Jorge Larrosa Bondía puts it, experience "requires a gesture of interruption, a gesture that is almost impossible in current times ",[7] because it entails the need to pause: a pause to think, to look, to listen, to suspend personal opinions, judgments, will, to cultivate attention and delicacy, to talk about what happened, to open to (and for) others, to be patient and give oneself time and space (24). For Bondía, the subject of experience is not defined by activity but by *passivity* - by the individual's receptivity to be taken, moved, by the occasion that presents itself. This does not mean excluding the experience from the possibility of thinking about it, conceptualizing it, and considering it, in terms of the relation between action and knowledge. As Bondía states, experience always finds an ethical and epistemological order – not a generic, normative order, but a contingent, personal one, revealing a singular way of being in the world – which, in turn, is simultaneously an ethics (a form of proceeding) and an aesthetics (a way of living) (24). In practice, this means embracing the uncertainties raised by the circumstances at play without anticipating possible outcomes or trying to control the situation in which one is involved. For Bondía, to experience is thus to be open to plurality, difference, and heterogeneity, through which one may travel across many different propositions, maximizing the possible articulations of the world and, thus, expanding one's ability for critical thinking (24).

Of course, this is easier said than done since people's bodies are strongly formatted to respond to the rigid habits of "reality", fostering

behaviours that arise in confrontation with a complex network of previous events. For the performer, these past events might include other performances, working processes and methods, artistic ideas, practical knowledge, but also everyday routines and personal traumatic incidents. In this context, questions of how experience is perceived and why it is perceived the way it is are central to recognizing the elements that make up the performers' sense of relating to others and the conditions in which they define themselves within the world. It is precisely this awareness that can bring the performers and their respective practices closer to an autonomous political and critical discourse.

The performance art philosopher Bojana Kunst recognizes the importance of shifting the meaning commonly attributed to experience, reinforcing the idea that it is only through the dispossession of the performers' inner sense of time – whereby their attention is no longer subdued by the kind of subjectification processes stimulated by the image of the artistic project – that they are able to recognize their autonomy as individuals. This entails creating a whole new working temporality whereby experience can be brought to the "surface" of the performers' consciousness and not subjected to the artistic timeframe of the project – which, instead of looking for how to do or achieve something, could allow them to wait for *something* to happen, to affect them. The *duration* and *rhythm* of the performers' work become, then, a crucial factor. It is by freeing the creative process from its utilitarian structure and fast-paced cadence that, as Kunst reminds us, performers can reveal how deeply their most intimate perception of time is conditioned by institutional and economic contextual forces - which, going back to Bondía, strengthens *passivity* as a disruptive agent of the performers' self-awareness, allowing them to receive what is still to come and, thus, to address their own potential for change.

In *Restless Youth*, I will never forget the time when, amid the creative process, we met with a former opponent of the fascist regime. The objective was for us to get an idea about what it meant to be part of the resistance of that time – an aspect deeply addressed in Abelaira's book. In this conversation, our interlocutor told us about the personal circumstances and ideological views that impelled him to take the side of the opposition, his main battles against the dictatorial oppression, and the clandestine lifestyle he adopted to

escape the police and preserve the safety of his family and friends. Of all the stories he shared with us, there was one that impact me the most – the testimony regarding his arrest and prolonged torture, especially the description of what made him endure all the inhumanity associated with his emotional and bodily-inflicted scars.

Nothing in my previous life experience could have prepared me for that revelation. At that point in the conversation, the artistic context that involved the meeting was long forgotten. The urgency of just being there, listening to what he had to share, and opening up to being affected by his presence was all that mattered. The will to make sense of it all was still very far from my thoughts – from any of our thoughts, as I came to realize soon after the meeting ended when we shared our first reactions to what had just happened to us. At that point, one thing became evident: the realization of how much the conversation had exceeded the expected time and how much it had questioned the relevance of the following working timetable. Faced with that situation, Joana decided to give the rest of the day off. There was nothing left 'to do' – 'to produce' – immediately after that. We needed time for the whole experience to sink in.

Process of *stimulus versus* process of *experience*

When reflecting on the personal impact of my collaboration in *Restless Youth*, the experience of the working process is the first thing that comes to my mind. Not only the experience of developing a *persona*, composing a dramaturgical score, devising scenic material, finding a particular corporeal expression, or other kinds of strategies that point to the scenic outcomes, but the experience of exploring and discovering new perspectives on life through exchanging personal histories, sharing different working materials or simply listening to other people. This meant watching each other grow, watching each other gaining different levels of social awareness, creating new and stronger arguments, proposing singular articulations, shaping a form, a more consistent form that seemed to respond to each person's internal 'laws' (to use another one of Beuys' terms)[8], to each one's sense of ethics and social commitment, to each one's responsibility towards the other, towards the world. In other words: the vivid experience of building and seeing others building worlds of difference. In a sense, it was as if the working process had pointed

in two directions: a vertical one that leads to the final stage performance and a horizontal one, more diffuse, harder to determine and understand in all its facets, that spreads internally at a different pace, inhabiting uncharted personal territories, insinuating itself along different scales and intensities, manifesting itself in subtle ways, occupying new places of questioning, of believing, reverberating through time, much after the artistic performance itself, in a continuous choreographic movement.

I am not advocating a theater without public performances. In the case of *Restless Youth*, it was precisely the objective of assembling a theatrical piece that drove the respective creative process and led to these reflections – I can hardly imagine the same personal impact without that objective in mind. On the contrary, it was only by taking into consideration the artistic outcome that one could raise these questions around the performers' experiences – around the *restlessness* generated. Grotowski also tackled this paradox, considering *art as a vehicle*, not as a replacement of *theater as presentation*, but as a form of bringing to the fore the practices involved in the creative process. For the author, both are bound together – as two poles of the same chain, belonging to the same family.

The difference that I want to stress here is the type of creative process a theatrical project can adopt, in terms of what concerns the performers' work. For this, I resort to Bondía's opposition between what he calls the *subject of stimulus* and the *subject of experience*. Following Bondía's dichotomy, as the *subject of stimulus*, the performers open themselves to a provisional experience - from which everything crosses them, excites them, and agitates them, but nothing happens to them. On the other hand, the *subject of experience* relates to a different form of theater-making, where the creative processes of self-exploration and discovery are privileged alongside the ultimate stage performance (Bondía). One may, therefore, look at performing arts productions through the mode of their respective creative processes, how they are conceived and operationalized, distinguishing between the ones that confine their focus exclusively on the artistic expression of the performers (a *process of stimulus*), and the ones that (also) point to their ethical transformation (a *process of experience*) - as is the case in Teatro do Vestido's creative processes.

In *Restless Youth*, both these drives were present, sometimes man-

ifesting separately, at other times overlapping with one another, blurring the differences between the artistic purposes of the project and its social reverberations. For example, many of the collaborators we contacted and talked with during the creative process ended up thanking the artistic team for listening, for taking care of their life stories, and for giving visibility to their testimonies, as if a community (even if provisional) was established in those moments of sharing, not only through the process of the encounter between the people involved but also through the artistic materiality in which this coexistence resonated. In this sense, I am not trying to consider theater in the radicalized debate between art-for-art and art-as-a-moral instrument, because that would imply homogenizing it in terms of an epistemological condition which is, for all intent and purpose, reductive – not only in terms of existing artistic diversity but also in terms of the relevance that different contexts of production may acquire. What I am suggesting is to look at respective creative processes in light of their ethical-political *praxes*, recognizing (possible) aspects of ideological, cultural, and social value at play within the work of the performers. This could be a way to establish the difference between making theater that resembles the politics we can only envision and a theater that engages the performers in the politics of everyday actions. In a nutshell: moving beyond theater through and with theater.

(Un)finished thoughts

For the performers invited to participate in processes of careful listening and research, to engage in a dilated timespan guided by the phenomenon of encounter with others, to reflect upon their own thoughts and perspectives, to be correspondents of their own experience, theater may become a powerful vehicle for their affirmation within the world. A vehicle that makes self-transformational possibilities more discernible and knowledgeable – more material. Not in terms of a materiality that manifests itself only at an artistic level but at the level of life praxis. By engaging performers through their own political drives, the creative processes may lead them to re-problematize and re-signify their place within the world. This is only possible through the instauration of a *process of experience*, in which the temporal materiality of the performers' work yields directly to life – enabling life in the process.

In the actual conditions of artistic creation, this remains quite difficult, mainly because it does not result in evident benefits for the artists who wish to leave a mark within the current economy of artistic production. It is, therefore, a practice dwelling on the margins of art making, manifesting itself through the working processes of the artists and groups pointing to a more direct (and critically informed) interpellation of life – as I advocate to be the case of Teatro do Vestido. But even Teatro do Vestido is not impervious to the demands of artistic production and distribution circuits, sooner or later bumping into the confinement of what Kunst calls *project temporality*: the temporal dimension that encapsulates the working conditions of artistic projects – which, for a long time now, means submitting creative practices to an intense acceleration at both collective and intimate levels. In *Restless Youth*, even though the performers engaged in self-questioning and research processes that aimed to affect the duration and rhythm of their individual experiences, we were eventually bound to the requirements and pressures of the art-making business - whether by having to respond to the solicitations of scenic composition, by having to show up for photo shoots, by talking to journalists, critics or theater producers, by having to give closure to our individual working processes or simply due to the need to anticipate the next project and, thus, our actions in the future. Project temporality eventually takes over, overwhelming the performers' sense of time and, hence, their attention to the experience of performing the self. The process that led me to make these considerations was only possible after a pause in my work as a performer. It is the result of an exercise of remembering: of reconstituting the residues, the ballast, that the creative processes in Teatro do Vestido has left me with. This drove me to recognize the parallel trajectory that both individually and collectively – in the political sense of the word – Teatro do Vestido invited me to follow over more than ten years of collaboration.

This consideration of the ways in which the creative process strategically frames the performers' work opens an alternative way of looking at the political dimension of theater. A political dimension articulated beyond the transitory effects on the audience and the critics attending scenic performances, which encompasses acting practices as a means for both artistic interpellation and everyday life. In this context, an acknowledgment and advancement of communicative networks organized around the performers' bodies,

movements, and discourse becomes crucial to understanding and deepening the material outreach of their theatrical experience within the world – and, consequently, to expand the research scope of artistic studies and the very knowledge economy, contributing to a more comprehensive reflection on the political ramifications of theater.

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I never spoke with José again, although I think a lot about him. Not so much about his wellbeing, what he might be doing, or if he ever remembers those moments of sharing with me. I think about the prolongation in me of his music as I carry on with my life. His waltz forever caught between my memory and my urge to listen to it again – to give it a present materiality. And when I do listen to it, sometimes I dance.

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Notes

1 My translation.

2 Literally "Theater of the dress" [my translation].

3 Teatro do Vestido is a theater company co-founded by Artistic Director Joana Craveiro in 2001 in Lisbon, Portugal. The company usually takes a documentary approach based upon ethnographic observation, oral history, and autobiography, with an important site-specific input. Over the last ten years, the work of Teatro do Vestido has been increasingly centered on the historical, social, and affective questioning of the lives of ordinary people before and after the revolution of April 25, 1974 - which put an end to the dictatorial regime that ruled the country for 48 years - and often resorts to collecting testimonies of political resistance from the past. The seminal performance *A Living Museum of Small and Forgotten Memories*, a performative lecture by Joana Craveiro, premiered in 2014. This is perhaps the creation that most influenced the recent course of the company's creative processes and the one that had the most significative impact within performing arts criticism in Portugal.

