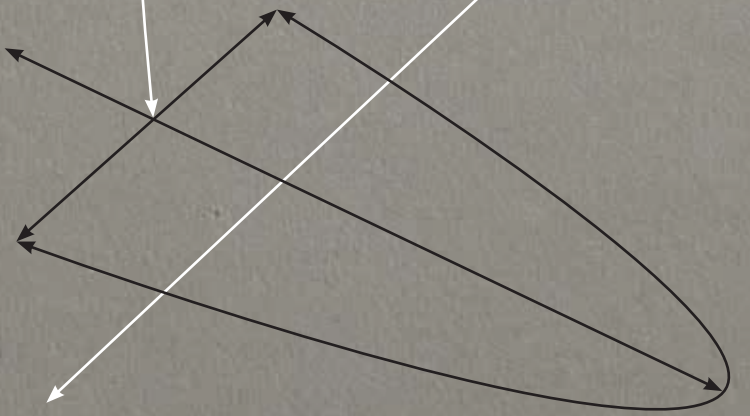
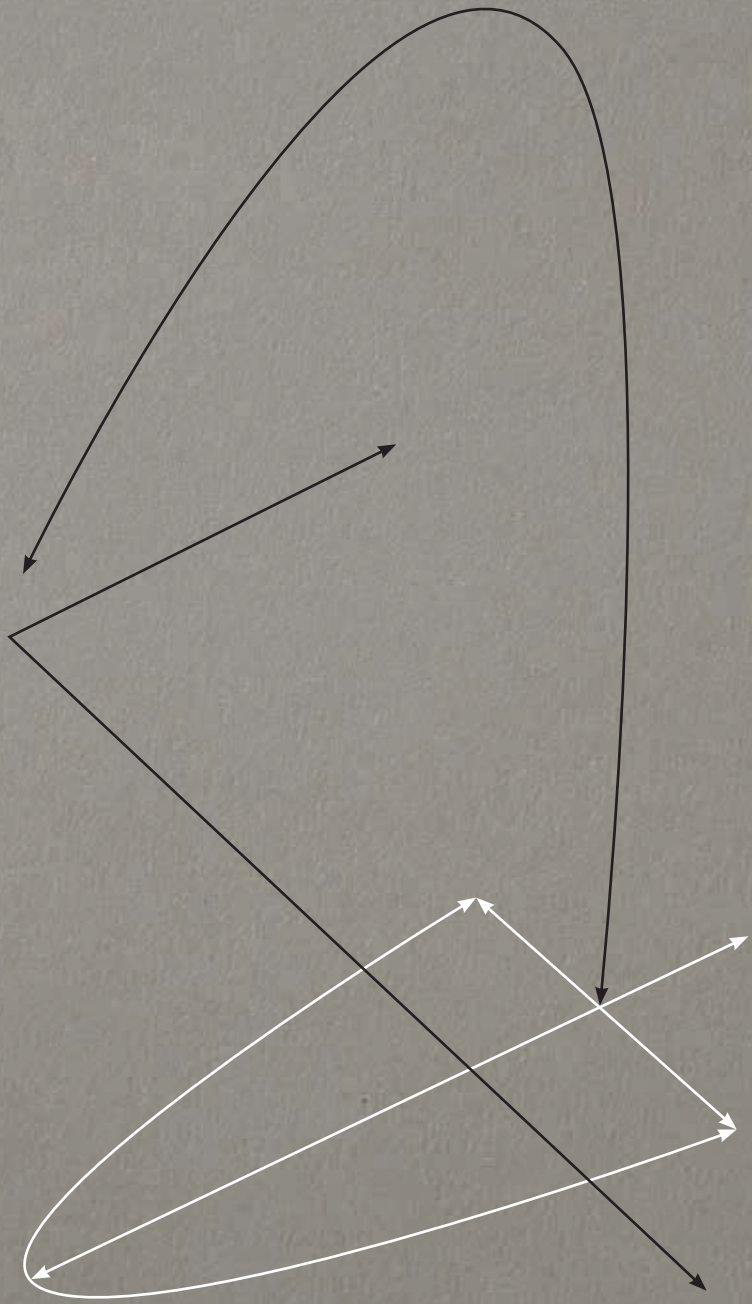
LOOKING FOR DIRECTION

Rethinking Theatre Directing Practices and Pedagogies in the 21st Century





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Rethinking Theatre Directing Practices and Pedagogies in the 21st Century

UNIARTS HELSINKI

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INTRODUCTION

Ramunė Balevičiūtė
&
Egill Pálsson

…it all started in Berlin in 2014. And it started with an egg salad.

Some teachers from different schools met in Berlin for an egg salad made by prof. Egill Pálsson and began to talk. What are we teaching when we teach directing, why are we teaching and who are we teaching?

Later, we realised that it is hardly possible to separate the training of directors from directorial practices. This is how the idea of the Erasmus+ project ALEXANDRIA NOVA, was born. This book is one of the outcomes of that project which took place during the years 2019-2022, dedicated to the creation of an international and diverse learning environment for the relatively small directing programmes of North European theatre schools. The network was built on the personal relationships (and being a former chef, on his ability to make and appreciate good food) of professor Pálsson, who has studied and worked in all of the Nordic countries and ended up being a professor in Ernst Busch, Berlin.

The title ALEXANDRIA NOVA was coined by prof. Robert Schuster from the Ernst Busch Theater School. Alexandria was the site of one of the largest and most prestigious libraries in the ancient world. The myth recounts that when trying to think of ways to preserve knowledge after the destruction of the Library of Alexandria, the priests considered many methods and materials but one appeared to fit best. It had to do with human beings' lust for games. This is how Tarot cards were invented. Thus, knowledge would prevail due to people's lust for playing games. In the frame of the ALEXANDRIA NOVA project, knowledge was also shared via play and games, since workshops and laboratories were at the very centre of the activities.

In a similar way, *Looking for Direction. Rethinking Theatre Directing Practices and Pedagogies in the 21st Century* is a collection of essays that was born out of theatre professionals' desire to share different perspectives and points of view regarding directing. This book might be considered as a playground where teachers of directing meet and share their thoughts about practices and methods, in the hope that it may give some impulses and ideas about how to play, how to create plays, and how to make play a part of our way of sharing knowledge.

The book is divided into four chapters and readers are welcome to jump in wherever they want, and move around freely. IT IS UP TO YOU HOW YOU PLAY WITH THE BOOK. It should be pointed out that, according to various thinkers and researchers of play, the peculiarity of play lays in its ambiguity: it can be light, joyful, and provoking, yet deep and serious. So, the four categories or playgrounds are:

LOOKING BACK
Skills. Methods. Techniques.

LOOKING INSIDE
Embodied Directing.

LOOKING AROUND
Community. Culture. Collaboration.

LOOKING FORWARD
Pedagogies of Directing.

The first chapter might be seen as a toolkit for craftsmen. It has a wide range of tools: from Stanislavsky's Action Analyses and Physical Action Method to such modern methods as montage and ludic structures. In *Looking back* we wanted to put the emphasis on the variety of first-hand

directing experiences through the articles of some of the renowned contributors who have been active as teachers for years while at the same time devising their own directing strategies and methods as theatre artists (Runar Hodne, Egill Pálsson, Kristina Hagström-Ståhl) as well as the practitioners of the younger generation (Loreta Vaskova and Mareike Nele Dobewall) who try to explore the limits of perception of contemporary theatre directing strategies. The focus in *Looking back* is on bringing traditional theatre directing crafts and methods closer to the requirements of contemporary theatre.

The second chapter *Looks inside* and dives into the very profoundness of the processes of directing paying attention also to the director's body. Theatre makers and researchers Una Þorleifsdóttir, Milda Al-Slamah, Mika Leskinen and Riko Saatsi reveal their unique and very personal, metaphorical and practical at the same time, approach to the mechanism of directing as well as the director's work on herself.

The third chapter *Looks around* and turns towards community, culture and collaborations. This chapter puts directing in a broader context and raises many important questions about the director's social responsibility and theatre's potential to imply social change. Moreover, the essays by Anja Suša, Rodolfo García Vázquez, Johannes Maria Schmit and Yana Ross discuss the topics of audience participation and its identity and self-awareness.

Lastly, *Looking forward* presents pedagogies of directing, because approaches to directors' training shape the future of theatre. The position of a director is a hot spot in theatre today. We need to confront the new questions of power and hierarchy in our work in a very concrete way, as well as the questions of representation and interpretation. As professor Kevin Kuhlke asks in his article, how can we create shared meaning on stage when the metanarratives are losing their universality and the audiences interpret meaning more diversely than ever before?

This last chapter - as well as the whole book - is about searching for good questions and maybe even some suggestions for answers. We are looking for a new way of being/becoming a director, but we still believe that the traditions we carry have a lot to give for the future. The chapter starts with an overview of the history of directing pedagogies (Pauliina Hulkko) and opens up some ways of teaching directing today (Saana Lavaste and Kevin Kuhlke). Finally, we are left with an article dealing with the heart of our craft: action and the ways of creating it by Robert Schuster. In this article the form and content come together and the focus turns to the reader, to the director making a proposition, taking a step, creating the action.

How can you do that?

We invite you to play with this book, jump around, change it, add something, rewrite it and, if you like, throw it right back at us in a dialogue. This is our experience as teachers and directors from the middle of the 90s to the present day, but the future belongs to the students.

LOOKING BACK

Skills.
Methods.
Techniques.

Is there a craft to
contemporary theatre
directing?

Can theatre directing be
taught and learned?

Is contemporary theatre
directing pedagogy more
about learning or
unlearning?

How much do we learn
as we teach?

Where does
a contemporary theatre
director stand in relation
to traditional directing
methods and skills?

How can we invent
the unified vocabulary
to communicate the art
of theatre directing?

Loreta Vaskova (1986) is a theatre director. After graduating from Klaipėda University, she continued her master's studies at the Vsevolod Meyerhold Centre, Moscow. Loreta Vaskova obtained her PhD in Art at the Lithuanian Academy of Music and Theatre (LMTA) and in 2014, started to teach there. Her first course focused on biomechanics for actors; later, Loreta Vaskova assisted director Oskaras Koršunovas in the course for actors he was leading. Currently, Loreta is teaching Documentary Theatre.

Besides this, as a theatre director, Loreta Vaskova practices documentary theatre beyond the walls of the Academy: her numerous publications and various seminars are all dedicated to the topic of documentary theatre. In addition to her research work, Loreta Vaskova has always been devoted to the theatre: she has directed 12 drama performances, five contemporary operas, and as many as 15 non-traditional theatre projects for play readings.

Loreta Vaskova is a passionate life-long learner, continuously developing her professional skills in internships and seminars in the USA, the Czech Republic, Poland, Russia, Denmark, Portugal, Great Britain, France and other countries.

SOME NOTES FROM A STAGE DIRECTOR'S DIARY (2013 TO 2020)

Loreta Vaskova

1. A WORD OF INTRODUCTION

I would like to start by clarifying some things about my directing background. I have studied theatre directing at three universities: I received my BA degree at Klaipėda University (2010), my MA at the Moscow School of Fine Arts (2013) and my PhD at the Lithuanian Academy of Music and Theatre (2019). The first two directing programmes share the common goal of training a theatre director to interpret literature and translate it onto the stage. It therefore goes without saying that, as a student of directing, I have mostly learned my profession by staging novelettes, novel excerpts, and classical or contemporary plays. The process of creating the literary aspect of a performance looked like this: studying the author's biography, reading other works by the author, discovering the author's hidden message, and finally coming up with a directing solution. In this way, the author of a play is always placed hierarchically above the director in the creation of theatre, which is why we were taught in the studios that the author's word is 'sacred'. For example, my BA thesis supervisor used to say about the text of a play: "if the author has written this, it means that this is necessary and we must leave it in the play", because any cutting of the text was seen as disrespectful to the author's idea or as the director's inability to grasp the 'underlying meaning' the playwright intended.