4 My translation from the Portuguese "Cidade das Flores".

5 Cf. Lewis & Short.

6 Cf. Bondía.

7 My translation.

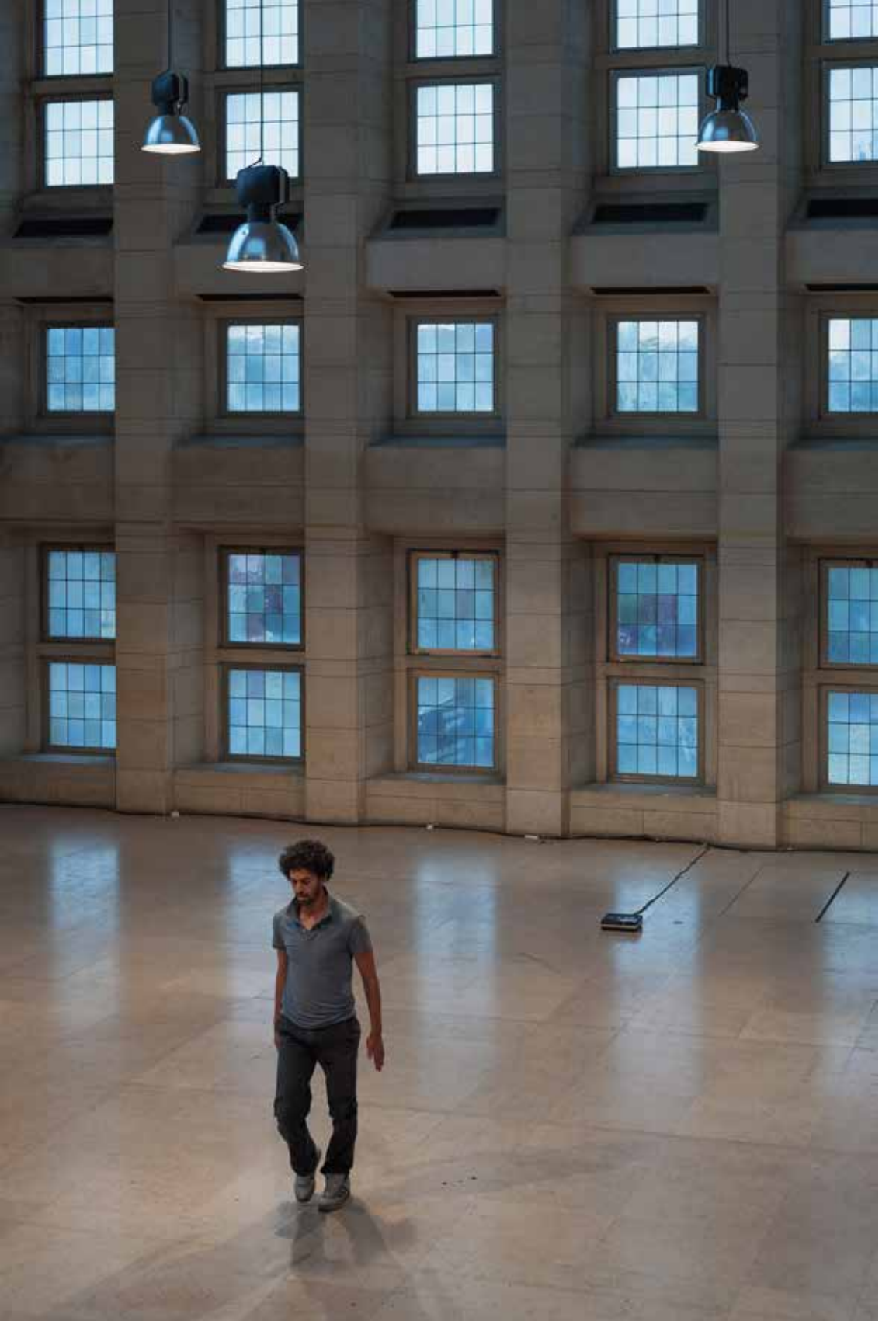
8 Cf. Beuys.

Articulating Architecture: A Speculation with the Joints of Choreography and Architecture in Radouan Mriziga's *55* and the Palais de la Dynastie (Brussels, Belgium)

–– Elias D'hollander (GHENT UNIVERSITY)

In 2015, choreographer Radouan Mriziga (Morocco, Belgium, 1985) performed a version of his solo *55* (2014) in the Palais de la Dynastie in Brussels (2015). In it, he constructed a floor plan within a building that he leaves almost untouched, creating a moment in which choreography and architecture seemingly dialogue as equal interlocutors. This article will research when and how this moment takes place and argue that *55* and the Palais de la Dynastie come together by way of joints, physical as well as architectural. Building on post-structural theory, this text will find moments of speculation to tentatively flesh out the implications of this articulated approach to architecture, both for the Palais de la Dynastie as well as for *55*.

Keywords: architecture, choreography, joint, fold, Radouan Mriziga



> Penser le territoire demande donc un geste: chercher à créer du jeu quand les conséquences collent aux causes, [...] quand les manières d'être se raréfient pour obéir à quelques principes. Ce qui veut dire aussi ralentir, laisser passer un peu d'air et se laisser aller à imaginer.[1]
>
> (Despret, "Habiter" 105)

Tracing the territory

For the 2015 edition of Kunstenfestivaldesarts, choreographer Radouan Mriziga (Morocco, Belgium, 1985) performed a version of his solo *55* (2014) in the Palais de la Dynastie on the foot of the Mont des Arts in Brussels. The building and its site were constructed for the Brussels' World Expo of 1958 by architects Jules Ghobert and Maurice Houyoux in the monumental architecture style (since 2019 it hosts a bar and event-space frequented by a mostly bourgeois clientele). As such, the Mont des Arts, and the Palais de la Dynastie in particular, are drenched in colonial heritage, built with money extracted from Congo for an Expo which hosted the last *zoo humain*. It is therefore at least noteworthy that Mriziga does not attack this building literally; a common strategy, since the 1960s, aimed at critiquing the institution that built it (Davidts 36). Even the conditions of the black box are not replicated in order to mask the building's presence. The audience members find themselves around the performative space of *55,* which refuses the theatrical schism between stage and audience. These strategies actively avoid the *a priori* structuring of the architecture and reveal an approach towards the monumental Palais de la Dynastie as it is found. That is to say, the space is only minimally, if at all, modified beforehand to accommodate *55,* postponing the relationship between choreography and architecture to the performance time itself (Fig.1).[2]

To think this particular *ecology*, as Isabelle Stengers (1949) would have it, I will ground my argument using post-structural theories and their ability to think relationalities. Through a formalist analysis

Figure 1. *55* choreographed by Radouan Mriziga, © Beniamin Boar

of Mriziga's movement, his floor plan and the architecture of the building, this article will argue that *55* and the Palais de la Dynastie are held together by way of *joints* and speculate on the implications of this articulation.

The word 'speculation' was chosen deliberately. This article is a reworked English version of a Dutch chapter, featured in an earlier published book on the way architecture and choreography function in Mriziga's work (D'hollander). Since publishing it, I was confronted with the work of Vinciane Despret whose philosophy, in line with Donna Haraway's speculative fabulation, searches for the ability of beings to act, inhabit or write. A work that Baptiste Morizot described as a "bataille avec la langue [...] pour essayer de faire justice à ce qui se passe"[3] (in La manufacture d'idées, 36:11-36:45). With Despret, I realized that this was already unconsciously present in my thinking about the relationship between architecture and choreography and needed fleshing out.

This article, then, is a first attempt at exploring the speculative moments in the previously written chapter and to see how they can take place in full force. This demands a slow methodology, to stay with moments, corners and words that fascinate me. Through descriptions of what happens in the performance, architecture, texts, the rewriting and retaking of it offers possible avenues for doing justice to what happens. This article, therefore, does not only *talk* about dialogue, but is the product of that practice: a dialogue with my own previously written text, with those of others, and, above all, with the work of Mriziga.

Moving with architecture

Mriziga's solo consists roughly of two parts. He starts *55* by walking to the center of the space, gently lifting his outstretched arms and hands away from his body at a 45-degree angle and swinging them symmetrically forward and backward without his hands touching. They rhythmically describe a horizontal circle around the point on which he is standing. It is striking that in an initial movement, Mriziga uses only two joints to generate dance material: his shoulders. With the first flick of his arms in front of his body, he already takes two steps backwards and remains there, still swinging his arms,

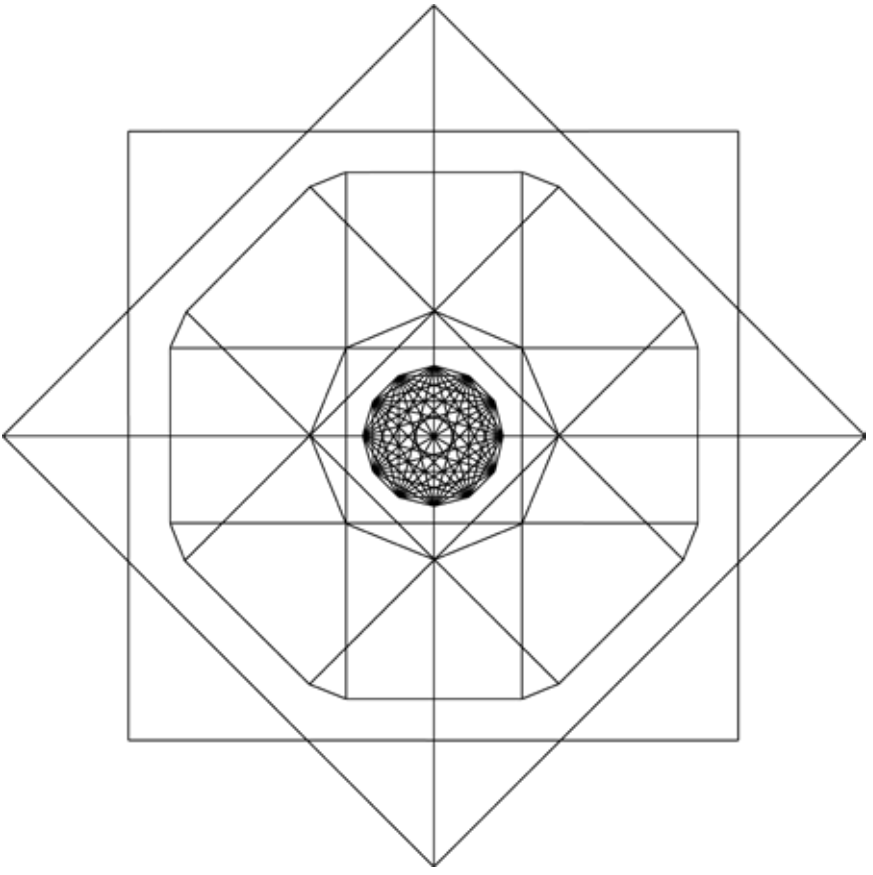


Figure 2. Floor plan of *55* (Radouan Mriziga), © Elias D'hollander

before stepping again towards the center, continuing the circling motion. Alternately, one foot remains in this point, while the other crosses his trunk, leg along the back, tapping the floor. From this middle point he gradually moves towards the edges, using everyday movement, snapping his fingers and doing lunges where he shifts one leg forward and lightly bends his knee.

It is because of the second section that the first one reads as Mriziga measuring the space. He constructs a geometric floor plan based on the Maghreb school of architecture with chalk and paper tape (Fig. 2) using similar movements. Swinging his arms in a circle, it is as if he is already measuring the space where the central figure will appear in the geometry. With the twelve taps of his foot, it

is as if he is marking the twelve points of this shape (Fig. 3). The choreographic chapter ends with Mriziga walking a large square. He takes five big lunges, with his arms accentuating the movement while swinging, to the next point until he has set out the entire square. He evokes the way we measure roughly one metre, using the body as a ruler. Repeating this a second time, he takes a crayon with which to carefully mark the points on the floor. The third time, Mriziga places his elbow at each point, as if it were his compass point, and draws a circle in chalk. These are then connected with their opposite in tape, creating two intersecting lines: the center of the geometry appears as an intersection point. From here, the rest of the geometry is constructed (Fig. 4).