The opposite is true for documentary theatre, which began to interest me during my third year at university (Lithuanian Academy of Music Theatre, 2019). I carried out some artistic research called "Documentary Theatre: Creative Methods of Verbatim" and, while writing the thesis and in parallel creating the first verbatim performances, a fundamental difference emerged in that I was starting to work without having a play. The process starts with first having to collect the material and fitting it into the structure of the performance. Of course, there are also similarities between this process and the work of a director in staging a play, but I have used this example to show that documentary theatre can be faced with a certain specificity, which I will reveal in more detail in this paper by presenting my personal diaries from the period between 2013 and 2020.

I was prompted to adopt this personal perspective in the creation of documentary performances by the phenomenological insight that sometimes "the source which stares us in the face and as the ultimate court of appeal in our knowledge of these things, [is] our *experience* of them"[1]. So, I'd like to believe that the story of my becoming a theatre director can best be told through my casual intonation and my diaries. Moreover, looking now at my creative biography with the perspective of time, I can see now that my learning trajectory in making documentary performances as a director followed a path of questioning requiring me to find new tools, rethink the stage of making a performance, to experiment in the rehearsal rooms, and to find information in various books and workshops. Indeed, using the document in this way for my paper is close to the genre of documentary theatre itself, where the creators rely on authentic written or spoken sources for creating their performances.

My interest in documentary theatre sparked from the first performance I staged without a play: *59'Online* (project "Atvira erdvė" ("Open Space"), Arts Printing House, Vilnius, 2013). In the process of creating the performance, the whole creative team and I wrote texts, searched for texts on the Internet, used true stories and then adapted them. Later, I felt that this process left me with more questions than answers,

1 Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, Taylor&Francis e-library, 2005, p.27, English translation by Kegan Paul.

which was the precursor to my further interest and led me to the genre of documentary theatre. In the context of my official CV, the *59'Online* production seems at first glance to be just another ordinary production in my biography, but if we focus on it more closely, there is an opportunity to see what lies behind such official entries in the biographies of theatre artists.

8. **2012 November 27**, reading performance, play "She left again". playwright: Goda Dapsyte, National drama festival "Versmes" (National drama theatre, Vilnius, Lithuania).
9. **2013 September 19**, performance "Mother, I'm Clown" with second year actors - students, Lithuanian Music and Theatre Academy ("Ramybes kulturos centras", Palanga, Lithuania).
10. **2013 October 19 and 20**, theatre and music performance "59'Online" in the project "Open Space", composer: Rita Maciliunaite, actors: Dovile Karaliute, Dainius Jankauskas, musician: Narimantas Besakirskas (Arts Printing House, Vilnius, Lithuania).
11. **2013 November 20**, reading performance "IF" (playwriter Gabriele Labanauskaite) in the project "New drama days"(National Drama Theatre, Vilnius, Lithuania).
12. **2013 November 29**, "8'Metamorphosis" by F. Kafka novel "Metamorphosis" in the project South Baltic Academy of Independent Theatre, (Theatre Gdynia Glowna, Gdynia, Poland).

An excerpt from my CV.

May 15, 2013

Today is a very nice sunny day, it's almost summer, but unfortunately I've been on the computer all day preparing for the rehearsals of the play *59'Online*. The first idea for the performance was fairly abstract: I wanted to create a performance to explore online technologies and show what can happen on the Internet during the space of one hour. In our discussions, it became clear that, as a creative team, we are interested in showing the increasingly closer connection between people and modern technology as more and more of our personal lives move into virtual space. We've been writing or researching texts for the upcoming performance on the Internet. Most of what we do is browsing without any specific direction and, when something interesting comes up – for example, an app, a video, or a text – we discuss it later during rehearsals. But as I browse and look for blogs, more interesting material, and more texts, I find more and more texts posted by teenagers who are the most active in the online space. I also discovered today that teenagers have such a thing as vlogs, i.e., video diaries posted on YouTube. At the beginning of the creative process, we thought that our play would be addressed to our generation, which has undergone many technological revolutions since 1990. Let's say that little by little the computer has become part of our daily lives. In rehearsal, however, you can see that most of the main characters will be teenagers, which suggests the production should be meant for them, even though at the beginning of the process we thought differently. While we were looking for texts, I found a poem that inspires me to think about the topic of the play. I'm adding it here, because I've already shared it with the team.

All Watched Over by Machines of Loving Grace

by Richard Brautigan

I like to think (and
the sooner the better!)
of a cybernetic meadow
where mammals and computers
live together in mutually
programming harmony
like pure water
touching clear sky.

I like to think
(right now, please!)
of a cybernetic forest
filled with pines and electronics
where deer stroll peacefully
past computers
as if they were flowers
with spinning blossoms.

I like to think
(it has to be!)
of a cybernetic ecology
where we are free of our labors
and joined back to nature,
returned to our mammal
brothers and sisters,
and all watched over
by machines of loving grace.

June 15, 2013

Today is summer, but it's cloudy and sometimes even raining. We have very long rehearsals almost daily, and although our tests of various apps and watching videos are fun, there's a lot of improvisation to be done on top of that. We do a lot of exercises. We've started to write the texts together with the composer, because we have a small number of texts so far and most of the material is still missing. Also, sometimes in rehearsals we come up with all sorts of strange ideas as a result of reflecting on modern technology. Here is a recent text by the composer, who, fearing that in the future it will be possible to get married on the Internet, has created music and text for a kind of advertisement:

Do you love your dog or cat? Why don't you get married?
Do you love your car or bike? Why don't you get married?
Do you love your Facebook profile or your Gmail inbox?
Why don't you get married?
Do you love your computer or your phone? Why don't you get married?
Do you love something else? Why don't you just get married?
Online marriage
Online priest
Online guests
Online marriage: just a few seconds and your life will be complete again.

June 18, 2013

Today is a beautiful summer day and I have finally shown the sketch of *59'Online* to the audience at the Culture Night event in Vilnius. A lot of people turned up, including my BA lecturer and a fellow student. We showed the audience a very small part of our work in progress, somewhere around fifteen minutes. It felt nice and exciting to be able to share

a sketch of our process. But some musical parts emerged that were connected with the acting, like the teenage scenes. After this screening, we will take a break and come back to the rehearsal room at the end of the summer. There will be time to think about some things.

October 20, 2013

I'm finally home after the premiere of *59'Online*... The last two weeks of rehearsals have been difficult, because the creative team and I were at a critical point where we had no idea how to develop the scenes further. What helped us to get off the ground was the public showing of the full sketch of the play to the staff of the Arts Printing House (the institution where we are doing this work). The presentation allowed us to look at the work through the eyes of the audience, to see which parts of the performance were clear only to us, and to understand that it lacked clear structure. After the performance, we worked intensively to make many changes: dropping some scenes, creating new ones, reworking some things, etc. After the premiere, nobody could recognise the work compared to the sketch. Everyone in the institution was also delighted that, for the first time in Open Space, a play was presented containing a huge chunk of reality torn from our daily lives. My biggest dream now, after the premiere, is to rest and catch up on my sleep. Also, even though we put everything together successfully, I still have some unanswered questions about staging a performance without literature.

June 13, 2015

It's been a long time since I wrote in my diary because I've been living a pretty intense creative life: I have staged two plays in Poland, created one contemporary opera, directed a few readings, and I've been working with students at the Lithuanian Academy of Music and Theatre. This bouncing from one project to another led me to decide to do a PhD and try to slow down the crazy rhythm. As a result, the first half of 2015 was much calmer: a lot of reading and preparation for the entrance exams to the Academy. Today, I've mostly been on the computer all day: I'm already finishing my preparation and editing the presentation of my plays. In addition to that, I have prepared a paper for the entrance exams and a supplementary description – a plan – in which I have presented the works I will create during my studies.

I have been staying in Juodkrantė by the Baltic Sea for the whole period of my preparation. During my daily walks around the town or by the sea, I pull abstract and semi-raw ideas out of my head, which I later try to articulate on paper. While writing the paper I kept thinking about how to deal with the problems I encountered in *59'Online*, i.e., how to work with non-literary texts. This has led me to the work of "Teatr.doc", an independent Russian theatre (founded in 2001 by playwrights Mikhail Ugarov and Yelena Gremina), which I visited during my studies in Moscow. The theatre was located in a kind of abandoned basement and offered very interesting performances. It was the first time I saw verbatim productions. The process of creating this kind of performance involves the creators interviewing people, collecting the interviews and adapting them for the stage, with the actors on stage exactly replicating the spoken language. I have found that the English critic Derek Paget does most of the research on verbatim – I hope to have time to read his books on documentary theatre during my studies. Although I've heard the word 'verbatim' a lot, I haven't actually tried to make a documentary play, so I don't even know what the

process is like inside. My application papers are finished, they are here on the table, and I will present them to the Lithuanian Academy of Music and Theatre commission in a week. Now I'm going for a walk by the sea. I can see that it's cloudy and windy outside, the forecast said there might be a thunderstorm today, so hopefully I'll be able to run to the seaside.

June 20, 2015

I'm writing directly from the courtyard of the Lithuanian Academy of Music and Theatre, where the sun is beating down and I'm dressed in black... I regret having chosen this outfit, because it's very hot and it's making it harder to wait for the admission results. I can see someone coming now to announce them....

April 24, 2016

Today is a bad day, overcast, and I have to go to the theatre to do my first interview with the theatre dresser. Yes, I've started work on my first verbatim play, *Staff*, about theatre staff. It came from my personal experience when I was staging my diploma performance based on Ivan Vyrypaev's play *Valentines' Day* at Šiauliai Drama Theatre in 2010. Back then, I had come from a university environment where my course mates and I, in staging excerpts from plays, did everything related to the performances on our own: we brought clothes for the characters from home, painted the set design, carried it around during exams, and put up the lights and did the music. When I was staging my first production in the theatre, I had to face the theatre as an institution and learn how it functions. What surprised me the most was that it had so many theatre employees I knew nothing about before. I also found many of them interesting and it was a pity that the audience never gets to see the whole process that goes on beyond the production. So now I want to show the process of developing the production through the staff and the ways in which they see the theatre. I've been looking now for staff members who would be willing to be interviewed. I've been mainly asking my colleagues from other institutions or interviewing the staff that I know.

Today I was given a contact for a dresser and I'm going to do the first interview. I have made a questionnaire in two parts: first, I ask questions related to the specifics of a theatre worker's job, and second, I ask them more personal questions. I haven't done any interviews in my life up till now, so I have no idea how it's going to go, and I feel anxious about that. I was looking for all sorts of journalistic interviewing techniques. I thought I'd learn by doing my own interviews, but I came across the book *Verbatim Verbatim*: *Contemporary Documentary Theatre* by Dan Steward and Will Hammond, which is full of interviews with various artists who talk about how they interview people. I realised that in verbatim theatre the interview is different from journalistic interviews because the way it is done can be individual, so I will have to find my own way. How am I going to do them? Let's see...

P.S. In a word, I came to the interview and the person sitting there was completely different from the one I had asked my course mate for; I had been given the wrong contact. I was shocked, but I did the interview. I was nervous during the session, maybe I was looking at the questions too much when I was talking to her. I tried to share some of my own stories too when she was not being talkative. She told me some things that were quite unusual and strange, but maybe I will tell you more about that someday.

May 23, 2016

These are sunny days in Vilnius, but I have to deal with all twenty interviews I did with the theatre staff. I plan to start rehearsing *Staff* at the theatre in the summer. I really enjoyed the interviewing process: it's very dynamic, you meet new people, and some of the questions also helped me to reflect on issues I have myself about my profession, being in the theatre, etc. Most of the staff told me interesting stories and I'm happy about that. But of course, there were also some who did not trust me, who were terse or philosophical. In a word, I've been transcribing the interviews: it takes about six or seven hours to type an interview into Word. I'm not sure if I will be able to get the structured texts ready before the meeting with the actors. I also hadn't worked with live human speech before, and I'm still wondering how I'll analyse these texts with the actors.

August 18, 2016

I'm at home in Vilnius. Yesterday, I came back from Klaipėda, where I showed *Staff* in a theatre newly opened after reconstruction. In the final version, I let the actors choose the staff interviews themselves, and we arranged them according to the age of the speakers and theatre spaces. So, we created a dramatised guided tour of the theatre. Looking back now, I realise it was not quite clear how to recreate the characters or how the actors interpreted them, and there were a lot of ethical questions in the process. These ethical issues, which I identified for myself as ethical dilemmas, were new to me because I had to think of whether we might harm those members of staff who spoke unfavourably of the theatre authorities. The biggest ethical dilemma was the dresser's monologue: this is the same woman who was my first interview after I was given the wrong contact. Her monologue went like this:

> *"Well, I have read a lot of psychology literature. I've been interested in esoteric things for about fifteen years now. I often go to Russia, to a school there. I know that we plan our lives in advance and we create these lessons for ourselves, so that we can break free and grow and not repeat the same mistakes. The greatest discovery of my life was in that school, when I learned that there is no such thing as death. Seriously."*

The actress and I had to work out how not to make her monologue funny, which is why we decided not to use additional elements of parody. But on the other hand, there's nothing we can do if the audience does find the person funny. I think I'll delve into the issue of ethics in documentary theatre when I do my research, because we are portraying real people, so the impact of the play on their reality is a little bit greater than in the usual case of a play with fictional characters.

Staff. Photo from personal archives.

November 19, 2019

I haven't journaled for a while again, but I have an excuse: I've been busy, I've been staging a chamber opera in Klaipėda based on Virginia Woolf's novel *To the Lighthouse*, and I have tried another verbatim technique in *A Hundred Years of Childhood*, which involved recontextualising interviews, and have tried out a not-so-pure documentary. The most important thing that happened during this time is that I was able to attend two workshops: in New York, "Moment Work" with Moises Kaufman, and in London, a verbatim workshop. In the latter, I received a diagram which answered my question about how to work with verbatim text or people's speech. D. Oran suggests treating the sound recording as a piece of music and first trying to get the actor to reproduce all the sounds exactly, and then go deeper into the meaning of the words.

In the New York workshop, I discovered that when Kaufman works on the principles of collective creation by selecting the vast amount of information that accumulates during the process, he uses a central question: to put it roughly: what do I intend to say with this artwork? I am full of positive impressions after these trips. I have seen some plays and visited various museums. The day after tomorrow, a friend of mine who works as a social worker is taking me to a juvenile detention centre where we agreed to hold a workshop. I am very scared of going to the prison, but she has reassured me that we will be going to a ward where inmates are placed for better behaviour.

January 3, 2020

Very cold and windy days in Kaunas. My verbatim play *Superheroes*, in which I use documentary stories of various teenagers, will be out in just a few days. Now I'm sitting in the hotel resting. In the morning we had a technical rehearsal with the lighting designer, putting up the lights, and in the evening I'll be going to run over the piece with the actors.

I interviewed teenagers for the play, from those in prison to those in the library. In the process, I had big problems with the playwright regarding the message of the piece. The playwright was not used to documentary theatre: she wanted to know at the very beginning of the process what the final message of our play would be. However, now that we've put everything together, the message has emerged, but only at the very end of the production, only when we had put all the material together. This is something I also encounter when I give seminars or work with students: they want to know the message of the future performance right away. But I think that destroys the possibility of learning something

new, because when you know everything at the beginning, is there really room for new things? Also, when you don't even have the material at the beginning of the process of creating a play, I can let myself get more familiar with the subject and try to understand it. The director Mikhail Ugarov from the independent "Teatr.doc", who I once wrote about in my diary, believes that if you depict one event, you collect many different people's views on it – which is why he describes it as 'the director's zero position'. This means that a viewer who is hungry for conclusions about life has to draw them independently after the verbatim performance, because the director doesn't provide answers. Moreover, my studies are coming to an end, and in the theatre director's curriculum vitae, this period has left various question marks.

2. THE FINAL WORD

I would like to conclude by clarifying one more circumstance that I didn't mention at the beginning. During my artistic studies at the Lithuanian Academy of Music and Theatre, I always dreamed of trying out the mockumentary genre. This presents a fictitious story to the viewer as though it were real. But due to certain circumstances, I always got stuck with documentaries in their purer form, or mostly experimented with their structure, which is why I am extremely grateful to the *Alexandria Nova* book project and the invitation to write an article dealing with different aspects of theatre directing.

This invitation finally gave me the opportunity to try out the mockumentary genre, because in this article I have actually presented a fictionalised diary, which I had originally referred to as real. All the information given above is more of a reconstruction from my memories, so there is some truth in it, but I have also supplemented my truth with various embellishments and fantasies. What you have experienced on reading this article is more like the 'Fargo effect' - (in honour of the Coen brothers' film of the same title): we all want to believe something which is presented as being true.

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Runar Hodne (1970) is a Norwegian theatre director and as of January 1st 2020 professor at the Danish National School of Performing Arts. Hodne has realised 60 performances as a theatre director and has substantial experience as a teacher of theatre education in Norway and abroad. He was appointed professor in both acting (2012) and direction (2016) at the Oslo National Academy of the Arts and has served as head of directing education from 2015-2021.

Concept development, conceptual art and theatre, realisation of new writing and scenic realisation are among Hodne's areas of specialisation. Making his professional debut in 2001 at the National Theatre in Oslo with the production of *Nokon kjem til å komme* by Norwegian playwright Jon Fosse, Hodne has established himself as a critically acclaimed theatre director in Norway and abroad (Sweden, Denmark, Italy, Israel). He has directed a wide range of modern and classic plays in some of the most important theatres in Norway, Denmark and Sweden (e.g., Dramaten, Aarhus Teater, the Danish National Theatre, the National Theatre in Oslo).

THE TRUTH OF THE MASK
A reflection on concept development in theatre

Runar Hodne

The word ‘concept’ can refer to a multitude of phenomena, ideas, thoughts, and expressions. In theatre, it refers either to the interpretation of a text or the aesthetical choices in a performance. This article aims to look at concept development as a tool in theatre directing, and to understand the complexity of concept development and some of the challenges that have to be faced.

Concept is thus connected to ideas; it is an application, a frame, or a reason, but it is also an action made by our mind, by our thought defined as ‘the immediate object of a thought’. The term has its origin in 1550s Medieval Latin, where ‘conceptum’ denoted draft, abstraction, and ‘concipere’ ‘to take in and hold; become pregnant’. Etymologically it is connected to the beginning, thus ontologically related to becoming, to conceive, and essence.

Gilles Deleuze defines ‘concept’ in *What is Philosophy* as a combination of two or more existing concepts. It shapes a whole because it creates a new totality from its components. He exemplifies this through the concept of ‘beginning’. According to Deleuze, ‘beginning’ is a concept like the beginning of a story or beginning of life. Combined with other concepts like ‘end’, ‘other’ or ‘difference’ new concepts are formed. In combination with ‘end’, ‘beginning’ can become the conceptual framework for a life or a story.

I will try to look at concept development in theatre through the lens of three literary terms: ‘transformation’, ‘mask’ and ‘the Other’. I will do this through three classical texts, *Hamlet*, *Don Juan* and *Oedipus*, three male protagonists sacrificed on the altar of katharsis. Finally, I will reflect upon the interdependency between communication and diversity.

There is only one fact in theatre: there are no facts. Theatre deals with fiction and imagination; theatre is transformative and boundless. Theatrical action is an act of interpretation, and interpretation is subjective. The craft of the director is to interpret and stage concepts. All statements and examples in this article are subjective, based on my own interpretation. According to Nietzsche: “There are no facts, only interpretations”.

1. TRANSFORMATION

When we investigate a play, the first (and obvious) thing to do is to define what is in the play, then we can add elements as a reader from own preconception and interpretation through the lens of subjectivity. This is the act of analysis. Volume and suspension are consequences of an analysis. The distinction between what is interpretational and what is undeniably in the text is important. The moment I enter a play with my own interpretation, I make a huge shift, and this is the moment when it’s crucial to have a concept, detectable guidelines, and verifiable parameters for how I structure my thinking. If this division is blurred and unclear, the potential of pure thinking becomes difficult because the lens is unfocused.

In Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* (1600), we know from the text that Hamlet can move between death (the meeting with the ghost) and life (hope, possibility, future). The concepts death and life frame Hamlet’s story. When we elaborate further, the conceptual framework creates several potent dramatic dilemmas.

The living Prince Hamlet makes a deal with the dead King Hamlet to revenge the murder committed by the new King Claudius. Prince Hamlet acts irrationally in an irrational world to restore rationality in his fight for justice. But when

he accidently kills Polonius, he becomes part of the problem. To salvage rotten Denmark, he must die. Revenge in the fight for justice leads Hamlet to self-sacrifice, with the conclusion that it is impossible to revenge death without losing your life. Death is the precondition for Life. This can be paraphrased by switching the preposition 'or' with 'and' in the famous soliloquy:

To be, and *not to be, that is the question:*
Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer
The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,
Or to take Arms against a Sea of troubles,
And by opposing end them: to die, to sleep.
No more; and by a sleep, to say we end
The heartache, and the thousand natural shocks
That Flesh is heir to?

As we know, everybody in the play dies in the end except for the witness Horatio, who is the only audience for Hamlet's mad theatrical performance and carries salvation and redemption as the only living witness, while the Hamlet family is reunited in Death.

Conceptual volume is the consequence of suspension between concepts that oppose each other: Life and Death; Justice and Sacrifice.

Tools for transformation

To be able to use and frame methods and parameters in interpretation we must clarify the tools we use. What is a tool? Ever since Meyerhold established directing as a profession with his school in Petrograd in 1918, directing became an important tool in transforming text and concepts into performances. Directing has ever since been a highly specialised profession requiring a specific set of skills and tools.

Theatre is time-based and live. The human process in theatre equals the cardiovascular system, and human and societal transformation on stage become its metabolism. Analysis and concepts depend on circumstances that trigger change and transformation in humans and society on stage.

Tovstonogov's action analysis is one example often taught in directing education programmes in Europe. This is a method for directing based on the active actor and is an amalgam of the legacy of Stanislavski, Meyerhold and Maria Knebel. The method divides a play into situations. Every situation is given a name related to the circumstances that affect every character participating in the situation. Each character is provided with an objective. The actor relates to circumstances in the inner circle (within the frames of the situation), the middle circle (within the frames of the play) or the big circle (within the frames of the world). Together these parameters create an interdependent dialectic that creates process and action.

In all these different processes, we make decisions that reflect our own life position and value system. A distinct separation between the tool and the interpretation is vital to avoid referring only to taste. If taste and emotions are blended in an unclear mixture, directing becomes an unreliable tool for objectifying and verifying personal emotivity. Art can easily become a convenient tool for executing political or ideological power if it loses its autonomy.

I believe it is important to distinguish between the tools we use and the performance we make. You can use a screwdriver to build a simple wooden hut, but the same screwdriver can also be used to build a futuristic palace. The artistic outcome

is the result of many small operations made by different tools. The craft of directing lies in how these operations are executed and how they interplay to form a performance.