Taping the floor plan, the grid of *55,* over the course of the perfor-

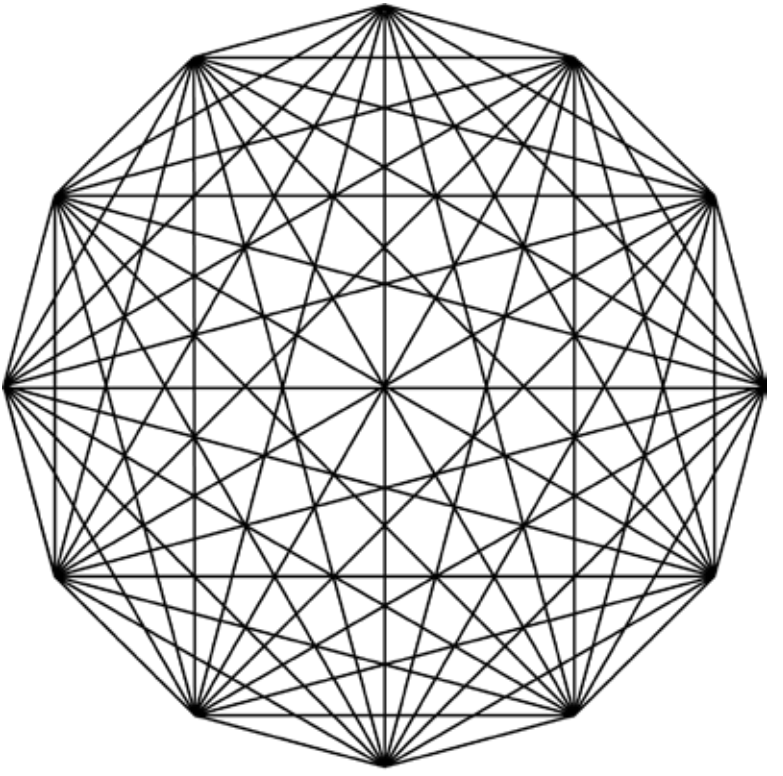


Figure. 3. Twelve-point circle in *55* (Radouan Mriziga), © Elias D'hollander

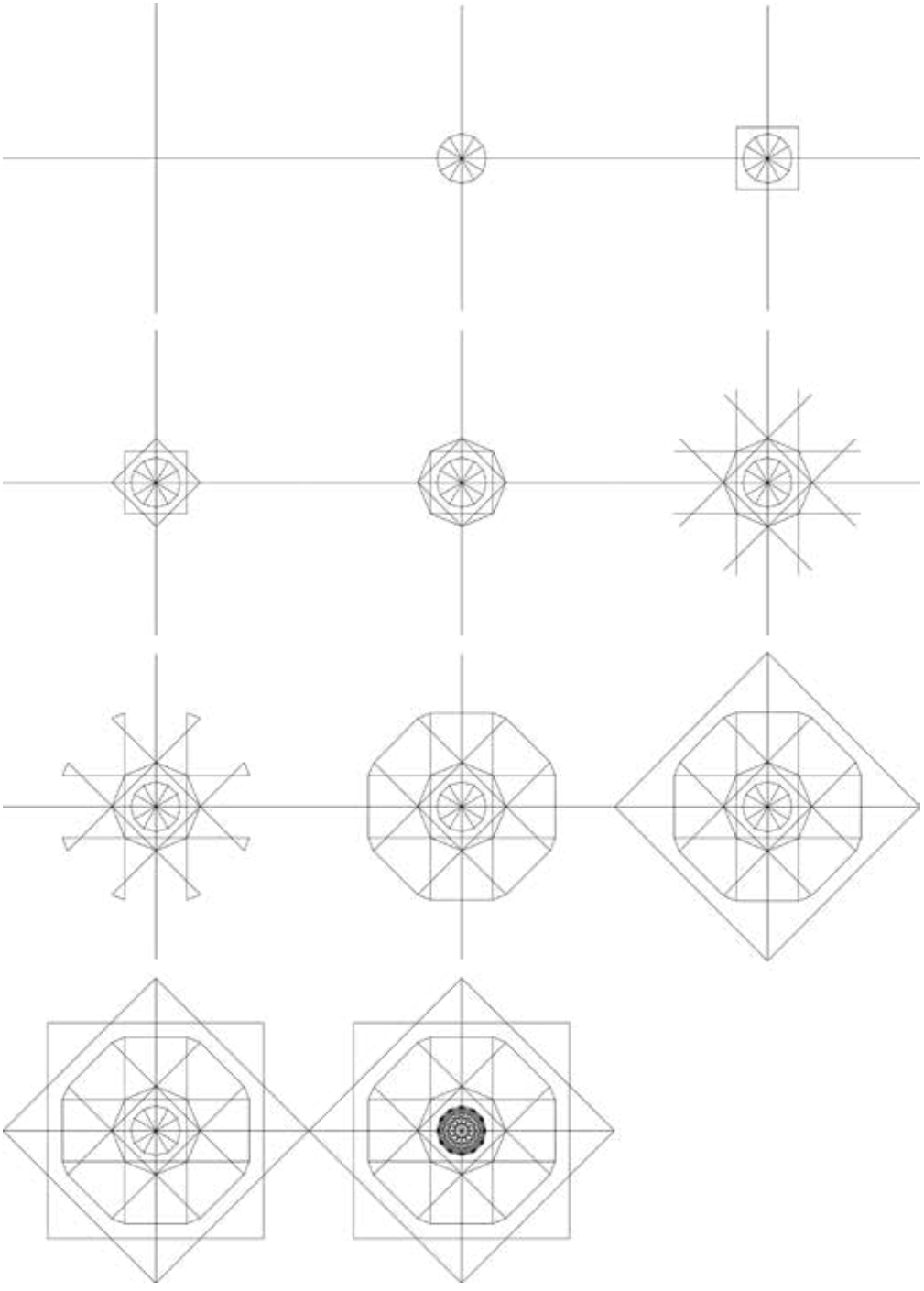


Figure 4. Construction of the floor plan in ***55*** (Radouan Mriziga), © Elias D'hollander

mance, already implies another relationship between architecture-choreography-ecology. The geometry does not *precede* the movement, but is the result of it. Jacques Derrida's analysis of what it means to establish a grid provides valuable terminology to rethink the bond between *55* and the Palais de la Dynastie:

> To establish a grid is to cross through, to go through a channel. It is the experience of permeability. Furthermore, such a crossing does not move through an already existing texture; it weaves this texture. (313)

Mriziga's geometry does not provide a platform on which the body dances, but because of its construction, the choreography goes through the architecture. This going through brings forth a more intimate ecology: rather than mere decor, the building is woven into the texture of *55*. By taping the floor plan through the Palais de la Dynastie as it is found, Mriziga has to take it into account. The architecture permeates the choreography. The softly blue windows, left uncovered, allow the natural light of '"the world" to filter through in the performance and with it the changes in daylight. One window is made out of a grid of thirty glass rectangles which functions as a large opening towards the National Library on the opposite side of the Mont des Arts and the statue of King Albert I in between. The windows on the two adjacent walls, however, are smaller glass squares made up, once again, of a grid of 16 rectangles vertically stacked together in six 'columns.' This generates a rhythmic pattern of windows, thick walls and an accentuated monumental verticality. In contrast to the black box, grids and windows produce an architecture that is not a stable block of concrete. The movement of the city seeps through; the changes in daylight outside alter the light inside and the verticality of the windows *moves* upward: architecture acts.[4]

If in the first part of the choreography the Palais de la Dynastie is, as stated above, at the very least allowed to be seen, it takes on a more prominent role in the second half of the piece. Not only is the focus on the floor plan itself in tension with the monumental verticality of the building, during the taping of this geometry the choreography and architecture engage in dialogue, intensified by the grid of the tiled floor. This seems to be a continuation of the walls since the rhythmic pattern of stone and glass provide the pattern of the floor

(Fig. 1). The square windows are reflected in four square tiles that, together, form a larger one. These composite squares are separated by a grid – that follows the structure of the stone wall – made up of rectangular tiles that have the length of two squares, punctuated by even smaller square tiles that are placed on each of the four corners of the composite squares.

When Mriziga measures the five lunges to mark the points of the square, importantly he does not follow these lines of the tiles, but traces out a 45-degree angle to the visible predefined path provided by the grid of the floor. This means that, when he connects the points to form the diagonals of the square, these would be able to be taped following the lines of the floor. However, because his body performs the task of ruler rather than stone cold numbers and precise measurements, the smallest deviation of the trajectory of the lunges can cause shifts in the geometry, away from the architectural grid.

In an exact fashion, the taped diagonals have gently diverged; the tape crosses the line of the tiles and does not intersect *on* the architectural grid, but rather *in* it (Fig. 5). The architectural grid, therefore, *crosses through* the choreography as well. *55*'s geometry has not been *clicked* into the grid of the tiles. Mriziga's decision to not follow their path results in a situation in which his movement and the consequent placement of the floor plan are dependent on the geometry of the tiles. Mriziga eyeballs the 45-degree angle and, as such, is influenced by the grid of the floor, generating the shift. Because of this, both *55's* floor plan, as well as the lines of the tiles are visible, crossing over each other, generating a "weave", in Stenger's sense of the word, where their meaning is dependent on one another: "Le fil, là où il est, prend son sens et donne sens à ses voisins et voisines, à l'ensemble de ce qui tient"[5] (Stengers, Dolphijn 95). Both choreography and architecture are threads that move through one another and nuance Derrida's earlier statement, since they do so through already existing textures. They appear horizontally, equally powerful, not subsuming the other in their own tissue. Mriziga's attitude is one in which it is not he himself, alone, that performs, but where the architecture participates. Both speak together, dialoguing the placement of 55's floor plan and, as such, its relation to the building in which it finds itself.

Figure 5. *55* choreographed by Radouan Mriziga, © Beniamin Boar

The twelve-point circle as joint

To understand how the shift works, it is important to look at the center of the geometry, since Mriziga seems to direct a lot of attention upon it. It is here that he starts, here from where he moves towards the edges to come back again, this time with tape. He places a piece of chalk on this intersection. Lying on the floor, he stretches his arm on one of the taped lines. Using his shoulder as a compass point, he draws half a circle on one side, turns, and does the same on the other one. He repeats this four times on each part of the diagonals, generating four overlapping circles (Fig. 5). After having carefully placed his shoulder on the center point, Mriziga uses his outstretched arm to the middle of each circle on the taped diagonals and two points on each circle's circumference. Connecting these points in tape, he forms a twelve-point circle with its twelve diameters. From here, he constructs the rest of the geometry gradually going outward towards the two squares (Fig. 4). Finally, after having taped the floor plan, Mriziga connects all the points in the twelve-point circle, generating a complex weaving texture inside it. The center of the geometry is here the result of movement – through the intersecting diagonals – as well as generator of it. It appears by way of contraction, after which it expands in the Palais de la Dynastie to then concentrate back on itself. This movement resonates with how Derrida describes the functioning of the point in a grid:

> On the one hand, the point concentrates, folds back towards itself the greatest force of attraction, contracting lines towards the center. [...] At the same time, through its force of magnetic attraction [...] the point seems to bind, [...] the energy freely available within a given field (315).

Tellingly, it is precisely this point which has been pushed *in* the grid of the tiles. Mriziga's twelve-point circle folds back on itself and maintains a relationship with the environment that surrounds it, manifested in the space between the line of the architecture and the point of the choreography. It functions, therefore, as the place where Mriziga's floor plan speaks together with the Palais de la Dynastie and both are able to influence one another. It holds them in shift, in dialogue. Taping the contracting and expanding geometry becomes, then, a dialogical practice, a negotiation between architecture and

choreography. The lines of the tiles and the center point of Mriziga's geometry are held together by the shift and the weaving texture of the twelve-point circle.

Holding together implies, however, the possibility of breakage. Here, the twelve-point circle becomes "a breaking point: it interrupts, absolutely, the continuity of the text or of the grid. But the inter-ruptor maintains together *both* the rupture *and* the relation to the other" (Derrida 315). It marks a situation where the dialogue between choreography and architecture can be deformed as well as maintained, the possibility of rupture *and* relation. A shape, then, which has the potential to form as well as to sever, and generate conversations that emanate from a point that is as flexible as it is fragile. Paper tape breaks, crumples and is taken away easily, yet all the connections of the twelve points render this process much more difficult. Together they stick harder to the floor.

The twelve-point circle as a breaking point or inter-ruptor, becomes denser when read through the way Mriziga constructs his movement material (in general, but for *55* in particular). When he starts the choreographic chapter by swinging his stretched arms in a 45-degree angle, the place of the movement finds itself only in his shoulders. It is this joint that makes the swinging possible, a movement that gets repeated and systematically added to with other joints. From his hip, Mriziga's legs rhythmically cross one over the other and from his elbow he tilts his lower arm towards his chest to then rotate his wrist. With his palms facing up, he lifts his arms above his head to bring them down – again from his shoulders – in a half circle. It is the shoulder from which the entire performance flows, not by accident the most mobile and most precarious of all the human joints.

The shoulder manifests the function of the inter-ruptor, precisely because of the precariousness of this joint. Within the twelve-point circle, the fragile shoulder is a breaking point that "maintains together *both* the rupture *and* the relation to the other" (Derrida 315). The joint maintains the mobile relation of the upper arm and the shoulder blade as a ball joint, hence its fragility, maintained only by tissue. The weaving together of the points of the twelve-point circle involuntarily evokes this, not only by the connection to fabric-making techniques, but to the idea of the holding together of the relation of architecture and choreography. As such, the twelve-point circle

appears to function as a shoulder joint, where its center acts as the locus where *55* and the Palais de la Dynastie come together, the interval between their geometries as movement and the interwoven points as tissue.

Mriziga seems to render this parallel explicit when he tapes *55*'*s* floor plan and uses his shoulder as the center point and his arm as a pair of compasses to place it on the intersection of the large diagonals to mark the intersections he needs to construct the twelve-point circle (Fig. 5). Both are points of departure for, respectively, geometry and movement, "a multiplicity of matrices or generative cells" (Derrida 313). The dialogue is being *articulated* here, as movement is being generated by the anatomical *articulation* of the joint. The carefully placed shoulder *joins up* with the architecture as the upper arm does with the shoulder blade. Here, then, appears a body that is not placed hierarchically above architecture, or vice versa. After all, Mriziga does not hit holes in the Palais de la Dynastie from without, but rather works *with-in* architecture to weave his geometry. Architecture and choreography are thought of as horizontal, in a reciprocal relationship where they dialogue together from the twelve-point circle.

As such, movement is not the result of an all-capable body, but a conversation between body and space that articulate *together* around their shared joint. As the muscles lift the arm, the particular movement is only possible by the way in which the upper arm and the shoulder blade function as a joint. It is here that another topology emerges, one in which space and movement are thought of at once: a world that always already has the possibility to move, bending around the objects that find themselves in it. Space and time joined together in difference, then, temporalized and spatialized respectively. Architecture becomes lighter and choreography heavier: the weight of *55* is articulated in the Palais de la Dynastie.

The earlier described moment where Mriziga interweaves all the points in the twelve-point circle, strengthening the staying power of the paper tape, is then not only a way of holding together the joint during the performance itself, but brings forth a heaviness which makes it linger after the fact, as well. The Palais de la Dynastie houses the trace of choreography, articulated upon it through their joints. Similarly, it becomes possible to think the building as one that can

move and evolve, through articulations. When Mriziga traces the twelve-point circle, he tapes within it the possibility of rendering the Palais de la Dynastie physically unstable. Or, at the very least, the twelve-point circle may put the building in a kind of fluid state, physically as well as critically. Architecture is no longer poured into concrete, fixed in time nor captured by the institution that builds it.

Articulation and folds

The fluidity of the architecture stands in opposition to its destruction. The joints are, after all, not being smashed into the architecture as if out of nothing, dragging this architecture with it, as if Mriziga was a sort of Atlas figure. It is rather the result of the dialogue between architecture and choreography and how the body is in, or with, the world, consciously, responsibly and humbly. His body is one that is in conversation with the architecture and the world in which it finds itself and is thus unable to create – from the outside – these joints in the architecture. Within the found architecture, its dynamism, direction and temporality is left intact: the grid of the tiles, verticality of, and the light falling through, the windows, preserving the differences of *55* and the Palais de la Dynastie *and* setting up a dialogical praxis between both. Architecture's temporality is not being reduced to the body's and vice versa; each has their own history, an enduring dialogue in the moment of *55*'*s* performance. The upper arm and shoulder blade do not change themselves; it is their relationship that does. The radical separation of environment and movement becomes untenable and makes place for an articulated dialogue: moveable, changeable, able to fold:

> Yes, folded. What is the fold? The aim of re-establishing architecture in what should have been specifically its own is not to reconstitute a simple of architecture, a simple architectural architecture, through a purist or integratist obsession. […] [A] narrative montage of great complexity explodes, outside, the narrative which mythologies contracted or effaced in the hieratic presence of the 'memorable' monument (Derrida 311).