An honest answer to the question of why we want to stage this today is maybe the most essential key to a personal and voluminous concept. The question of 'why' and 'today' connects us as artistic teams with society and gives necessity and imperative punch to the process.

2. MASK

A classical text refers to circumstances from the context in which the play was written. In many cases, this context consists of several other layers, since the text often refers to a variety of contexts. Brecht refers to the 30 years' war in *Mutter Courage*, Shakespeare to feudal conflicts in medieval Venice in *Othello*. The different time levels bleed into each other.

If the reality we refer to consists of fragments of an author's perception and fictional creation, the concept cannot claim authenticity by declaring proximity to a reality that never existed. The concept creates its own reality. The text consist of its own immanent context: text is topography. Theatre is a mask between the vision and its audience. Concept is a mask.

Classic texts from a different time carry dissolved constituted categories such as class, gender, ethnicity, and demography, and are inhabited with problematic inherent connotations. To be able to activate these challenges, the concept is our playground, our time-machine. Space and time are in flux in a digital world where a spectator from the other side of the world might be closer than your neighbour. Participation is liberated from time and space. The concept must reflect contemporaneity by questioning theatre, liveness, and presence.

For Plato, the sensible world is an illusion, a mere reflection of the inner world, a simulacrum. If theatre reflects reality it becomes in this context a double simulacrum because it is an illusion of an illusion.

In the long essay *The Truth of Masks* (1891) Oscar Wilde invites the reader to think about authenticity in theatre. He tries to break the connection between art and life by establishing art as an autonomic condition of life:

> *The true dramatist, in fact shows us*
> *life under the conditions of art, not art*
> *in the form of life.*

This implies that art has its own language, manners, and structures. With his penchant for the hybrid and theatrical, Wilde foresees the focus on inauthenticity we know from post-modernism a century later.

In *Don Juan* by Moliere (1665), the protagonist nihilistically seduces all females, the more complicated and painful the process, the more gratifying it is. Why does this paradox make him even more attractive? What is the constructive force behind his destructive behaviour?

Don Juan stages his persona in a radical attempt to demask the world around him. He tries to find the truth of the mask by exposing the absence of truth behind the mask. What is exposed behind the mask is incoherent. The mask is the face. Don Juan is seemingly insufferable and unscrupulous, arousing respect and disgust and totally devoid of attitudes, values, consequence. For Don Juan, beauty is perishable and

thus accessible; it must be consumed immediately. This stirs up deep resentment and indignation in everyone around him.

Through the reaction of the outside world, Don Juan reveals the double morality and structural falsity in society. He presents an x-ray mirror in morality which necessarily points back to the sender. Anyone who makes a moral judgement puts the judgement, not the object of the judgement at the centre. Don Juan is a theatrical mirror, for the audience, the other characters, for the hidden suppressive structures in spoken language, and finally for himself. The mirror is a central part of the mise en scène in Don Juan, and Molière rebukes all institutions: church, law, family and chastens false and vain knowledge.

Don Juan's brave undressing of society transforms Don Juan into modernity's first hero, since greatness springs from the risks that are taken. Sorry to all later post-modern and lazy lookalikes.

In the enigmatic final sentence of his essay *The Truth of Masks*, Wilde states: "the truths of metaphysics are the truths of masks".

By making the membrane between the physical and metaphysical opaque, we make the fish (us) aware of the water they (we) swim in (the world).

3. THE OTHER

Concept development in theatre is connected to how we think thoughts and how we combine our thoughts with the text, topic, or theme in the performance. Then we become equipped to formulate the main artistic question for investigation.

Theatre is representation. Any action, person or object on a stage is a representation of something we want it to signify. During the history of theatre, the most vibrant conflict has been between those who believe in mimesis and representation (Aristotle, French classicists, Stanislavski), and those who do not (Plato, Rousseau, Brecht). The latter often emphasise theatricality on stage contrary to the former who emphasise lifelikeness. But in both cases, the fundamental premise is inauthenticity as our *raison d'être*.

In the era of climate change and the Anthropocene, we must approach the act of interpretation more humbly; it is no longer possible to stage the director's interpretation and vision alone. The human mind has fucked up nature, science has conquered evolution and nature strikes back. We are integrated into interdependent kinships where human and non-human agents correlate.

> *The climate emergency has at least one ironically progressive facet. White boys now get to feel what it's like to be just about everyone else, everyone else having suffered from white boys since boys and wheat began to relate symbiotically.*
>
> Timothy Morton: *Hypo-subjects* (2020)

Oedipus Rex by Sophocles, written around 429 BC, is a precise example of how human beings have polluted their own fertile soil. This is one of the first plays in the history of drama where women and men stand out as individuals from the collective. Oedipus must solve the riddle of the Sphinx to release Thebes from a curse after their King disappeared.

The riddle is as follows: "What creature walks on four legs in the morning, two legs at noon, and three legs in the evening?"

The answer to the riddle is: “a human being”.

Oedipus solves the riddle, becomes the new King and marries the Queen Iocasta. When a new plague breaks out in Thebes, King Oedipus must react, and he starts to delve into history. As the play evolves, it develops in two directions synchronically. With each step Oedipus takes forward to find out what has happened in the past, he takes one step back towards the inevitable truth. The play moves dramaturgically forward and backward at the same time. Gradually he understands that he killed his father unknowingly and placed the curse on Thebes himself.

There is an urgent need for truth that brings the past and the future together. This magic mirror is the structure of a riddle. The Human being is Me. And I am you. We are responsible for our actions. There are no Gods to blame and Oedipus the saviour becomes the problem.

There are two concepts inherent in the play: the curse is configured in the riddle; the truth is configured in the taboo.

The concept of truth and curse oppose each other; they collide and shape a tragic dilemma that creates a series of conceptual possibilities: Theseus the blind man is the seer. Oedipus is blind to reality but becomes a seer when he is blinded. The two opposing concepts together create a new totalised performance concept.

Horrible events in the past infect the present and shape the future. The exact story of Humankind in the time of the Anthropocene.

If one could possess, grasp, and know the other,
it would not be other. Emmanuel Levinas

Diversity and communication

Questions of diversity are questions of representation. The language of the performance creates the interpretational framework for each object represented. Clarity in what an object represents and its intentions are specifically important when things may have unintentional connotations. The samovar in *Cherry Orchard* by Chekov signifies a social situation, a hierarchy and carries inherent meaning both historically and politically. We should exhibit these features when we use the samovar as a representation in a conceptual re-interpretation. A clear concept frames the aesthetic project, the language, and the ethical implications. The totality of the utterances depends on the co-relation between each component.

We must perform for the context we perform in, and context matters. Genre and taste are subordinated context because the medium stays the same even if the context changes. The game remains even if each performance is unique and alive.

The artistic team have a vision.
The performance is the language.
The audience is the receiver.

The artistic team is the sender, talking to the audience, the receiver returns the message. The performance is the interface between the artistic vision and the audience. The performance is the language we speak, and like any language it has rules. The artistic vision and performance concept feeds into the public discourse and the communal field of reference. How does this message resonate in the world, how does it talk with its audience? In his essay *Spirituality and Intellectual Honesty* (2014), Thomas Metzinger raises

the question: “whether and how, given our new situation, intellectual honesty and spirituality can ever be reconciled”. The honest artist points towards the society. The performance is the object, not the interpretation.

Quasi-emotions

Aristotle describes katharsis as a liberation through reliving fictional circumstances. The emotions we experience are real but based on imagination. Today we envelop ourselves in TV series that produce emotions in an increasing amount of ‘binged’, fictional circumstances. Berthold Brecht’s concept of Verfremdung was invented to wake the audience up from the comfortable bourgeois sleep that fiction, fake emotion and false empathy create. Katharsis can become a lazy way of societal participation. All the quasi-emotions produced by algorithmic-based scriptwriting in the massive amount of fiction that surrounds us creates a katharsis for no reason. What do emotions without thinking, feelings without concepts do to our ability to respond and participate? What is beauty? Can art ever be pure or is it always political? Art is concerned with uniqueness and specificity, a unique experience or object. Morality deals with repetition and values connected to repeatable actions done by humans. If art is unique and morality repeatable actions, then art and morality are incompatible i.e., mutually exclusive.

Art schools are educational institutions struggling with these questions because the possibility to learn is founded on the idea of experience, tools, knowledge, and history. Is it possible for me as teacher to distinguish between the tools we use and the building we build?

The struggle is the answer. Any claim of universalism and essentialism is impossible because it depends on someone’s definition of truth and excludes that of someone else. By teaching and making theatre we may fail, but by repeating it we expose the discrepancy, put the challenge into motion and implement diversity in the public discourse.

Awareness is important in how we deal with emotions, since emotions and interpretations are powerful tools. Clear analysis and concepts make emotions and interpretations transparent and translucid. Concept is the common ground, the fellowship where performers and spectators unite, where we make the interpretation clear, where everybody can participate and develop as a group of individual artists.

In *The Truth of Masks,* Oscar Wilde argues that the truth of metaphysics is the truth of the mask. If the mask’s whimsical relationship to what we call reality represents the true metaphysical, then Theatre is the most real scientific laboratory where truth and human beings can be dissected and analysed. There are no boundaries between the vision and the world, us and them, the presence and the past, because it all comes together in the theatrical now. If we live in the end phase of classic metaphysics, it is time to realise the potentiality of the real within the real reality.

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As a theatre director, he has made over 90 productions in all the Nordic countries and in Europe, as well as in Australia. Theatres where he has worked include the Royal Theatre in Copenhagen, Gothenburg City Theatre, Uppsala City Theatre, Stockholm's City Theatre, Schaubuehne Berlin, National Theatre Iceland, City Theatre of Iceland, Viirus Theatre Finland, National Theatre Mannheim, and NIDA Sydney.

TWO METHODS, SAME ORIGINS, DIFFERENT OUTCOMES

Egill Pálsson

When I started out working with theatre, I became fascinated with methods, structures and tools that could help the creativity of a group to grow, give guidance, clarity and, in the end, an artistic outcome.

Throughout the years I have been collecting tools and methods that have been of great help in my profession as a director as well as a professor of acting and directing for over 20 years.

1. A LITTLE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

I would like to begin with a little historical background so we understand where the methods I will describe and analyse in this text come from, and why they are both related and unrelated with one another.

The two methods that I will focus on were both developed and tried out at almost the same place and time. One of the methods called *Physical Action Theory and Action Analysis* was developed by Constantine Stanislavsky and later developed by his student Maria Knebel (Benedetti, 2016; Thomas, 2016). The second method called the *Theory of Montage of Attractions* was developed by Stanislavsky's student Meyerhold, although he was not able to publish his dramatic theories before being executed by the USSR in 1940. Sergei Eisenstein, his dedicated student, further developed, coined, and published Meyerhold's methods, based on his notes (Law and Gordon, 2012; Eisenstein and Taylor, 2010).

It could be said that the Theory of Montage of Attractions came as a reaction to Stanislavski and his System of Physical Action Theory and Throughout Line of Action storytelling or as Meyerhold said himself:

> *[T]he montage idea espoused the cause of freeing the theatre from strict adherence to the linear and sequential cause-effect progression so typical of nineteenth-century realistic drama*
>
> Symons; Listengarten, 2000:15

On December 29 1898, *The Seagull* by Anton Chekhov opened at the newly established Art Theatre in Moscow. The story, portraying the actress Arkadina, her lover Trigorin the great author, Arkadina's son Treplev and his girlfriend Nina, is about passionate theatre artists and artists who fight fiercely about art, love and life. A comedy, as Chekhov insisted. There is a play within the play written by the young avant-garde artist Treplev. In the first act, when Treplev shows his play to his mother and her lover Trigorin, it causes a row because Arkadina says it's stupid, and the drama of the play unfolds.

Ironically enough, the history of modern theatre was already decided there, at the opening of *The Seagull*, as a young actor called Meyerhold played the role of the avant-garde playwright and director Treplev, while the more conservative, established and already famous writer Trigorin was performed by Stanislavski (Braun, 1998).

The conflict between the two characters in the play then moved into reality and became an iconic conflict between Meyerhold and Stanislavski (Gordon, 2006).

Stanislavski's work on creating a method for acting, changed theatre history forever and is better known as the 'Physical Action Theory'. At a later point, deriving from the primarily acting-oriented method, a directing method called 'Action Analysis' was developed by his assistant Maria Knebel. We will assign her one of the main roles in this text (Thomas, 2016).

The story says that Meyerhold managed to be fired from Stanislavsky's company, not once but twice. He was a rebellious young theatre artist who developed his own methods that were in direct opposition to what was being taught at the Art Theatre of Stanislavsky[1]. Meyerhold established his own company called the Proletkult Theatre[2], a political agitation theatre travelling through Russia, promoting revolution and creating political theatre for workers. This was where Meyerhold developed the theories that are called today the Montage Theory of Attractions and Biomechanics (Eisenstein, 1974; Law and Gordon, 2012).

Both men, Meyerhold and Stanislavski, later suffered a grim fate in Stalin's Soviet Union. After the brutal murder of his wife, Meyerhold was arrested for treason, tortured and executed. With his methods banned, Stanislavski was kept under house arrest until his death in 1938. Stalin's wish to *keep him isolated but preserved* was fully accomplished (Russell, 2008).

The subject of this essay is these two methods; Action Analysis and The Montage Theory of Attractions. What is their relationship, what do they have in common and what is the difference between them?

Action Analysis

I like to call Maria Knebel the grandmother of the directing methods derived from Stanislavski's inheritance. She was one of Stanislavsky's assistants in his last workshop The Opera Workshop from 1935 to 1938 when he passed away. It is from Maria Knebel's hard work that the directing part of the Stanislavski Physical Action Method was developed and defined as Action Analysis (Thomas, 2016).

We are going to dive into two different kinds of work methods and theatre forms. One being the text-based theatre using Action Analysis as its main tool, and the other being defined as Devised Theatre, using the Montage Theory of Attractions.

Text-based theatre

Dramatic theatre is dominated by the text mainly because:

- in modern times the human subject was still centrally defined through speech.
- the main preoccupation of this theatre is to communicate the illusion of a probable world, a 'fictive cosmos'- a mimesis.
- to sustain this illusion, it is not so much the continuity of the representation that matters, but rather the **imagination of a totality**, something that is guaranteed by the centrality of the text.

What is interesting here is that: *through its very form, dramatic theatre proclaims wholeness as the model of the real.* (Lehmann, 2006:22)

It was Gustav Freytag, a nineteenth-century German novelist, who saw common patterns in the plots of stories and novels and developed them into a diagram. He diagrammed a story's plot using a pyramid like the one shown here:

1 The Moscow Art Theatre (or MAT; Russian: Московский Художественный академический театр (МХАТ), *Moskovskiy Hudojestvenny Akademicheskiy Teatr* (MHAT)) is a theatre company in Moscow. It was founded in 1898 by Stanislavski, together with the playwright and director Danchenko. Its principle was to enhance psychological acting style, develop new playwriting and enhance the technique of the actor. With its 1898 premier of *The Seagull*, the theatre achieved its fame. This production was so successful that the theatre adopted the seagull as its emblem.

2 In November 1917, the theatres were nationalised. 120 leading creative figures where obliged to meet with the minister for culture for a discussion on the relationship between art and Communism. Only five attended; amongst them – and the only representative of the professional theatre – was Meyerhold who was subsequently invited to take up the role of Deputy Head at the Petrograd Branch of TEO, the Commissariat's Theatre Department. Meyerhold's aim was the destruction of the old to create a new theatre which responded to the new world of Soviet Russia, what he called an 'October in the Theatre'. Writing in 1920 in the journal Vestnik teatr (Theatre Herald), he notes: At the present time, there are two possible types of theatre:

1. The non-professional proletarian theatre, whose roots are in the culture of the new ruling class
2. The so-called professional theatre

1. Exposition: setting the scene. The writer introduces the characters and setting, providing description and background.
2. Inciting Incident: something happens to begin the action. A single event usually signals the beginning of the main conflict. The inciting incident is sometimes called 'the complication'.
3. Rising Action: the story builds and becomes more exciting.
4. Climax: the moment of greatest tension in a story. This is often the most exciting event. It is the event that the rising action builds up to and that the falling action follows.
5. Falling Action: events happen as a result of the climax and we know that the story will soon end.
6. Resolution: the character solves the main problem/conflict or someone solves it for him or her.
7. Dénouement: the ending. At this point, any remaining secrets, questions, or mysteries which remain after the resolution are solved by the characters or explained by the author. Sometimes the author leaves us to think about the THEME or future possibilities for the characters. The dénouement can be thought of as the opposite of the exposition: instead of preparing to tell us the story by introducing the setting and characters, the author is getting ready to end it with a final explanation of what happened and how the characters think or feel about it. This can be the most difficult part of the plot to identify, as it is often very closely tied to the resolution.

Devised theatre

Devised theatre refers to the process of creative collaboration by a group of performers to generate and assemble a performance through improvisation, discussion and rehearsal, inclusive of the resulting production.

In *The Theatre of Cruelty* (First Manifesto), Antonin Artaud declared that, to circumvent all the imitative, closed and subjective qualities of pre-authored text:

> *(…) masterpieces (…) fixed in forms that no longer respond to the needs of the time (…) We shall not act a written play, but we shall make attempts at direct staging, around themes, facts or known works.* Artaud and Corti, 2013:69

Deidre Heddon and Jane Milling perfectly continue Artaud's contemplations in their writings about Devising Performance:

> *(…) a mode of work in which no script - neither written play-text nor performance score exists prior to the work's creation by the company.* Heddon and Milling, 2006:3

The impact that Antonin Artaud had on theatre should never be underestimated; he is one of the founding members of what we today call Devised Theatre or even Postdramatic Theatre.

To get a rough overview of the development of the avant-garde leading to Devising it is helpful to use three landmarks:

First: in the early 1900s - Modernism.

Second: in the 1960s - The Rebellious Years.

Third: middle of the 1990s until today - The Postdramatic. The liberating years that detoured into Neo-Liberal Global Capitalism.

Democracy

The instances are and have been a determination to democratise the theatre, giving rise to the often conflicting ideas of aesthetic and social reformers. Inherent within this democratisation was a critical repositioning affecting the theme on stage, the theme of how to work on and off stage, and the whole theatre structure in itself.

In this liberalisation and democratisation, the collective is:

- questioning society.
- questioning the stage.
- questioning how we work in the theatre
- questioning how the theatre works.
- questioning for whom the theatre should work
- questioning the role of the director, set designer, dramaturge, actor, all the staff.
- questioning the very reason why we should create a piece of art.

Audience relational positions

The relationship between stage and spectator, above that of the internal activity between the onstage characters which had been dominant since the eighteenth century, became all-dominant. This movement towards the spectator occurred across the spectrum of avant-garde activities with the idea of reclaiming the perceived social and cultural purposes of the theatre - something that the bourgeois seemed to have lost sight of (Shevstova, 2006).

It was for this reason that the spectator is at the core of all reflections and activities. Making the function of the spectator visible remained an experimental concern throughout the twentieth century. Contemporary devising practice placing the spectator as a collaborator includes applied theatre, immersive theatre, interactive, community theatre, theatre of the oppressed, theatre for change, etc. Like earlier audience-focused work, these practices often have the political imperative of raising awareness and inspiring change.

A few words on the primary motor of Devising

Within this process model, it is immediately apparent that stages can be swapped, re-ordered, or re-arranged in the light of the specific circumstances of the devising situation.

The need to question *how we see the world* underlies any devising process, consciously or not. Devising is a tool for re-arranging that world for a group; assembling and structuring an experience into a concrete form for others to see, which is often complex, both intellectually and emotionally. The drive or motivation comes from the desire to make sense of something. A very strong need to speak. And a will to investigate. The passion to explore the theme through the means of theatre.

2. METHODS, TOOLS, LIKENESSES AND DIFFERENCES

Let us start with Action Analysis.

Action Analysis is a directing toolkit, a system that helps in approaching a written text, breaking it down into situations, analysing it, conceptualising and finally realising the production. The method helps the director understand how to talk with actors who are using the Physical Action Theory as their fundamental acting method.

To simplify the system, it really helps to break it down into three circles, each containing different questions and tasks that the director needs to work with, through the preparation work and finally in the rehearsal room with the actors.

The Big Circle offers questions that have to do with the world where the play comes from. The life of the author, or as the Russians put it, the pain of the author. The life of the text itself, how it has been played, why it has been played etc. At this stage, questions appear that could help you in your conceptual work, such as: What was the political, economic, ideological, philosophical, and historical spirit of the times the play was written? What was the fashion? What is the structure of the play, the language, the genre etc. In trying to answer these questions, you should relate to them and contextualise them, remembering that the purpose of this research is to enhance the understanding of the play you want to do. I sometimes call it an artistic investigation.

The Middle Circle has to do with everything in the text from the first page to the last bar on the last page. The Middle Circle contains tools such as: fable, the basic circumstances of the play, the driving circumstances of the play, the struggle of the play and the five situations, as well as the unsolvable question of the play and the Super Objective of the play. We will be looking into all these tools.

The Small Circle is each situation for itself, this includes the analysis of each situation in the play. This enables the driving circumstances. The given circumstances and a goal for each of the given characters to be found, as well as the title.

Devising methods.
The Montage Theory

We will now consider the Montage Theory. This method is very useful when working with devised projects, which means non-text based productions being created with the team or in a collective, creating an alternative dramaturgy.

Montage Theory was developed by Meyerhold in his political theatre 'Proletkult Theatre', an agitational or propaganda theatre aiming to enhance the Soviet revolution. The method was then later further developed by the previously mentioned Eisenstein, as well as by Brecht, and also through the work of contemporary theatre collectives such as Forced Entertainment, Théâtre de la Complicité, etc.

Again, I like to divide things into circles, or shall we say units, when we talk about Montage Theory. Each unit has different tasks for the team, or for the directors while working.

The Biggest Unit contains the research question or the theme to be investigated. Usually in devised projects you have a non-text based start. Questions for society, conceptual questions, and research. This includes the economic, ideological and historical point of view on the theme or the subject matter you choose to work on. The fundamental questions will be the tools to gather the material that will be used later for developing the play.

The Middle Unit is the montage theory, this meaning the theory of juxtapositioning, where attraction are ensembled. As we move along, I will explain this method of dramaturgy in greater detail.

The Smallest Unit is called the 'Attraction' or 'Opening', which is where you will be working and creating the scenes that will then later be put together in a Montage.

So far, both methods and work processes can be divided into these three circles/units each with different tasks to work on. They look similar and follow a similar kind of logic of how we approach a project or a given text. From the widest context towards the smallest unit in the play or in the devised project.

Now I would like to go into each of the Circles/Units and discuss how they are planned out, how they are related, how they are not related and how they differ. Starting with the big circle in Action Analysis and the big unit in Montage Theory.

When working with Action Analysis and the Montage Method, you will see that they both require the conceptual motor to start this analysis phase. Let me explain.

The conceptual motor, the four laws of contradiction. At the core of every written text and as a conceptual motor in devised work, hidden powers must be found, either within the play or within the material that will be researched. This is necessary for creating a conceptual motor to drive the project from an idea into reality.