Through the articulated dialogue, the folds in architecture do not

point towards a how-it-should-have-been, but rather *multiply* its constitution. Meaning is not fixed in the architecture with joints. It is a humble architecture that allows for change, difference and dynamics and even expects them, but never eternalizedas *monument*. Indeed, "this work does not pour the difference into concrete; it does not erase the differential trait, nor does it reduce or embed this track, the distract or abstract, in a homogeneous mass *(concrete)*" (Derrida 311). To trace the sides of the squares, Mriziga places one end of the tape on the center point of the earlier-drawn chalk circle and pulls it vertically upward, stretching his arm above his head, as if to measure himself with the tape. Next, he connects this with an adjacent middle point, set low, as if dragging the tape over the floor. The vertical pull points to an architectural fold with the movement of his body: the building becomes complex, subverting the enduring thought of a dominant, unchangeable one, poured with concrete.

Walking to the center of where the twelve-point circle will be taped, swinging his arm back and forth, Mriziga does not merely show its placement, but, more importantly, engages in a moment of listening, of receiving the architectural joint inherent to the grid of the tile floor. By continuously crossing his legs one behind the other to mark all the twelve points of the circle, Mriziga takes this activation even further. The points *stick* to his feet and are folded upon each other while he articulates them with the Palais de la Dynastie, bringing the circle with his arms towards his chest and folding it open towards the ceiling by rotating his wrists, lifting his gaze and stretching his arms upward. Then, the ceiling and floor fold with the walls under the impulse of the downward movement of his arms. Mriziga repeats this phrase, each time turning his body, thus establishing a folded space.

This folded architecture is a radically different topology. Mriziga is not thrown in the world, as if from outside, but is inherently part of it. He is not the unbridled virtuoso dancer on the platform of a black box theatrical space; rather, his movement is always already in dialogue with the architecture that surrounds him. Since he does not generate movement solely from his anatomical joints but does so as well from those of the architecture, his dancing is, before anything else, a response to the joints of the architecture, to the verticality and the gridded tile. This architecture with joints, one with folds as concrete possibilities, is one that places body and cho-

reography on equal ground, one that is able to adapt and respond to what takes place. That is to say, the building becomes, what Mriziga calls *non-linear*: narratives, meaning and histories are articulated, one on top of the other, in an architecture that is more than what is present *here, now* (Mriziga).

The architecture folds into multiplicity and *sticks* to the body as the tape *sticks* to the floor. The folds in Mriziga's performance with the Palais de la Dynastie and the affirmation of the joints stretch the building beyond the institute that performs its power. An architecture with joints is one that holds within it complexity, without a desire to resolve it and therefore explodes The Institutional Narrative which holds the building captive. Through folding joints, the Palais de la Dynastie becomes re-marked, not as a mythic monumental system, but as just that: architecture.

Architecture as speculation

Architecture as a "narrative montage of great complexity", freed from its "hieratic presence" (Derrida 311) becomes question rather than statement, precisely because of its ability to maintain "the *dis-jointed* as such" (Derrida 314). Responding to this demands a flexibility architecture is traditionally not endowed with, for which *55* and the architectural joints it makes clear are invaluable. These inter-ruptors housed in the Palais de la Dynastie itself – the tile joints, the grid of the windows and even the corners of walls, floor and ceiling – allow the building to become lighter, supple, and, therefore, bring forth the potential to adapt, receive and answer to the complexity that circulates through it.

To receive before answering problematizes the idea of a person that creates by and from themselves, alone. Mriziga and the Palais de la Dynastie are dependent on one another and, as such, are only able to articulate a dialogue after having received the potentiality inherent in the architectural and choreographic joints. The choice of not following the grid of the tiles is, therefore, a gesture of listening before articulating a response. Through this dialogue, it is architecture and choreography *together* that create, a situation that Étienne Souriau calls "instauration" (Stengers, Latour 10). This designates an action in which something is created, not out of nothing, but by

engaging "la responsabilité de celui qui instaure, à accueilir une demande"[6] (Despret, "Au bonheur" 16). The person carrying out an act of instauration has, first, to listen to the demand made upon them by their object or environment: creation is always relational. Mriziga's tape becomes not so much an owned geometry placed over another, but rather an instaurated fold between the grid of the tiles, as if the tape shows a shift within the architecture, which has adapted itself. The Palais de la Dynastie has become speculation:

> L'accueil du signe se fait dans le régime des 'peut-être', du doute, [...] des 'comme si', des reprises de formulation. [...] Chaque 'peut-être', chaque 'comme si', chaque doute exprimé, chaque reprise pour 'dire autrement' mobilise d'implicites 'et', d'avides 'ou alors', en quête d'une autre version (Despret, "Au bonheur" 151).[7]

Welcoming the demand, or the sign of the environment, implies doubt in search of another articulation of architecture, away from the monumental stability imposed upon it by the institution that has built it. Instauration, therefore, might return the building to what it could be: uncertain and hesitant, adaptive and architecture as such. *55* seeks to articulate the Palais de la Dynastie differently. The jointed approach puts the building conceptually in doubt, to be sure, but maybe it does so physically, as well. Mriziga's practice of generating movement does precisely that, since he builds his movement phrases as if the architecture in which they are generated can fold. Because a step, a snap of the finger in Mriziga's work are thought of as folding the space during the creation process, they receive from its conception the ability to fold the building, or else to open it up and erect columns. Reaching an arm towards a corner, before attentively moving the arm somewhere else is, in effect, to displace it, or to open up a wall. Speculation: might the Palais de la Dynastie, at least during the time of Mriziga's *55*, be deformed, since the latter's movement is built *as if* the building could be folded?[8]

By stretching the tape, it is *as if* the floor is stretched towards the walls and ceiling, evading as such the connotations of a platform on which Mriziga's body is fixed. He is not being pulled on a plane by gravity as if he can be thought of as detached from it, but is rather intrinsically woven of the world. Here, the dialogue between architecture and choreography is, once again, instaurated "comme si

le réel insistait. Là où il y a usuellement production de séparation, [...] les choses se mettent à communiquer autrement"[9] (Despret, "Au bonheur" 150). The insistence of the relationality of movement and space makes them dialogue differently: not dancer *on* stage, but architecture and choreography *in* articulation. *55* folds the building, as the Palais de la Dynastie folds it, in turn. Architecture becomes speculation through doubt, adapting to the complexity of difference.

This carries out an immense responsibility, since movements from an 'outside' would know a more free and all-possible statute, not being an intrinsic part of the platform on which they are performed, enjoying, therefore, less accountability. Only after having received the joints of architecture is Mriziga put in a state of response-ability, able to move as if folding – not by hypothesising this possibility beforehand, but by welcoming speculation. It is the floor-ceiling-wall-fold that allows him to work against the monumental verticality of the Palais de la Dynastie: a folded building that opens itself for adaptation, as speculation, no concrete given fact as a tool to exhibit power on that which finds itself in and around that architecture. Doubt, through the *as if*, rather than confidence, invites complexity once more and generates different versions of architecture. Or else, with these physical articulated folds in the building, the Palais de la Dynastie in *55* becomes multiple.

Multiplying the Palais de la Dynastie

Folding a choreography whose floor plan refers to Maghreb architecture in a Palais de la Dynastie of a country with a colonial past of its own, generates an extremely sharp criticism. It is the taping of the geometry that criticizes the architecture-as-institute, *adding* to the building, rather than attacking it. That Mriziga interweaves with it a geometry that has its origins within Moroccan architecture, a country that was itself heavily colonized by France, intensifies the link between the Palais de la Dynastie and Belgium's colonial history. After all, the building was built for Expo '58, the pinnacle of unbridled colonial modernity, and displays a monumental prestige that should be very explicitly linked to colonial Belgium. Indeed:

> [T]he cool white marble of the hall [of the Palais de la Dynastie] keeps alive the memory of Leopold II's plan to

> use the blood money extracted from the Congo, safely put away in the royal foundation and so protected from 'recuperation' by the Belgian state, to build, among other projects, a mausoleum and a palace to the glory of the dynasty (Van Synghel 34).

As such, the focus on two-dimensionality in *55* that counteracts the vertical movement of the building takes on political connotations. The building's grand verticality is rendered monumental by the institution and its associated power structures at work: they impose their form and with it an institutionalized grid that holds the architecture, as well as its dweller, captive. The Palais de la Dynastie has always been an inaccessible block, a facade more than anything else, safeguarded, or so it seems, by its monumental verticality. Even now that Plein Publiek has taken over the building – some years after *55* – it remains, thus, protected by the men in suits and their after works.

By folding the floor plan of *55* with the Palais de la Dynastie, the building is articulated differently and the institution critiqued. The architecture *in itself* does not crumble, but the institutional decisions do: the verticality is still vertical, it only loses its "hieratic presence of the 'memorable' monument" (Derrida 311). That is to say, through the folding of the joints, the architecture is speculated upon, and becomes supple. Glorification, nor mausoleum, it regains its connection to a more natural scale. In dialogue with Mriziga's movement; it is as if the stones become tactile again, the shades in colours of the windows gain beauty *for themselves,* and are no longer the servants of the vertical movement. Or else, perhaps, articulated with each other, window, wall and floor are able to exist, woven together with the colonial critique, held by the tissue of the twelve-point circle.

With Mriziga's movement and the architectural joints, the Palais de la Dynastie is opened up. Today, after the fact, passing by the Mont des Arts – now protected by the men in suits on their after works – it is as if the hollow facade of the building remains folded with its interior. The verticality of the windows continues to recall the paper tape that bent the ceiling, wall and floor; the grid in the windows, folded on the grid of tile floor, retains the trace of the twelve-point circle that once held them together. Or, to put it differently: *55* has given the Palais de la Dynastie an interior again: Mriziga's response

to the architecture that "cries out for new life" (Van Synghel 36), is not filleting or hollowing out the building, but speculating upon it, folding it in dialogue. An articulation emerges which has returned the (colonial as well as architectural) transparency it lacked, "especially in the vertical sense" (Van Synghel 36).

Here, something demands attention: Mriziga's approach to dealing with monumental verticality differs fundamentally, after all, from the way André Lepecki analyses the crawl pieces of William Pope.L. Lepecki uses Frantz Fanon's notion of "the stumble" to think about Pope.L's embrace of the horizontal plane and refusal of verticality, which is here the orientation of the institution's brutality:

> The moment one gives up one's own verticality, the first thing one discovers is that even the smoothest ground is not flat. The ground is grooved, cracked, cool, painful, hot, smelly, dirty. The grounds pricks, wounds, grabs, scratches. The ground, above all, weighs in (99).

Instead of giving up his verticality, Mriziga affirms it. He is never off-balance, never threatened by horizontality nor verticality. He moves through the building's planes with ease, even retaking the movement he uses to draw a circle in chalk on the floor when he is upright. From his shoulder, his stretched-out arm traces a vertical circle. As the floor of the Palais de la Dynastie takes its pattern from the walls (or vice versa), so Mriziga *implicates* verticality in horizontality and in north, east, south and west. Herein lies the risk: he challenges the building's lack of vertical transparency, by folding it with horizontality, holding both 'in relation': "des plis pliés les uns dans les autres, impliqués les uns par les autres, qui tiennent les uns grâce aux autres ou au risque des autres"[10] (Stengers and Schaffner 35). Speculation: might the ground weigh in, not by wounding, but through its joints that render it supple, by folding around, or with, the weight of the choreography? Stumbling would be impossible here, since architecture's tissue would support the body that folds through it.

Folding brings forth an articulated topology and a way of dealing with a past of architecture without destroying it, not a *tabula rasa*, but an affirmative critique, once again, in the realm of "des 'peut-être', du doute, […] des 'comme si', des reprises de formulation" (Despret, "Au

bonheur" 151). The folds of Maghreb geometry in *55* and the Palais de la Dynastie establish an architecture – and the Western ideology that builds it – as if it has always been folded: in its basis with an ancient world that is not merely Western European, the Mediterranean that has never been homogenous, and with a colonial heritage. Through dialoguing articulations, the architecture becomes supple and can once again be worked with, all the while unfolding the processes of the history of its building. By coming together in joints, folding past, present and eventual future, architecture and choreography have genuinely become non-linear: *55* and the Palais de la Dynastie fold in an articulation, as if *joined* together through time, in earth:

> Mais si le territoire le [l'oiseau] tient par tant de choses, […] n'est-ce pas d'abord parce qu'il le tient, tout simplement? [N]e serait-ce pas le fait que, quand un oiseau habite un territoire, il est complètement habité par lui? […] C'est le territoire qui le fait chanter, comme il le fait arpenter, danser, exhiber ses couleurs.[11]
>
> (Despret, "Habiter" 122)

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55. By Radouan Mriziga. Palais de la Dynastie (Brussels), 2015.