The contradiction

The contradiction as the core of the dramatic narrative format.

> *The peculiarity arises from the situation in which its perfect generality gets a rupture through which the contradictions inherent in the generality come to the fore. It is only through the situation that the contradictions created in the state of the world are transformed into a concrete relationship to one another.*
>
> *(…) There is no situation without a world state with the contradictions laid out therein, and without the event of the situation the state of the world remains unrecognizable.* Stegemann, 2015:110

Dr. Professor Bernd Stegeman, who is quoted here from his book *Lob des Realismus*, is inspired by the Hegelian discourse on dialectics that form a fundamental law for creating a dramatic work.

This means that in the world in general you would seek to find contradictions and in the compact world of written drama, or devised work, you bring these contradictions as close together as possible in order to release the given energy or dramatic tension.

Inside Action Analysis and Montage Theory there is the so-called **Concept Motor**, which is a fundament buildup of specific and vital contradictions, that when defined in a sharp manner will create the necessary dynamics to create a piece of theatre.

3. THE FOUR VITAL CONTRADICTIONS

I've taken these four phenomena from Action Analysis:

the devising motor:

I. The unsolvable conflict

The paradox every play and piece of devised work must have. In both methods, the unsolvable conflicts lie at the core of the work. I used the word paradox because this is an unsolvable universal problem.

EXAMPLE FROM TEXT MATERIAL. ACTION ANALYSIS

Romeo and Juliet by Shakespeare. At the end of the play the prince says:

See, what a scourge is laid upon your hate, That heaven finds means to kill your joys with love. And I for winking at your discords too, Have lost a brace of kinsmen: all are punish'd.

This paradox; that hate brings more hate, is the **unsolvable universal paradox** at the core of the play. It is in a way the pain of the author, what he wants us to understand and across the centuries he sends this message.

EXAMPLE FROM DEVISED THEATRE. MONTAGE THEORY

Let's say we are creating a devised piece; we will need a research question; what is it in the world that we wish to examine, what paradox?

We want to examine how the populist rich use the lower-class voting base. This is a paradox of our political time. How does it happen that the rich elites, the privileged, can get support from the lower classes, the under privileged, in society? This is a paradox.

II. Super objective

What is the goal of your production, why do you want to do it today? This is a question that addresses the subject matter. In devising, it is the research question. What is your question to the unsolvable conflict/the paradox? What do you want to do with this paradox? What do you want to be addressing or enhancing or putting a light on, or what's your passion towards the core of the play?

EXAMPLE FROM TEXT MATERIAL

The Super Objective question for *Romeo and Juliet* could vary, this is where interpretation comes in. So if my super objective is to unravel the patriotic structures in the play, I might ask what mechanisms of conflict/war bloodshed has as a power tool.

EXAMPLE FROM THE DEVISING PROCESS

If my **unsolvable conflict** is that of a lower-class voting base voting for extremely rich, my super objective could be to make people understand the relationship between the fall of democracy and the rise of neoliberal capitalism.

What is important here is that you address a question or several questions towards, or in a dialectical contradiction, or simply as a provocation, to the Unsolvable Conflict. This is vital to create tension, power, and energy. In a devising process there are often many questions that will open up for research. When working with written text, this is the directors, or the artistic team's motivation for creating the play here and now, today. What they want to say with it.

III. The given circumstances of this world

This is a phenomenon that puts together a contradiction, or at least a possible one. It starts with the enigmatic words "*In a world…*". Then you fill in what you are looking for and somewhere there is an opposite or a contradiction, so the sentence continues: *there is no place for 'something else'*.

These two lines *In a world… There is no space for…* are essential to be able to create the contradiction that will define the universe we will be working in.

EXAMPLE FROM TEXT MATERIAL

In *Romeo and Juliet*, the Basic Given Circumstances of the world could be formulated like this: *In the world* where civil war between two clans has been going on for years and the chain of hatred, revenge and blood cannot be broken, *there is no space* for love between the two families.

In this way, you create a circumstance that relates to everything that happens within the play. This is the fundamental rule of nature within the play and therefore controls the way every character behaves.

EXAMPLE FROM A DEVISING PROCESS

In a world where neoliberal capitalistic game rules of maximum growth have been derailed, meaning there are no rules, out of control, only the privileged few will win, creating more losers than winners. These 'losers', the under privileged, keep up this system by consuming and voting. In this world *there is no space* to leave the game, stop it, or turn it back.

Here you have created a dialectical premise enabling the creation of a performance that is poisoned with this deadlock in every attraction you make.

IV. Instigating Driving Circumstances

In every play, this driving circumstance is essential to start the Throughout Line of Action, that we the audience will be watching. In a devised process, this driving circumstance is the initiating power that will contradict all the above-mentioned phenomena, so that the dramaturgy will have a driving force.

EXAMPLE FROM A WRITTEN TEXT

In *Romeo and Juliet* this driving circumstance is of course the love between Romeo and Juliet. Only with the initiation of this unique power within the play can the Throughout Line of Action take place. And maybe most importantly, the other circumstances become understandable to the audience.

EXAMPLE FROM A DEVISING PROCESS

The Driving Circumstances must threaten the world order we have created. So, in the neoliberal world where the game rules cannot be changed, something new comes in. Possibly a virus called COVID-19, that somehow manages to stop

or at least slow down the mega game of neoliberal capitalism and consumption, just for a few weeks or months, or a year. Then see how these other circumstance we have found catch fire. Where suddenly, maybe a possibility of a change arises.

This driving circumstances enhances or puts a magnifying glass on the Given Circumstances that then catch fire. It is essential that this contradiction comes into the process, otherwise the essential tension necessary to build a devised process will be lacking.

Since it is here that the most important questions behind the project are answered, directors generally spend most of their time in this area. Finding the concept. What story do I want to tell, why do I want to do this play, or this devised process, and how do I want to do it?

The most important thing here is to understand that these four circumstances all stand in a dialectical relationship with each other. When such a nucleus is found, you have a strong inner motor to bring a piece of stage art into the world.

Middle Circle and Middle Unit

Here there is a great deal of difference between the two methods. They demand different analysis models and their realisation will require different dramaturgies. I will try to present the two different methods in order to reveal the differences.

ACTION ANALYSIS MIDDLE CIRCLE

In Action Analysis, the work on analysing the play itself takes place in the middle circle.

To understand the Action Analysis, you must imagine that you are dealing with a play that has a Throughout Line of Action, *Romeo and Juliet* for instance. Then we apply the tools provided by the method to determine the Throughout Line of Action, the main conflict, the Given Circumstances and the Main Events.

In the table below, all the tools of the Action Analysis in the middle circle are drawn in.

Tovstanogovs table.	1. Initial event. In a world (BGC) no space for (IDC)...	2. Primary event. What happens for the first time?	3. Central event. Where is the Main conflict of the play under most\less pressure?	4. Final event. Where do the Instigating Driving Cirum-stances come to a stop?	5. Principal event. Has the world become better or worse?
A. BGC Basic given circum-stance. In a world... no space for	X	X+Y	X+Y	X+Y	?=XY
B. Main conflict of the play. Objective of the play		The battle for....	Closest or most far away from reaching the objective	The objective reached or not?	What has happened to IDC after its encounter with BGC?
C. IDC Instigating driving circum-stance: In a world... no space for		Y	Y	Y Comes to an end	

Fabel is an objective description of the main events of a play, and constitutes a good tool for determining these five events, especially if it is a big play.

This is a good exercise for boiling down a play. Be objective, no interpretation at this stage, and try to formulate the main events without which the play would come to a halt.

EXAMPLE

Fabel for *Romeo and Juliet*:

A boy and a girl from rival families fall in love, only to find out that their love is forbidden. They marry secretly. The boy kills the girl's uncle and is sent into exile. The girl makes a plan to deceive the world by faking her death, the plan goes wrong, and the boy, believing her to be dead, kills himself. She wakes up to find him dead and kills herself.

Fable has no interpretation only an objective description of what happens. It is very important at this stage to resist the temptation of starting to interpret or creating a concept. Just try to find out what the play is about.

Vertical lines

The five events are marked out on the vertical line. The play is divided into five major events each having a name and a certain question that helps you to locate them and understand the meaning they have for the Throughout Line of Action.

1. Initial event. What are the Basic Given Circumstances of the play? In a world...there is no space for...? This event is not necessarily to be found in the play itself.

EXAMPLE

In *Romeo and Juliet*: *In the world* where civil war between two clans has been going on for years and the chain of hatred, revenge and blood cannot be broken *there is no space* for love between the two families.

2. Primary event. Where in the play does something happen for the first time or the last, that has never happened before?

EXAMPLE

In *Romeo and Juliet* this is where they meet for the first time at the masquerade.

3. Central event. Where is the new conflict of the play under the greatest or least pressure?

EXAMPLE

In *Romeo and Juliet* this is when Romeo kills Tybalt.

4. Final event. Where does the conflict that we have been following through the play come to an end?

EXAMPLE

In *Romeo and Juliet*, this is when Romeo finds what he thinks is his dead Juliet, and kills himself, only for Juliet to wake up and find Romeo dead, whereupon she kills herself.

5. Principal event. How has the world been affected by the conflict of the play? Has the world changed for better or for worse? This event is not necessarily to be found in the play. Here the Super Objective with the production is addressed.

EXAMPLE

Has the love of Romeo and Juliet changed the world? Does the chain of revenge and hatred break or will it grow stronger? To follow our analyses from the concept motor: Have the patriarchal structures that use violence to reinforce their power been put in check or is this outcome a reason for total war?

Horizontal lines

In the three horizontal boxes you can see the three powers or contradictions that need to be defined to create dramatic tension which can therefore be released in the Throughout Line of Action.

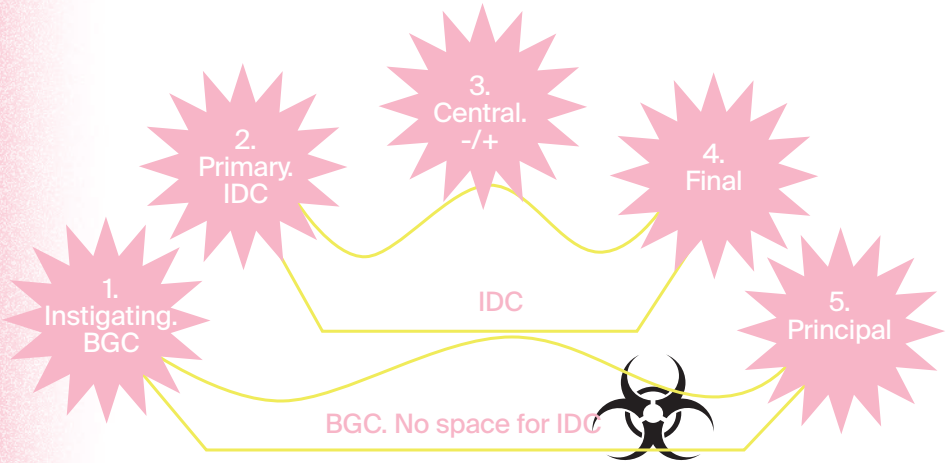
A. The basic given circumstances. In a world... No space for...

B. The main conflict of the play. This is the battle for the new goal. In *Romeo and Juliet* it is 'the battle to be together'.

C. Instigating driving circumstances. These are what comes into the play in the Primary Event setting the whole Basic Given Circumstances into action.

In *Romeo and Juliet* it is *the love between the two of them*. This love between the two families, i.e., the contradiction built into The Basic Given Circumstances, becomes active as never before, and the Throughout Line of Action is instigated (therefore the name of the circumstances) motivating the objective of Romeo and Juliet and releasing the main conflict of the play: The battle to be together.

A very simplified table could look like this, an analogy being where you have two tubs of chemicals that should not be mixed, but you do so thus releasing a chemical chain reaction, the Throughout Line of Action.



Action Analysis is a method that works on plays built on causality, or cause-effect dramaturgy where one event leads to the next. This has often been used as an argument to limit the use of the method. It is my experience that the method can be used in several different ways all depending on which play you are working on. The analytical method gives you an overview of the play, the main events and the contradictory powers at large within it. This does not mean that the method applies to all plays but parts of it can be applied to almost all plays.

We will now change track to start looking at the Middle Unit in the Montage Theory.

Montage Theory Middle Unit

One of Meyerhold's seminal essays, published in 1913, was called 'The Fairground Booth' or 'Balagan' in which he lays out the broad lines of his avant-garde dramaturgy. I give the word to Meyerhold:

> *I have come to regard the mise en scène not as something which works directly on the spectator but rather as a series of 'passes', each intended to evoke some association or other in the spectator (…) Your imagination is activated, your fantasy stimulated, and a whole chorus of associations is set off. A multitude of accumulated associations gives birth to new worlds (…) You can no longer distinguish between what the director is responsible for and what is inspired by the associations which have invaded your imagination. A new world is created, quite separate from the fragments of life from which the [piece] is composed.* Braun and Meyerhold, 1998:318-319)

Meyerhold is explaining a new way of conceiving a theatrical event for the audience where the audience itself should be active in creating the meaning. Interaction with the audience lies at the core of Montage Theory. Meyerhold suggests a very lucid way of perceiving a performance. He dreams of setting the fantasy of the audience ablaze. It is the audience's role to be active, analytic and sensitive to the meaning of the performance.

In this case, the Throughout Line of Action from Action Analysis does not exist. The Montage Theory suggests that a series of attractions connected by a theme, paradox, or story, create a new way of working and creating theatre for an audience.

The Proletkult's aim was the rejection of all pre-Revolutionary theatre forms in favour of a new Russian culture led entirely by the Proletariat. The lines between actor and spectator were to be blurred, with the ultimate goal

Konstantin Rudnitsky notes, of 'turning spectators into actors' (Rudnitsky, 2000, p. 45)

It is this Montage of Attractions that create the Middle Unit in this method. How the attractions are lined up in a dialectical, juxtapositional dramaturgy, affecting the audience and therefore creating a meaning.

This method grew with Meyerhold's apprentice, Russian filmmaker Sergey Eisenstein in whose film dramaturgy Meyerhold's work appears. But there is a difference in the definitions of the Montage. Consider what Eisenstein says when he refers to the Montage.

The montage is…

(…) mathematically calculated to produce specific emotional shocks in the spectator in their proper order within the whole. These shocks provide the only opportunity of perceiving the ideological aspect of what is being shown, the final ideological conclusion (…) Eisenstein and Taylor, 1998:4

There is a difference between the more lucid definition of Meyerhold and the more rigid definition of Eisenstein. Eisenstein means that every attraction and the order they are put into are mathematically calculated to have a certain specific effect on the audience, therefore awakening in them very defined and specific associations.

The other interesting aspect here is the final line of his definition:

(…) of perceiving the ideological aspect of what is being shown, the final ideological conclusion (…)

Eisenstein and Taylor, 1998:4

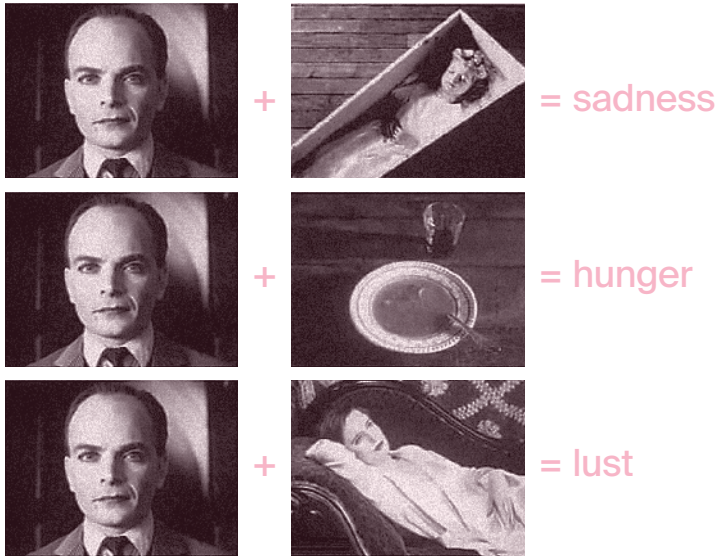
One must remember, however, that the method is built as an agitational tool at a time when social and political changes in the form of a revolution were taking place. So Marxism lies at the core of this method with its dialectical approach.

4. 1+1=3
THE KULESHOV EFFECT

The Russian filmmaker Lev Kuleshov is considered the first theoretical film maker. His theory about juxtaposition is often referred to as the most groundbreaking piece of film research in the last century.

At the core of his theory is juxtaposition. The meaning of juxtapositioning is to place two seemingly abstract things close to each other to create a third meaning.

Kuleshov's juxtapositioning:



The tablet shows Kuleshov's famous experiment: Kuleshov edited together the same frame of a man looking into camera followed by a frame he would then change. The actor in the first frame was given strict direction not to think or act anything, just stare into the camera.

First cut. You can see the man's face and the next frame is a coffin with a child. Leading the audience to feel sadness.

Second cut. The same cut of the man's face followed by a bowl of soup. The association with hunger comes to the audience's mind.

Third cut. Again, the same cut of the man but followed by a cut of a lady on a sofa. Lust awakens in the audience.

Juxtapositioning is how you arrange or assemble elements to guide the audience to the ultimate ideological conclusion. The spectators connect the dots, filling in the lacuna (the unfilled space) for themselves, generating an understanding they hadn't known before, an a-logical understanding. (A-logical, being outside the bounds of that to which logic can apply, the unconscious is a-logical)

The arrangement of the attractions isn't a logical or chronological sequence, pursuing an Aristotelian or Stanislavskian causality that's 'self-contained and all-determining', but a theatrical one. It's neither logical nor illogical, but a-logical, meaning that it is associative, aiming to establish a certain final thematic effect that is more than the simple sum of the fragments. (The trap closes.)

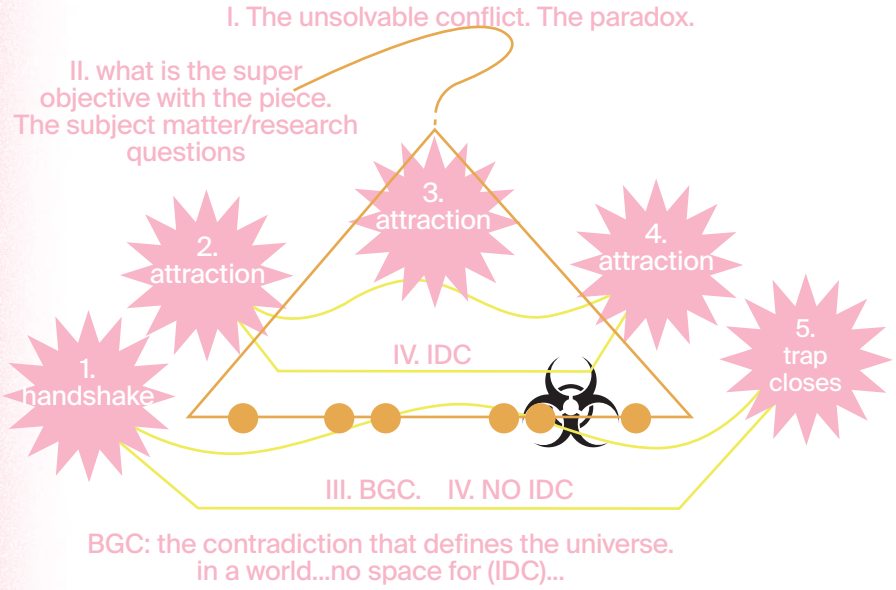
Bertold Brecht uses this method in his theory about the Epic Theatre. It is one of the essential ingredients in his dramaturgical structure. Brecht writes:

> *(…) each scene for itself (…) in contrast to (…) one scene makes another (…); The episodes must not succeed one another indistinguishably but must give us a chance to interpose our judgment. The parts of the story have to be carefully set off one against another by giving each its own structure as a play within the play.* Squiers, 2012:84

The selection of the attractions, however, does not come about by chance in a fortunate or beneficial way. Each element is carefully and purposefully chosen from all the possibilities in order to generate the desired response. How each attraction interacts with those around it, creating tension or conflict, determines the selection and juxtaposition and how the audience is affected.

Montage Theory becomes even more powerful within the avant-garde as an alternative to narrative linear storytelling. Its power lies in its associative aspect, used to its limits by twentieth-century propagandists.

In the tableau below, you can see how the Montage method comes together and how it is related to Action Analysis.



Please look at attraction one and five.

1. The handshake. This is a theatrical handshake with the audience to give them an idea of the degree to which they will interact with, or be immersed in, the piece they will be joining. What kind of universe will they be participating in?

5. The trap closes. In this attraction, there is often an attempt to bring the audience to the ultimate ideological conclusion. Sometimes it can be seen as where the domino falls backwards in the production they've been seeing. It is where the immersive or the interactive part of the production are addressed. What role has the audience been playing, and maybe most importantly what for?

The fundamental differences between the two methods can be summarised in two words; Causality and Juxtaposition.

Causality, meaning that a play is built on a cause-and-effect logic, such as *Romeo and Juliet*. One situation leads to another, therefore affecting the coming situation. Henceforth creating a Throughout-Line-of-Action drama.

Juxtapositioning, meaning that a play is built on placing seemingly abstract things close together to create a third meaning for the audience. Those attractions, as they are called in Montage Theory, are independent of each other but when carefully assembled in the montage they create a new meaning.

Now let's move onto our last and final toolkit, the small circle in Action Analysis and the Small Unit in the Theory of Montage.

Smallest Circle

In Action Analysis, the smallest unit is called a Situation. This is where Action Analysis and the Physical Action Theory unite. It is where the director works with the actor and these two systems come together.

A situation is the smallest entity the play can be broken down into. Meaning each situation for itself. This then

creates a chain of situations that in their causality create the Throughout Line of Action.

The definition of a Situation is very important for creating what is called Stage Action.

Stage Action is defined as: an active unified psycho-physical process to achieve an objective in a struggle with or against the proposed circumstances, a struggle that unfolds in a given space and at a specific time, here and now, in the small circle.

This definition lies at the core of the Physical Action Theory. It is a method well known within classical acting. We will not go further into our understanding of this method here, but move on to discuss what a situation is.

The definition of a Situation is: a situation is the sum of the given circumstances, one driving circumstance, and a transitive verb for each character. And a title for the situation, the so-called mise-en-scène.

EXAMPLE

Romeo and Juliet. Consider the scene where the two meet at the masquerade. If you break the scene down into a situation, it could look like this:

Title. Love at first sight

Juliet's transitive verb: to get a clear sign of real love from the unknown boy.

Romeo's transitive verb: to get a clear sign of real love from the unknown girl.

Notice how the two transitive verbs are alike and a delightful comical tension can therefore arise between the two.

The driving circumstances. The strongest motivation for the scene is the love at first sight between the two characters.

Sum of given circumstances. There are many circumstances, for example the masquerade, their experience with love, the fact that Juliet is supposed to marry Paris, and Romeo is recovering from a broken heart after Rosalind. But one very important circumstance in this scene is that neither knows who the other is.