Notes

1 Thinking territory demands therefore a gesture: searching to create a game when the consequences stick to the causes, […] when the ways of being rarify themselves in order to obey some principles. Which also implies slowing down, letting pass a bit of air and letting oneself go and imagine. (My own translation)

2 This inadvertently recalls the discussions surrounding 'site-specificity', a notion that has long gained popularity within the fine arts (see for example Miwon Kwon's *One Place after Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2002)) and has since been used and adapted within performance studies as well (see for example Melanie Kloetzel's notion of *site-adaptive dance* in "Site and Re-site: Early Efforts to Serialize Site-Specific Dance" in *Dance Research Journal,* 49:2 (April 2017): 6-23). Here, however, I am interested not so much in the fact that the performance *is* site-specific or site-adaptive, but rather in *how this* choreography and *this* architecture dialogue together and what this relationship *does.*

3 A battle with language, to try and do justice to what is happening. (My own translation)

4 Elsewhere I have analysed architecture's potential to act through Michel de Certeau's concepts of 'place' and 'space'. See: D'hollander, Elias. *Architectuur choreograferen / Choreografie architecturen. Het verweven van choreografie en architectuur in Radouan Mriziga's '55' (2015).* Tectum Verlag, 2021.

5 The thread, there where it is, gets it meaning from, and gives meaning to, its neighbours, from and to the whole of that which maintains. (My own translation)

6 The responsibility of the person who instaures, to welcome a demand. (My own translation)

7 The reception of the sign finds itself in the realm of 'maybe', of doubt, […] of 'as if', of reworking formulations. […] Every 'maybe', every 'as if', every expressed doubt, every reworking 'to say it differently' mobilizes the implicit 'and', the enthusiastic 'or perhaps', in search of another version. (My own translation)

8 The concept of architecture as speculation should not be confused with speculative architecture, which often brings forth dystopian typologies. It is rather more closely related the the idea of architecture as

hypothesis, coined by practitioners and theorists Madeline Gins and Arakawa. (See: Gins, Madeline and Arakawa. *Architectural Body.* The University of Alabama Press, 2002.) Speculation as well as as hypothesis think architecture adaptively and unstable. However, they imply a radically different approach to the built environment, manifested in their different tenses ('as if' versus 'what if'). Hypothesising architecture means, in effect, to posit a hypothesis beforehand. Here the relation of the stated hypothesis and the thing hypothesized seems to be less intimate, less interrelated, where speculation, through instauration, works more closely *with* the thing it speculates upon. Asking 'what if' is more of a free-for-all, whereas 'as if' is more interdependent, response-able.

9 As if the real insisted. Where there is usually a production of separation, things start to communicate differently. (My own translation)

10 Folds folded one in the other, implicated one in the other, that hold by the grace of each other or at the risk of one another. (My own translation)

11 But if the territory holds it [the bird] by so many things [...] would it not be first of all because it *simply holds it?* [the French 'tenir' signifies 'to hold' as well as 'to like', 'to love', 'to desire' etc.] Would it not be the fact that, when a bird inhabits a territory, it is completely inhabited by it? [...] It is the territory that makes it sing, just as it makes it roam, dance, exhibit its colours. (My own translation)

Motherhood as Resistance in the Bio-Performance *Analfabeta*: An interdisciplinary Dialogue Between Biology and Performance.

–– Paulina Bronfman (PONTIFICIA UNIVERSIDAD CATÓLICA DE VALPARAÍSO)

–– Alejandra Zuñiga-Feest (UNIVERSIDAD AUSTRAL OF CHILE)

Interdisciplinary dialogue acts as a symbiosis for all the areas that participate and imply enormous projections for both art and science. This paper explores the potential of an interdisciplinary dialogue between Biology and Performance using as a case study the Performance *Analfabeta* created by the artist Paulina Bronfman**.** The work was shaped in the context of The Third Conference of the Nucleus of Artistic Research (NIA) of In/Inter/Disciplinary Laboratories hosted by the Faculty of Art of The Pontificia University of Chile (LAB IID). The Lab was led by Chilean biologist Alejandra Zuñiga-Feest and the Brazilian artist Adriana Parente La Selva. This work aims to explore the questions: what does it mean, from the point of view of the arts and sciences, to develop an interdisciplinary laboratory? How is this done? This paper problematizes the creative process of collaboration between sciences and performance as well as the potential impact and link with society that this multidisciplinary dialogue can have.

Keywords: interdisciplinary, biology, performance, motherhood, Chile

Introduction

The first part of the article describes the context and the scientific input that biologist Alejandra Zuñiga Feest gave to the laboratory writing from her own personal experiences and research area. She describes the laboratory process and settings and her subjective experiences as a participant. After this stage she exposes the scientific input that she gave to the lab based on the concept of resilience and resistance through her presentation. In the second part of the article, Bronfman explores how the Performance *Analfabeta* was created as an artistic response to Zuñiga Feest's input using a subjective personal narrative. The third part of the paper reflects collectively on the principal themes that *Analfabeta* explores: resilience, resistance and motherhood. Finally, the fourth part of the article explores the potentialities of interdisciplinary collaborations.

Part one

The starting point: Surviving Los Andes adverse climate conditions

I (Alejandra) received an invitation from Dermis Pérez León, a PhD student in Arts at Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile (PUC), who is also a member of the NIA group (Nucleus for Arts Research), to be part of an in/interdisciplinary Art Laboratory with Brazilian artist and researcher Adriana La Selva, who works on art practices. We talked about some common concepts for various disciplines, both from the arts and the sciences, which constituted a starting point to carry out diverse exercises. These pairs of concepts were a) Contact and Contagion and b) Resistance and resilience, in which I gave my experience from the perspective of research on plants that grow on volcanic substrates in the Andes mountains of southern Chile. These plants are a model of resistance and resilience to extreme living conditions.

At the beginning of the workshop, the most important thing was to open up and let go; to let myself be carried away by the dynamics that my workshop partner, an experienced actress, Adriana La Selva, offered me. I must say that we scientists always have very defined protocols to approach carrying out any type of activity, such as

workshops, scientific congresses, experiments, projects, writing papers. This gives us a certain security in what is established, what is organised well in advance, and always using the scientific method, often leaving intuition and improvisation a little in the margins. This researcher's task ends and is re-organized with new questions at the time we disseminate results. This science and art workshop was a call to a beautiful adventure, in which I completely immersed myself, and for which I am grateful.

The anchors of this exercise were the concepts of **resistance** and **resilience**, which can be defined from various perspectives and disciplines. For example, from the physical, biological and psychological point of view. Thus, finding key and approachable concepts from different disciplines turns out to be key for this type of creative exercise. I spoke from my research areas: plant ecophysiology and

Figure 1. NIA group's (Nucleus for Arts Research) Invitation to be part of an Inter/disciplinary Art Laboratory

soil-plant interaction. I showed my results humanising the life of plants, trying to reveal what they 'feel' or 'sense' when they grow in extreme conditions of life in the mountains. I spoke not only from an aerial perspective, but also about the most unknown, the subterranean: their belowground life, that ecosystem containing the roots of many plants. Coexisting species, which are neighbours, which recognize each other and which dialogue with the microbes that live in the vicinity of their prodigious space: the rhizosphere, the zone of influence of the roots.

Then, within the workshop that we planned with Adriana, the exercises of gifts among the participants emerged. We were sequentially giving each other actions that showed the resilience and resistance that we had experienced in our lives. This is how each of these actions lit up like 'flashes', which opened a path for us among the participants, until *Analfabeta* was born. When it manifested, I was amazed at the process: previously, I had experienced approaches

Figure 2. Alejandra Zuñiga giving her presentation in the Inter/Disciplinary Laboratories at the Universidad Católica de Chile, © Paulina Bronfman

to artistic activities, but the birth of this 'illiterate' co-creation literally 'blew my mind' and my eyes marvelled at the enormous opportunities that were opening up at that moment for the dialogue between art and science.

The input: Resistance and resilience from the scientific perspective

In the context of the Inter/Disciplinary Laboratories organised by The Third Conference of the Nucleus of Artistic Research (NIA) I gave a PowerPoint presentation to a group of 15 interdisciplinary artists. I am a biologist. I speak from a science-based perspective on the research that I have carried out in two areas that are connected: plant ecophysiology and soil-plant interaction. For years, I have visited the slopes of several volcanoes in the south of Chile and studied the mechanisms that 'colonizers' employ on recent volcanic substrates, this nascent material that our volcanoes continuously expel, and that Chileans know well.

Figure 3. Slide from Professor Zuñiga workshop's presentation

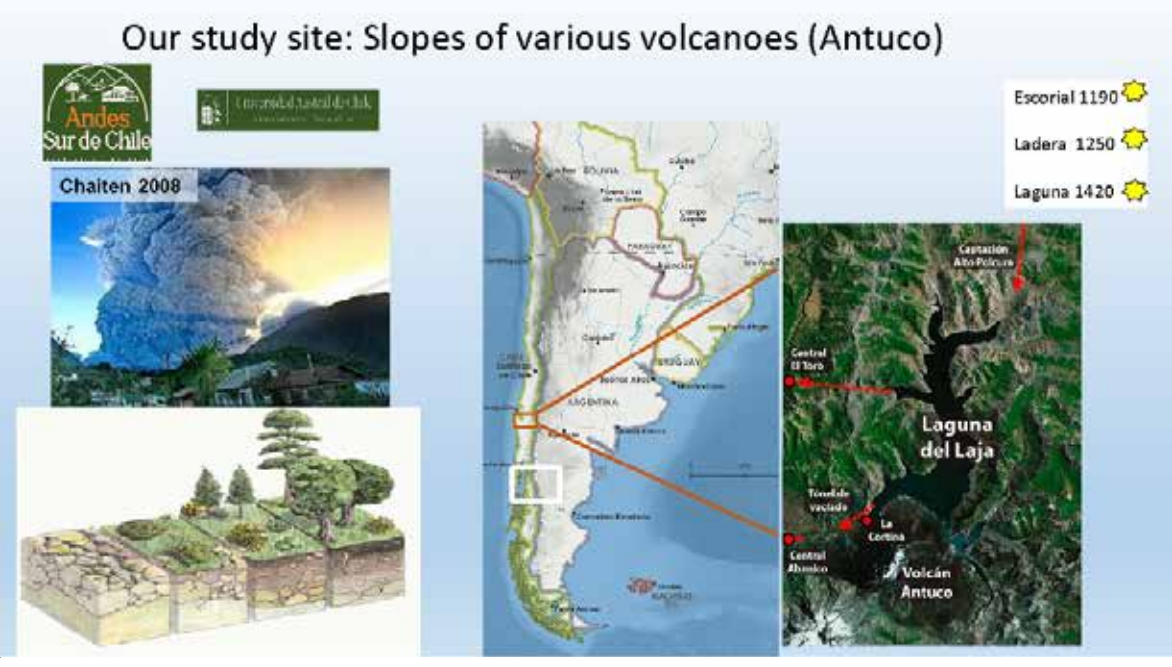


Figure 4. Slide from Professor Zuñiga workshop's presentation on roots.

Only a few species grow in these types of conditions and elevations, since life there is more adverse than in places where there is greater soil fertility, more water, and lower elevation, as occurs in most prairies or crop fields in the intermediate depression in Chile.

These colonising plants are both resistant to environmental stress and resilient, establishing and persisting there and even generating positive relationships with their neighbours and the microbes close to their roots, in the area we call the 'rhizosphere' (Zhou et al. 514). These concepts, defined for human reality, are also applicable in the context of stress physiology, as well as from the perspective of plant nutrition and plant ecology, which studies the relationships between plants and their biotic and abiotic environment.

The plants that we studied in some cases can reduce their growth, but persist, as occurs with the natural bonsai of Coigue (*Nothofagus dombeyi*), and other species grow in "vegetation patches" where

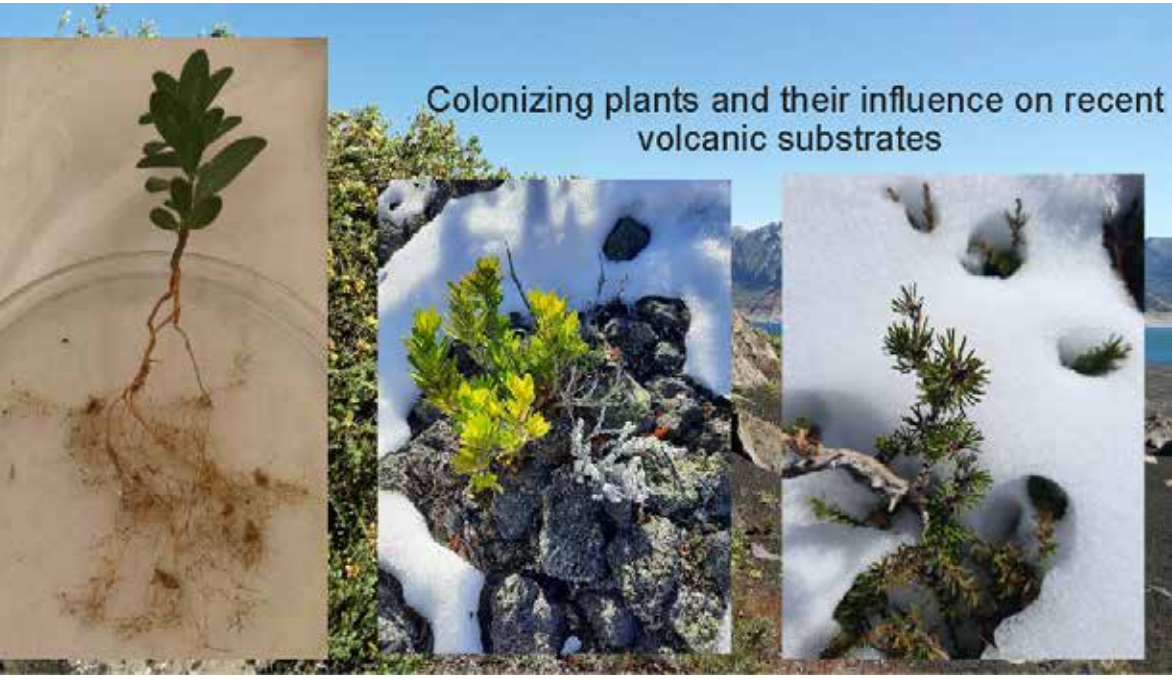


Figure 5. Slide from Professor Zuñiga workshop's presentation

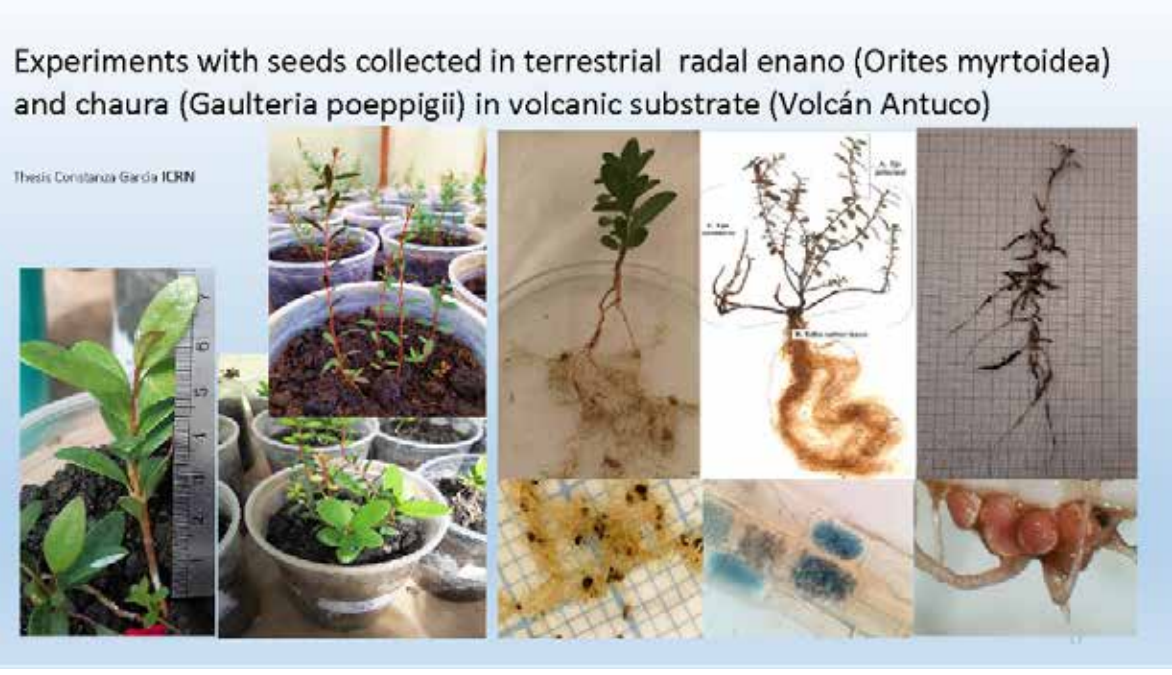
several species coexist (Cavieres et al. 229). We have seen that in many cases these neighbours have nutritionally complementary adaptations in their roots and thus one of these species can provide a type of resource which can be shared by the inhabiting species of that patch. We have detected this among species that grow on volcanic substrata in Patagonia, where notro (*Embothrium coccineum*) and cadillo (*Acaena integerrima*) are better supplied with nitrogen and phosphorus when they grow together, on the material expelled by the Hudson volcano (Piper et al. 12). These complementary radical adaptations occur in plants that have mycorrhizae (associated with fungi), nodules with nitrogen-fixing bacteria (an element that comes from the air) or proteoid roots (RP), which allow them to solubilizesparkly phosphorus from the soil.

In particular, these adaptations, the PRs, to solubilizethese nutrients, exude molecules called carboxylates (and many others) to the soil, close to their roots (rhizosphere), which have a chemical but also a

biological effect; that is, they can attract or stimulate the growth of bacteria in their rhizosphere (Renderos et al. 2427). This is possible, because plants communicate in this way with soil microbes and can even select beneficial microbes that contribute to them and/or the patch where they live. I like to call this selection mechanism 'the free pizza effect'; that is, an invitation to microbes that almost no one refuses to eat (in fact, carboxylates are food for bacteria). Countless relationships are taking place under our feet, between plants and between plants and microbes, not only in the mountains.

Through different methodologies and techniques, which include work in the field, in the greenhouse and in the laboratory, we have determined that, in the mountains, under extreme living conditions, plants resist and grow better when they are together in patches, with 'good neighbours' and that this form of growth magnifies the 'free pizza effect'. Through these strategies, these colonising plants can even improve the environment where new plant species arrive

Figure 6. Slide from Professor Zuñiga workshop's presentation



in a sequential process called 'primary succession' (Muñoz et al. 266). These colonising plants are pioneers and by improving their substrate for themselves, and their current and future neighbours, can become what are called 'ecosystem engineers' (Lambers et al. 337). We have detected that these patches of vegetation increase the diversity and abundance of microbes close to their roots, compared to soil without plants, and that within the patch the leaves of the plants are better supplied with essential nutrients for their life. Apparently, there are growth strategies that are combined to explore the substrate, which allow them to better resist these extreme conditions, making a more conservative use of resources that enables them to persist in adversity; that is, being resilient.

Part two:

Surviving the human conditions: the biopolitics of motherhood.

In November 2022, I (Paulina) joined the Inter/Disciplinary Laboratories organised by The Third Conference of the Nucleus of Artistic Research (NIA), as a participant. I was highly motivated for the potential dialogue between nature, science and art because my current research was on *Scenic and performative practices as an ecological strategy in Chile.* The lab led by Adriana La Selva and Alejandra Zuñiga-Feest was constituted by diverse strategies of play and creative practices that established a wonderful creative atmosphere between the interdisciplinary group of participants. In the first part of the workshop, Zuñiga-Feest gave a complete presentation of her research on plant resilience and living conditions in the South of Chile, of which I took very detailed notes.

One of the most beautiful exercises proposed by La Selva was 'The gift chain', where each participant created a sensorial performative gift for the rest of the group using a very simple input as a starting point. The repertoire of 'responses' were extremely diverse in terms of their materiality. Some contributors used their voice, bodies, phones, instruments etc. Each person created a response to the other's piece, creating a chain of performative gifts. We had just a few minutes to create a response to the other's material, and consequently the exercise was very dynamic and spontaneous.

Creating a bio-performance

The performance *Analfabeta* was created in response to Alejandra's presentation of a "performative gift". In a very short amount of time, I took notes from the presentation that she made and wrote freely on my own personal experiences of adaptation and resilience as a Chilean immigrant in the UK. The writing process was a combination of in-*situ* improvisation; my personal experiences of motherhood in a foreign country, with the notes I had taken from Alejandra's presentation on resilience and resistance. Each of her ideas was a stimulus to remember the adaptation process that I had gone through as a mother in the UK. The text is centerd on the idea of 'becoming' illiterate and raising children that speak another language.

ANALFABETA (Spanish version) [1]

Sensa ? El estrés de las plantas
Cuando tenía 35 años quede analfabeta
Cuando tenía 35 años quede analfabeta
Como quien queda sorda. Yo que era la profesora, la sabelotodo. Un día no entendí nada
Quede analfabeta
    una madre analfabeta

Entonces ocupe La memoria de las plantas

Mi cuerpo se silencio y me dedique a escuchar, a imitar, repetir
Repetir
Repetir
Escuchar, imitar, repetir
    una madre analfabeta

Como las raíces de las plantas que comparten lo que falta, busque un trabajo en un pub. Lave, serví y escuché
Lave, serví y escuché

Lave, serví y escuché
Las plantas toman lo que necesitan o ¿lo que sobra? ¿Cómo lo sabes?
Las plantas toman lo que necesitan o ¿lo que sobra? ¿Cómo lo sabes?
(Justicia social, equidad, comparte solidario no competitivo)? Pensaba
Volcanes de Chile pensaba
Ambientes estresantes, alta montaña. Pensaba.
hijos.
una madre analfabeta

No entiendo las tareas del colegio
No entiendo las comunicaciones de los profesores
Cuando tenía 35 años quede analfabeta
Como quien queda sorda. Yo que era la profesora, la sabelotodo. Un día no entendí nada
RESILIENCIA: superar las circunstancias traumáticas

RESISTENCIA: capacidad de resistir la fatiga, mantener un esfuerzo concreto por el mayor tiempo posible

Luego me puse a estudiar el nuevo idioma. Cuerpos que se mueven de otra manera
Que dicen gracias, cada medio metro
It is lovely to meet you
It is lovely to meet you
It is lovely to meet you
It is lovely to meet you
It is lovely to meet you
It is lovely to meet you
It is lovely to meet you
It is lovely to meet you
It is lovely to meet you

LÍNEAS DE INVESTIGACIÓN resiliencia maternidad
Lenguaje
Fui a la universidad gané beca fui doctorada
Pero ya no fui sabe lo todo
Soy sabe lo nada
Soy FISIOLOGÍA VEGETAL
Soy (la fisiología del estrés)
Soy más aun la ECOFISIOLOGÍA VEGETAL

Cuando tenía 35 años quede analfabeta
Como quien queda sorda. Yo que era la profesora, la sabelotodo. Un día no entendí nada
-INTERACCIÓN SUELO-PLANTA

cluster roots, bunch, plant
I miss my home
I miss my plants my roots in the middle of Yorkshire
My children's playground in the middle of Yorkshire
I miss my face in the cold wind
The snow in the cold Yorkshire morning
an illiterate mother
I miss the cold wind while cleaning the rubbish in the Yorkshire Pub
The invisible mother
the poetry
The Green

the poetry
The Green

La ciencia se hace en grupo / same to the performing arts ¡
RESISTIR a veces es dejarse llevar, soltar, caer hacia atrás
Radar enano crece en muy pocas partes del mundo, asociada siempre con otras plantas
Chillán y Antuco, lava, lago, cordillera

¿Cuál es la función de los cluster?

Una Sucesión vegetal, que cambia el suelo

El territorio se renueva por la lava de los volcanes. Chile es un territorio que esta siempre renovándose.

una madre analfabeta

Nutrirse de la roca. Micorrizas eating roots, minan los nutrientes

Coping with the stress

Sensar

Hacer

Cope

Resilience

Nosotros

Crece dentro de una roca

Flores rojas en nativa chilena

RAICES PROTOIDEAS

Hidropónico en agua, pero también puede crecer dentro de la roca y la rompe

Va formando suelo

¿Que significa para una planta crecer en la montaña?

LENGA

UNA GRIETA ES UNA OPORTUNIDAD

Revelando la belleza de las plantas

Todas estas plantas son resilientes y resistentes

Las plantas colonizadoras son lo que se llama INGENIEROS DEL ECOSISTEMAS, van mejorando las condiciones para que lleguen otros

Estas plantas exudan ácido cítrico, jugo de limón, y van disolviendo las rocas

Avellanos tienes raíces proteoideas

Interacción de las plantas es cooperativa
It was lovely to meet you
It was lovely to meet you
It was lovely to meet you

ANALFABETA (Illiterate) English version

Sensa? The plant stress
When I was 35 years old, I became illiterate.
When I was 35 years old, I became illiterate.
Like those who are deaf. I was the teacher, the know-it-all.
One day I didn't understand anything
become illiterate
an illiterate mother of two
Then I occupied the memory of plants

My body fell silent, and I dedicated myself to listening, imitating, repeating
Repeat
Repeat
listen, imitate, repeat
an illiterate mother

Like the Roots of the plants you share what is missing, looking for a job in a pub.
Wash, serve and listen
I washed, I served, and I listened
wash serve and listen
Do the plants take what they need or what is left over? How do you know?
Do the plants take what they need or what is left over? How do you know?
(Social justice, equity, non-competitive solidarity share)?
I Thought

volcanoes of Chile
I thought
Stressful environments, high mountains. I Thought.
children.
an illiterate mother

I don't understand their homework
I don't understand the teachers' letters
When I was 35 years old, I became illiterate.
Like those who are deaf. I was the teacher, the know-it-all.
One day I didn't understand anything
RESILIENCE: overcoming traumatic circumstances

RESISTANCE: ability to resist fatigue to maintain a specific effort for as long as possible
an illiterate mother

Then I began to study the new language. Bodies that move differently
that says thank you every half metre
It is lovely to meet you
It is lovely to meet you
It is lovely to meet you
It is lovely to meet you
It is lovely to meet you
It is lovely to meet you

LINES OF RESEARCH maternity resilience
Language
I went to university I won a scholarship I received a PhD
But I was no longer a know-it-all
I am a know-nothing
an illiterate mother
I am PLANT PHYSIOLOGY

I am (the physiology of stress)
I am even more the PLANT ECOPHYSIOLOGY

When I was 35 years old, I became illiterate.
Like those who are deaf. I was the teacher, the know-it-all.
One day I didn't understand anything
-SOIL-PLANT INTERACTION

cluster roots, bunch, plant
I miss my home
I miss my plants my roots
My children's playground
I miss my face
The snow
an illiterate mother
the poetry
The Green

Science is done in groups / same as the performing arts!
RESISTING is sometimes letting go, letting go, falling backwards
Radar enano grows in very few parts of the world, always associated with other plants
Chillan and Antuco, lava, lake, mountain range
What is the function of the clusters?
A plant succession, which changes the soil
The territory is renewed by the lava from the volcanoes.
Chile is a territory that is always renewing itself.
an illiterate mother

Feed on the rock. Mycorhizas eating roots, saps of nutrients
Coping with the stress
sense
Do
cope

resilience
Us
grows inside a rock
Red flowers in Chilean native

PROTOID ROOTS
Hydroponic in water, but can also grow inside rock and break it
It is forming soil
What does it mean for a plant to grow in the mountains?

TONGUE
A CRACK IS AN OPPORTUNITY

Revealing the beauty of plants
All these plants are resilient and resistant

The colonising plants are what are called ECOSYSTEM ENGINEERS, they improve the conditions for others to arrive.
These plants will exude citric acid, lemon juice, and dissolve the rocks.
Chilean Hazelnuts have protein roots
Plant interaction is cooperative
It was lovely to meet you
It was lovely to meet you
It was lovely to meet you

The gifts, the authors and the fire

In the context of the 'gift chain' exercise, the performance was presented to the colleagues in the laboratory. The piece was composed of three fundamental elements: reading the text, physical actions and improvisation. The text was written less than an hour before presentation, therefore all reading implied an exploration of tones, volumes and intentions. The physical actions consisted of opening

my handbag and carefully arranging the objects in full view of the participants. This action implied two things. Firstly, taking the private into the public space and giving it another order, therefore, a new reading. I discovered that the experience of feeling illiterate had generated a lot of shame, especially because the mandate said that mothers should understand what is happening around their families and explain this to their children and not vice versa. On the other hand, the exercise of metaphorically taking things out of my bag, giving them a new order, represented the power of the text: taking my shame out of the text and transforming it into resilience and resistance. Taking the text out, had allowed me to see the resilience with which I had faced the immigration experience.

Narrating the creative process of *Analfabeta* represents a series of challenges because I felt that some important element of the process was missing besides 'academic' narrative. During the writing process of the article, I had a dream. I was in the lab with the workshop's participants. We were doing a circle where one by one we passed a paper sculpture that contained a small flame of fire inside. The 'instruction' consisted of passing the sculpture to the next colleague. Changing the shape of the paper sculpture but without extinguishing the flame or burning the paper. It was an impossible mission and yet it was accomplished. Each sculpture was different, there were geometric flowers, like origami and marine plants. All made of paper with their flame inside. The dream helped me to understand two elements of the creative process. The container for the fire was a plant, which is very consistent with the theme of this work, but there was something dangerous and supernatural in this act. The sculptures were made of paper so they should have burned with the small flame, but for some extraordinary reason they didn't. The 'paper plant' container did not catch fire but only protected the flame. The flame, of course, symbolically, in many cultures means life. But here I think it also contains the idea of authorship, collaboration and co-creation. The flame or the 'work' was passed from hand to hand without an owner but with the aim of keeping it lit. It was an action that aimed at taking care of life and what is alive, which could ultimately be the purpose of the process of resistance and resilience in nature: to keep beings alive and take care of life in all its dimensions. This occurred in a completely natural way as a kind response to a gift that Alejandra had given to me. It has given me a new perspective on my experience of not belonging. Also, it

allowed me to see motherhood as a biopolitical (Foucault "Vigilar") form of resistance.

Part three

Motherhood as resistance: a biopolitical reading of care

The concept of resistance is used by various disciplines such as physics, biology, political theory, sociology and cultural studies. Resistance is a concept that generates a multiplicity of meanings. Many times, the idea of resistance can have different meanings and uses, even within the same discipline. From the perspective of the social sciences, Baaz et al. state that there are a wide range of definitions and concepts linked with the idea of resistance. For example, 'everyday resistance', 'critical resistance', and 'civil resistance', including non-confrontational types of resistance, as Scott has described in his works. In the Chilean political context, for example, García has applied Said's concept of 'themes of cultural resistance' to describe the tension between the Chilean government and indigenous communities, focused on the Mapuche conflict (Alvarez and Bronfman 318).

Several authors (Fernandes; Mikael Baaz et al.; Maase) agree that it is not possible to establish one definition for the term resistance. In order to make sense of cultural context and biopolitical processes, Fernandes proposes that

> the concept of resistance is reserved to name the counter-hegemonic social attitudes, behaviours and actions which aim at weakening the classification among social categories and which are directed against the dominant power(s) and against those who exercise it (them), having as a purpose its (their) redistribution in a more equitable way (174).

Discussions that seek to perpetuate the existing state of things deny the possibility of resistance. Díaz thus conceives it as creative and productive when he affirms that resistance is co-extensive with power and is rigorously contemporary. It is not the inverted image of power, but it is, like power:

> as inventive, as mobile, as productive as it is. It is necessary that power be organized, coagulated and cements itself. Let it go from the bottom up, like him, and be distributed strategically (117).

Resistance could be also conceptualised as a process of creation and transformation. In this context the body is the place of resistance. According to anthropology scholars, the body is understood as "the place of experience, desire, reflection, resistance, response and social change, at different economic, political, social, aesthetic and cultural intellectual crossroads" (Esteban 54).

Analfabeta is a work that brings together two conceptions of Resistance. On one side, the ability to resist fatigue, maintain a specific effort for as long as possible, which comes from biology dialoguing with a more biopolitical narrative of resistance. The text explores "illiterate motherhood" and the experience of not speaking the language of your children as a biopolitical experience of displacement. The text investigates motherhood as a form of resistance and resilience; the capacity to overcome traumatic circumstances (adaptive capacity, flexibility, strength) as biopolitical circumstances of immigrant women. The piece presents a reflection on the sense of resistance to the ideal of motherhood imposed by biopower (disciplinary institutions – family, religion, nation, language, school) which the subject constructs in a body narrative about her bodily experience as an illiterate mother.

Analfabeta re-signifies motherhood and performative narratives as practices of resistance to biopower. Foucault conceived the term 'biopower' in the 1970s as part of his explorations into how various disciplinary techniques directed at training the body deliver the basis of the governing power to survive life. Foucault analysed how it became possible to:

> manage a population through the development of new rational and demographic techniques aimed at measuring, classifying and managing the immanent characteristics of a given population and territory. (Donger and Katsouraki 2)

From another perspective, Polezzi explains how Foucault, in his

discussion of the biopolitics of contemporary societies, identifies language as the supplement which distinguishes human politics from any other form of social interaction:

> the element which allows us to move from the distinction between pleasure and pain to that between good and evil, right and wrong, and which ultimately makes us what we are: ''homo sapiens loquendi'' (353).

The environment where translation encounters migration, where the work of translation is directly connected to migrants and to their lives, where linguistic and cultural differences intersect and become visible, then arises as a key location for the struggle over the control of individual lives as well as social processes (Polezzi). That territory is an extremely political space and any act of translation that inhabits it is, therefore, an eminently political action.

Maternal action is also intrinsically linked to 'mothering' and 'performance'. All three terms are active and invoke a sense of doing. All three are political and linked to activism, to going beyond the prescribed normative maternal identity, to engage in a kind of struggle for a different, self-defined position that will remain open to the plurality of others. Through the invocation of maternal action, mothers position themselves as active agents, as performers, in the world, beyond the domestic intimate sphere. The three terms, mothering, performance, and maternal action, are also social; they can only be understood in relation to our wider otherworld and its structures, including the species beyond humanity.

Maternal action that seeks to treat "everyone with maternal care is a struggle to move from the domestic to the public, as Hannah Arendt argues" (Šimic and Underwood-Lee 87). Going public is going from the individualised struggle of a mother at home to thinking about mothers as a collective. For example, we can consider those who breastfeed as a marginalised group, in the patriarchal context in which we live, structured around the devaluation of care. To invoke the group is not to reduce the mothers to a homogenizedmass; instead, maternal action must be experienced by active agents in relation to other active agents: a collective of individuals who respect and work with each other, what Judith Butler and Athena Athanasiou have called 'plural performativity'. Butler and Athanasiou's discussion

is based primarily on social movements and agencies involved in politics and street activism. This paper proposes to investigate "the maternal" beyond the limited world of the domestic as it is predominantly presented. On the contrary, we wants to install the discussion in the public space, visualising maternal action and affirming that said action must be carried out in public and must participate and be visible in the world. Butler, following Hannah Arendt, points out that it is when bodies come together as a community that they can move into the political realm: 'the bodies in their plurality reclaim the public'' (2013). Thus, "the maternal'' happens, transiting through public space, as a performed and embodied act (performance), that different maternal bodies transit towards through maternal action.

Despite this dichotomous vision of motherhood, Hays questions the exercise of the maternal role in the 21st century, in which women try to manoeuvre and fulfil their professional development and the upbringing of their children. It is consigned as intensive maternity, in which women must invest a large amount of time, energy and money in raising their children. Under this requirement, women who stay at home carry a devalued position from the social point of view, while those who work carry a double role or double shift, in which they are in charge of domestic chores and childbearing. Even when the father figure has been incorporated into spaces that were previously the exclusive domain of women, women continue to be in charge of childbearing more than men, in the same way that girls are more concerned than boys with household chores. The various discourses that make possible the emergence of motherhood, which is not directly related to the biological capacity to reproduce life, but rather to the task of raising (Badinter), are strategically deployed in knowledge-power devices that account for of a way of being in the world (Rivera).

Part four:
Reflections on interdisciplinary dialogues between the sciences and artistic practices

Alejandra

My first sensation is of heat and uncertainty; I like to plan every detail of an activity well in advance. I let myself go, surrendering to the exercise that this arts research workshop summoned from us. I felt a huge door opening into a garden, ready to be explored. This happened in me, after addressing resilience and resistance, from 'my' model of plants that live in extreme conditions in the mountains. Thus, we exercised dialogue with our experiences; the ones that have moved each one of us and the messages that emerge, like an epiphany from our own life stories, identifying ourselves with these other beings: vegetables. We say, "a crack in the rock is an opportunity", that message inherited from the vegetable experience resonates with us. We say, "a microbe told me," communicating these underground stories of multiple interrelationships, as if it were a dance that is practised between the plants that have come to colonize those substrates, which are not yet soil, that were thrown with force from a volcano.

Practice brings new questions: how do I connect with all living things? How do I make a synthesis by building a network, with all these experiences of moving molecules? The molecules below are obvious and aerial. In the group, I let myself be carried away with the dance and the drums, with the beating within me and thus I now 'colonize' the space of this white room, as if drawing the space with the 'dance of the winds'. I join the network of dancing souls, I coordinate, submerging myself slightly in each look. I rediscover the richness of having opened this door, that starting point, that 'flight line' from where we build this practice in art.

This article is relevant to biologists and ecologists that are looking to expand their research and results to the community and could be a way to improve dialogue to help them realize how to outreach to society. Also, it is important because it represents an exercise in co-creating knowledge among art-science, science-art, from different research areas. Nature, plants and this knowledge have been a part of art as inspiration now and during the naturalist ex-

pedition to South America in past centuries, developing enormous contributions in terms of understanding nature, vegetation, land processes and heritage worldwide. However, here, in this co-creation of it went further, contributing towards the development of a transdisciplinary exercise.

It brought an enriching point of view to expand my knowledge about plant ecology and plant ecophysiology. Although biologists previously used the 'humanization' of plant functioning to show scientific results normally published in papers, here, I emphasizedthese ideas to keep participants closer to a belowground reality. A friendly way of communicating science to other audiences that works well, interdisciplinary dialogue like this probably creates a displacement of the limits between science and art. Oftentimes, biologists use different narratives in their presentations. I like to use humanisation from an intuitive approach to show our research group's results. In this case, this co-creation could represent a way to move further and expand our disciplinary limits in a 'dance' with artists, just as nature dances over seasons or roots dance with microbes into the soil.

Paulina

This article aims to explore the questions: what does it mean, from the point of view of the arts and sciences to develop an interdisciplinary laboratory? Is it still possible, from the space of freedom that art is supposed to embody, to deploy renewed links with heterogeneous ways of thinking and building knowledge? How is that done?

Interdisciplinarity implies points of contact between the disciplines in which each one contributes its problems, concepts and research methods. It refers to the work of cooperation and integration between two or more disciplines and its focus is to obtain syntheses that go beyond the limits of the participating disciplines. If for the multidiscipline the character of interaction is juxtaposition, for interdisciplinary dialogue it is an integration of concepts, methodologies, and practices (Klein). Interdisciplinarity is a new restructuring of knowledge that considers the ways in which different disciplines can lead towards the solution of different and novel questions. And as we have already pointed out, it responds to the idea of conflict; of everything that is complex. According to Edgar Morin, there is an ever-deeper line of separation between our acquired and segmented

knowledge and reality, which is increasingly transversal, multidimensional and global. From here, we come to understand that the complex can be solved by the interdisciplinary and this can result in a trans-discipline (Dalmau & Górriz). Bearing in mind that the disciplines are specific fields reflecting a fragment of reality, their overcoming is necessary because the discipline is an approach that indicates its own expansion in its potential root.

The option for interdisciplinary work, without neglecting the incidence of personal trajectories, is part of an epistemological conception. If all construction of an object of knowledge is related to points of view and to the place from which it is elaborated, the articulation of different perspectives and places opens different potentialities. According to Pombo, we are in a situation in which we need to broaden the very concept of interdisciplinarity. We already had to amplify the concept of science; we already had to move from a science that was predominantly analytical to a science that seeks to deal with the new complexities that it constantly discovers and invents, proceeding more and more transversally:

> We have to realize that we are in a world in which walls have been torn down (although others are being erected, the fall of the Berlin Wall is an event of inexhaustible symbolic meaning) (43).

We are in a world of cancellation and the mixing of borders. As Agamben considers, the emerging global community is a community of immigrants, mestizos, stateless, the impure, 'landless' people (6) hat awaits us is a world in which one's own sense of identity (or would it be better to say, sense of belonging?) is lost. This is also a new reality that demands from us the capacity to find broader ways of thinking and that, very probably, has to do with the issues that are thought in accordance with the scope of the word 'interdisciplinarity'. Basically, this suggests that we are going from a tree-like scheme, in which there was a root, a Cartesian stem that rose impressively above us, which divided into branches and small segments from which several 'succulent fruits emerged', all of them linked by a kind of harmonious and fertile hierarchy, towards a network model – a very complex constellation, where there are no longer hierarchies, nor privileged links (54).

In this perspective, art-based interdisciplinary research proposes a new epistemology based on practice. Within artistic practices, the innumerable tactics and knowledge of everyday life from multiple perspectives in various fields are named as 'ways of doing' (practical or critical ways of articulation), rather than disciplines in and of themselves. In the case of *Analfabeta*, these new ways of knowing and creating within interdisciplinary practice arise from the situated experience of the South, reconstructing the migratory experience from a decolonising perspective.

Following De Sousa Santos' thinking about the experiences generated through social struggles, like migration and exile, requires thinking from an epistemological, geographical, and political standpoint. Speaking from the South and with the South means producing knowledge "with its subjects rather than about them" (245), in a permanent dialogue mediated by intercultural and inter-political translation. It means generating sound, relevant knowledge from other perspectives, differently formulated. This is a knowledge that requires "new ethical relationships and is performative, healing, transformative; it goes beyond being decolonising, democratising, and depatriarchalizing" (246). It is a knowledge that, by using different expressions, can highlight emergent thought from the South, a knowledge attentive to both the individual and the collective needs of individual and collectively oppressed subjectivities. Such knowledge must be unruly, disruptive, provocative, and rebellious.

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Notes

1 We invite English readers to try reading the full Spanish version first to experience the estrangement and difficulties the artist herself went through.

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Patrick Campbell is a theater maker and Senior Lecturer in Drama and Contemporary Performance at Manchester Metropolitan University (UK). He is co-author of the monographs *A Poetics of Third Theater: Performer Training, Dramaturgy, Cultural Action,* written alongside Dr. Jane Turner, and *Owning our Voices: Vocal Discovery in the Wolfsohn-Hart Tradition*, written alongside Margaret Pikes, which were both published by Routledge in 2021. He is a Core Member of Cross Pollination.

Elias D'hollander is a doctoral researcher who graduated Performance Studies at the University of Ghent, where he is affiliated the research groep Studies in Performing Arts and Media (S:PAM). His current FWO-funded research moves within the rich tissue of choreography and architecture. On this subject he has published the book *Architectuur choreograferen / Choreografie architecturen (Architecting Choreography / Choreographing Architecture)* in the Agent-series on the work of choreographer Radouan Mriziga, *My dwelling is my dancing* about the architectural qualities in the work of Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker in Documenta

and *Ariadne ich liebe dich*, working on the figure of the architect for the Desired Spaces-project of ICA, CIVA and VAi. Together with this work as researcher, he is developing dramaturgical/collaborative work as well.

Andrea Maciel Garcia worked as a visiting lecturer at the University of Bristol, where she concluded her postdoctorate on contemporary performance and public spaces. She was a Lecturer in Movement and Contemporary Theater at the Department of Theater – PUC- RIO and University of the City – Brazil for over a decade and has conducted several research groups in the fields of Dance and Performance, supervising undergraduate and postgraduate students at New York University, University of Bristol, Queen Mary University of London, and the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro- Brazil. Her academic/artistic work investigates the physical resonance of social-urban landscapes through dance, performance and installations with an emphasis on the relationship between body and intercultural performances. Maciel is a core research member of the Cross Pollination Platform, a peripatetic laboratory for the dialogue in between theatrical practices and a resident group at Nordisk Teaterlaboratorium (Denmark). She is also co-founder and Artistic Director of the NGO Intercultural Roots Arts for Health & Arts for Social Change. https://www.interculturalroots.org/

William Kentridge was born in Johannesburg in 1955. He is a graphic artist, filmmaker and theater artist renowned for his humanist and poetic perspective on apartheid, colonialism and totalitarianism, and on their lingering effects. Best known for his allegorical animations of charcoal drawings that he erases and appends frame by frame, Kentridge has explored disciplines ranging from sculpture to books, stereoscope to opera. His works are included in numerous international collections, including the Museum of Modern Art, New York; Tate Modern, London; the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; the San Francisco

Museum of Modern Art; the Stedeljk Museum, Amsterdam and the Albertina Museum, Vienna. Kentridge was elected as an Honorary Academician at the Royal Academy of Arts in 2014, was awarded the prestigious Praemium Imperiale Prize for painting in Japan in 2019, was elected to a Chair at the Académie des Beaux Arts in France in 2021, and that a major retrospective of his 40-year career was held at the Royal Academy in 2022. He remains based in Johannesburg.

Adriana La Selva is a theater-maker, a performer, a networker and a researcher. She is currently a fellow FWO researcher, working on a Ph.D. at S:PAM (Studies in Performance and Media- Ghent University) - in association with IPEM (Institute for Psychoacoustics and Electronic Music), Utrecht University, Manchester Metropolitan University and Aalborg University. Her research investigates what it means to practice an archive, by addressing the transmission of embodied practices through virtual media and dramaturgical approaches to archival practices. In 2009, she concluded her Master's degree in Contemporary Arts, practice-based, at the University of Lancaster, UK, on Deleuze and Guattari's notion of becoming in relation to physical theater. She is since 2015 member of the international theater group The Bridge of Winds, led by Odin Teatret actress Iben Nagel Rasmussen. Adriana co-founded Cross Pollination together with Marije Nie, an international network of performers and researchers, which focuses on the dialogue in-between practices, new ways of knowledge building and understanding collaboration.

Miranda Laurence is a dance dramaturg and cultural producer, currently PhD Researcher in the 'Mobilizing Dramaturgy' co-tutelle programme at center for Dance Research, Coventry University and Department of Dramaturgy and Musicology, Aarhus University. Her work often focuses on generating and facilitating surprising meetings between academic researchers, artists, practitioners, and lay experts, including as founder-director

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Vera Mihailovich-Dickman is a Johannesburg-born but Paris-based research associate in English and Interculturality. She combines English teaching and developing Intercultural communication skills through embodied practices and the interactive exploration of critical incidents. She was Head of Department of Languages and Cultures at the Graduate Engineering School, Telecom Paris, for 15 years. Her earlier academic studies on the 20th century French artist Henri Michaux led her to a PhD in History and Semiology of Text and Image with subsequent publications. She is today associated with the SHALL Department and the center SPIRAL of Art-Science research at the Institut Polytechnique de Paris (IPP) and is also a member of the SLAM Lab (UEVE), a PlugIn Lab of the Université Paris-Saclay. She belongs to the IMT Didalang Interculturality and Humanities Research Network and is an active member of SIETAR France.

Marije Nie (www.marijenie.com) is a musician with her feet, a dancing percussion player. She is also a creator, performer, educator, researcher and facilitator. She dances with classical music, jazz, film and dance theater, creates interdisciplinary theater pieces, creative interventions and workshops. Marije is fascinated by the poetry of steps, and their ability to traverse many different worlds. Using the universal language of rhythm, she steps onto concert stages, film screens, boardrooms, and barricades, bringing vigorous energy and joyous virtuosity. She received the Jur Naessens prize for innovation in music and continues to find new paths in music and tap dance. She is co-founder of Cross Pollination (www.crosspollination.space) and the Parliament of Practices (www.parliamentofpractices.space), which combine research

and creation through the dialogue in-between practices. Sharing the knowledge and working methods of artists is a passionate mission for her. Activities in this field range from interactive concerts to lectures, articles, workshops and sessions in which professionals from in- and outside of the arts work together on a shared theme.

Leonie Persyn (°1989 – Kortrijk) is affiliated to the Department of Music, Visual Arts and Performance Studies, at Ghent University (2017-2023). She is researching the heautonomous functioning of sound to image within the context of contemporary performing arts. She was trained as a visual artist (Sint-Lucas, Antwerp) and as an art historian (Ghent, University). After her studies, she developed an own practice and worked for several art institutions, artists & companies.

Julia Pond (https://juliapond.com) is an independent, interdisciplinary dance artist active as a performer, maker, researcher, and teacher / facilitator. Her current performance project explores value and productivity in the context of a fictional company called BRED. She is currently engaged in practice-based PhD research (fully funded by AHRC/TECHNE) at Kingston University London into embodied practices for sustainable economics. Julia is also a co-initiator of the podcast DanceOutsideDance.

Diana Taylor is University Professor and Professor of Performance Studies and Spanish at NYU. She is the author of *Theater of Crisis: Drama and Politics in Latin America* (1991), *Disappearing Acts: Spectacles of Gender and Nationalism in Argentina's 'Dirty War',* Duke U.P., 1997; and *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (Duke U.P., 2003). She was the recipient of the Guggenheim Fellowship in 2005, an ACLS Digital Innovation Fellowship, 2013-14, and a Research Fellowship at the Institut d'Etudes Avancée de Paris, 2016-2017. She was President of the Modern Language Association

(MLA) in 2017. Taylor also is the founder and past director of the *Hemispheric Institute of Performance and Politics*, funded by the Ford, Mellon, Rockefeller, Rockefeller Brothers and Henry Luce Foundations. In 2018, she was inducted into the American Academy of Arts and Science. In 2021, she was awarded the Edwin Booth Award for "outstanding contribution to the NYC theater community, and to promote integration of professional and academic theater."

Vinicius Torres Machado is a theater maker, professor of aesthetics at the Art Department at the State University of São Paulo (Brazil). He has dedicated his career to the study of the sensuous aspects of performance, emphasising the materiality of the stage. He has created and coordinated the Research Group Materiality of the Stage at State University of São Paulo for 6 years. He is the author of the books A máscara no teatro moderno (Ed. Unesp), Cena em devir: um instante para que algo inexista (Ed. Annablume) and Em Tempo, introdução a tragédia na Grécia antiga (Ed. Annablume) which approaches connections between performance and philosophy.

Lotte van den Berg (www.lottevandenberg.nu) uses the theatrical form to make relationships visible; relationships between humans and more than humans. She does this not only within the walls of the theater, but also outside them, working in the public spaces of cities around the world to make visible, precisely there, what already is. Images, movements and scenes are reduced to their essence with attention to detail. Van den Berg moves between the worlds of dance, theater, performance and film, creating an open and very personal style, which invites the audience to contemplate different perspectives and angles. Working with professionals and non-professionals, on location and in theaters, she chooses to be inspired by what is happening around us, in everyday life. As was written, "Van den Berg blows a bubble around the ordinary to grasp its naked essence". Lotte van den Berg has won several awards. Her work can be seen at renowned European theater festivals.

Gustavo Vicente is a teacher, researcher, performer, and artistic director. He is a professor at the School of Arts and Humanities of the University of Lisbon, where he lectures on Performance Studies, Contemporary Dance, and Practice-as-Research. Integrated researcher at the center for Theater Studies, where he also coordinates the research group Critical Discourses in Performing Arts. Member (and former co-convener) of the Choreography & Corporeality Working Group of the International Federation for Theater Research. Member of the Editorial Board of *Sinais de Cena: performing arts and theater studies journal*. He began his career as an actor in 2001, gaining broad experience both in theater and cinema, before going on to win the 1st prize at the Portuguese Academic Theater Festival with his first project as an artistic director in 2009 and, more recently, the award for Best Solo Performance by Guia dos Teatros 2019. Regular contributor of Teatro do Vestido.

Sara Živkovič Kranjc is conducting her PhD in Performing Arts Studies at the Academy of Theater, Radio, Film and Television, University of Ljubljana, Slovenia, focusing on the relation between dramaturgy and silence. As a dance dramaturge she worked with choreographers in co/productions of Bora Bora – dans og visuelt teater, Dansehallerne, Skånes Dansteater, LANDERER&COMPANY, MUOVI/Fabio Liberti, Institute 0.1, Bunker, Flota/Matjaž Farič, and in artistic residencies at Performing Arts Platform, Dance & Dramaturgy EU Network, Aaben Dans, Riksteatern among others. In 2016 she co-established Institute for contemporary art practice and theory 0.1, where she also works as producer and curator.

Alejandra Zuñiga-Feest is a biologist and Doctor in Biological Sciences, Botanical area. She has carried out Postdoctoral stays at the University of Western Ontario Canada and at the University of Western Australia. She is currently a full Professor and Director of the Institute of Environmental and Evolutionary Sciences at the Universidad Austral of Chile. She teaches plant ecophysiology, plant stress physiology, and plant physiology to undergraduate and graduate students. She is interested in interdisciplinary collaboration, ties with society, and biological conservation.

Forthcoming Issues:

Documenta XLI (2) - Theater and Law - Winter 2023
Documenta XLII (1) - Dance + New Tech - Summer 2024