The fourth wall. At the core of this method lies the relationship between the characters and what they want from each other, binding them together in a closed conflict. One situation feeds into the next, thereby letting the conflict grow as the play moves along.

This is one of the reasons for the creation of the fourth wall. The fourth wall is where characters interact with each other in a closed environment, no audience being present. This does not mean that the fourth wall cannot be opened in these plays to allow the audience to be addressed, as Brecht did, but most importantly it relies on the other characters to unfold the Throughout Line of Action.

Smallest Unit

In Montage Theory, the Smallest Unit is called an 'Attraction'. 'Attraction' is the same word that is used to describe a sideshow, vaudeville, or a circus; in fact, the Russian noun attraktsion also means 'sideshow'.

Maria Knebel, Stanislavski's last assistant, not only created the Action and Active Analysis directing method, but also contributed to the more avant-guard theory of Meyerhold. She called the Attraction an 'Opening'.

An opening is a format where the theatre artist is inspired by the sister arts, visual arts, dance, poetry, music, etc. This is where the abstract, the alogical, metaphorical, expressive theatrical form of theatre comes to live, the starting point for opening immersive theatre, devised theatre, physical and visual theatre.

Let's consider Maria Knebel's Theory. It presents very useful tools and definitions for what an Opening/Attraction could be.

An opening is a specific emotional, conceptual blow/stroke, to the audience, created through theatrical means (with theatre technique).

Knebel develops this idea and tries to help us understand the difference between a situation and an opening.

An opening is not a situation, it has no Throughout Line of Action. But openings do have strong content: theme, contradiction, dilemma, message, emotion, and philosophical/poetic thought. In addition, there is a specific form: the aesthetic language that is the content and expression of the 'what' at the same time. The **how** is the **what**!

Openings should not be used as illustrations, but they belong to one of the unwritten rules of theatre, I see one thingand hear the other, and understand the third.

Maria Knebel lays out ten fundamental rules for creating openings:

1. No illustrations, no direct contact between pictures and words.
2. The fantasy/imagination of the director/theatre maker leads. Their insight.
3. Find/seek the emotional/conceptual content, that is what should be made visible.
4. The stage elements used should be connected to the inner emotional/conceptual content.
5. An ascetic use of elements.
6. Harmony and coherency between the scenic elements.
7. Condensed, short, and precise theatre language
8. Precision in the musical, and poetic solutions.
9. Expressive scenic metaphor.
10. A decisive quest into the emotional thought of the text. And not an interpretation of a dramatic conflict to illustrate the text.

The clearer your goal is with your opening, and the better/more refined the scenic elements you are using, the clearer your theatre music will become!

Knebel gives us a clear view of the difference between a situation and an opening, as well as trying to define the lucid form of an opening. Notice the importance in the definition that *it's a blow or a stroke to the audience,* not to another character on stage. This means that openings belong to the immersive theatre tradition. I do not know what brought Knebel to use the word 'opening' instead of 'attraction', maybe it was Soviet censorship.

We shall now consider how Meyerhold and Eisenstein defined their work. They both use the word 'attraction' as the smallest unit in Montage Theory.

The definition of an Attraction is: Any aggressive aspect of the theatre, that is, any element of it which has a sensual or psychological impact on the spectator.

Again, the audience is the receiver, not another character inside the play.

The Montage Theory also concludes with the following:

Each attraction is:

1. Discrete/condensed and complete.
2. Selected and presented to have the strongest effect on the spectator.
3. Is independent of any of the others, either for its meaning, or for its presence on the stage.
4. Can be summoned only in the a-logical summary of the 'whole/the concept'

At the core of Montage Theory lies the fundamental belief that dialectics are the main dramatic ingredients, that inside each attraction certain elements of a thesis and antithesis are put forward so that the audience create the synthesis.

This means that any work done on attractions is meant to affect the audience and not another character on stage. The whole method therefore includes the audience in an immersive theatrical experience. How this immersiveness is then developed is up to the theatre maker.

This is where the two methods fundamentally differ. The Action Analysis goal in the Little Circle, each situation for itself, is to create a moment of conflict between characters on stage. The Montage Theory of Attractions, on the other hand, seeks to build up the most dialectical, juxtapositional, and immersive effect on the audience as possible.

5. A LITTLE BIT ABOUT HOW THIS AFFECTS CONTEMPORARY POSTDRAMATIC THEATRE.

Hans-Thies Lehmann, a German scholar professor and theoretician, and the author of the seminal book *The Postdramatic Theatre*, situates the emergence of the Postdramatic in the 1970s with the booming of mass media and communication technologies. According to Lehmann, these have resulted in changed perception, as well as in changed social communication that is profoundly shaped by general accessibility to information technologies. Postdramatic theatre then, which consists of a *new multiform kind of theatrical discourse* (Lehmann and Jurs-Munby, 2006), is theatre's response to these changing modes of communication and perception.

Postmodernism in general is reflected in a theatrical form where the binding unities of the plot (or diegesis), psychology, logocentrism (or the association of subject and speech), the author, the totality and coherence of the text and illusionism, give way to the postdramatic aesthetics of the fragment. The main feature of this change **is the replacement of mimesis or imitation of human action, by the production of presence, through staging the real.** Therefore, postdramatic theatre is not dramatic, meaning that it does not offer a closed and mimetic representation of the world. It does not represent; instead, it relates.

It is my thorough belief that, when creating or working with devised theater or the postdramatic, you are still using the fundamental elements of the Montage of Attraction theory.

6. JUST ONE LAST FOR THE END

The Seagull by Anton Chekhov shows us how theatre artists passionately fight with each other about what kind of theatre is the real theatre. It is my hope that contemporary theatre-makers can be more open minded towards different kinds of stage art, more tolerant of them, embracing the difference, enhancing tolerance and understanding, and most importantly giving our audience a magnificent theatrical experience.

Best of luck, and remember have fun! Trial and error is the name of the game!

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REFLECTIONS ON A CURIOUS ART FORM
An essay in nine steps

Kristina Hagström-Ståhl

"Why does tragedy exist? Because you are full of rage.
Why are you full of rage? Because you are full of grief."

Anne Carson

"There is always rage in grief." Judith Butler

"I'm a strange new kind of inbetween thing aren't I"

Antigone

1. THE TIME OF WRITING

As I write this text, typing with one hand, a baby – my infant son – lies cradled in my lap with his head on my arm. Lips pouting, he drifts in and out of sleep, the corners of his mouth twitching occasionally into a brief smile, or at times into a grimace of displeasure. As his face relaxes, he sighs softly, growing heavier against my arm. I wonder what he is dreaming, what his memories are, what he thinks when his fluttering eyelids open to reveal his curious, profound, unwavering baby gaze. At this stage he has no language to tell me, and by the time he acquires the use of words he will have no memory of what it was like.

This phase of life is, as a friend puts it, a close encounter with unsayable mystery – its temporality the paradox of a continuous yet ungraspable present. Here I am at work and there he is, "rendering", in e.e. cummings' words, "death and forever with each breathing". A reminder of infinity, intimacy, and "intense fragility" (cummings 1931). But also of the cycles and repetitions of quotidian life, which must be managed amidst all the thinking, making, and labouring involved in artistic practice.

The baby dozes off once more and I type as quickly as I can, hoping to commit my thoughts and reflections to paper while there is time.

A reminder of the present.

A reminder to be present.

Written in spare moments, this text intends to say something about the mise en scène of tragedy and about my own experiences staging Sophocles' *Antigone* in Anne Carson's translation from the Greek. The time of writing is of course different from that of the rehearsal period – which in my experience often feels like a volatile marriage between repetition (which is the actual word for rehearsal in Swedish, '*rep*' for short) and a relentless rush toward the edge of a steep cliff that is opening night. The rehearsal process is also, profoundly, a collective experience, unlike what I am undertaking now, while caring for a baby I wasn't yet carrying at the time of the production work.

In those intense weeks of rehearsal, my job is to create a genuinely collaborative work environment, and then to practice edging myself out of the core of creativity so that when the time comes the cast and crew will be able to leap off the cliff, assured or willing to believe that their wings will carry and that the world that is the play can continue to evolve in flight. In this present work of thinking, remembering, and writing, my own perspectives, ideas, and visions remain central as I try to account for my process of 'coming to' a play in the genre of tragedy, and what I believe it has to offer as drama, as form, as dramaturgy, as a narrative for our times.

My thought process feels belated, it responds to my own present moment. It works through the traces that are notes, documentation, and memory, consists in tracing – a reminder that the time of performance is, as Peggy

Phelan puts it, a coming into being through disappearance (Phelan 1993: 146). While I become increasingly (re-)immersed in the experience of working with *Antigone*, the performance itself, its work context, its audience encounters, are gone.

2. A CURIOUS ART FORM

Phelan argues that this vanishing constitutes the very ontology of performance, and that it points to something constitutive in subjectivity and human experience as well. In its process of repetition, performance can be understood as a reflection of loss, but also, perhaps more acutely, it can function as a *rehearsal* for loss: "it rehearses and repeats the disappearance of the subject who longs always to be remembered" (Phelan 1993: 147). Phelan's words struck me deeply when I first read them as a student and they have remained with me as a director. As I was preparing my work on *Antigone*, I found them resonating with Carson's formulation of tragedy's raison d'être, cited in the epigraph above (Carson 2008: 7). Carson introduces tragic dramaturgy as simultaneous revelation and consequence of a fundamental aspect of the human condition – the interconnectedness of rage and grief – and also intimates that it meets a (repressed, unfulfilled?) contemporary need to frame and engage with these emotions. She calls tragedy a "curious art form", suggesting that what's curious about it is what it affords its spectator – the 'you' whom she addresses.

Not only does tragedy have the capacity to "put a frame around" your grief and rage, Carson writes, but it also offers actors who "act for you". Through a relationality and ethics of sacrifice, the actor performing the drama allows the spectator to encounter herself in a particularly, perhaps curiously, intimate way: "You sacrifice them to action. And this sacrifice is a mode of deepest intimacy of you with your own life. (…) The actor, by reiterating you, sacrifices a moment of his own life in order to give you a story of yours" (Carson 2008: 7). The notion of the actor (in character) as stand-in for the spectator, via projection and identification, is of course well-established in Greek drama through Aristotle's formulation of terror and pity as part of the experience of *katharsis* (Aristotle 1987: 37): "There is a theory that watching stories about other people lost in grief and rage is good for you – may cleanse you of your darkness", Carson remarks (Carson 2008: 7). It is also a key aspect of most contemporary performance practices founded in realism.

But beyond identification, the sacrifice enacted through mutual agreement in the encounter between spectator and actor can, in my reading, be understood to engender a form of double consciousness and a particular experiential temporality: tragedy, as theatrical form, allows for the *simultaneity of looking upon and living through* an experience of rage and grief. As an artform, tragedy thus affords the spectator the possibility of being at once within and outside the experience, (re)living and emoting while also reflecting. This is not exactly *katharsis* but another form of deep, and perhaps curious, experience – of being at once within and beside oneself.

This form of double consciousness was at the heart of my staging of *Antigone*. I wanted to offer my audience a deep emotional experience while simultaneously providing space for reflection, operating through affect *and* critical thinking. In Carson's translations/adaptations of *Antigone*[1], I found strategies and choices that seemed to enact this kind of double consciousness on behalf of the play. As if in response to the self-commentary that tragedy performs through the function

1 In 2012, Carson published *Antigonick*, a poetic and experimental rendering of Antigone; in 2015, commissioned by director Ivo van Hoven, she subsequently produced a "straight" translation, closer to the Greek original. The latter version, which was originally performed in van Hove's production at the Barbican and Les Théâtres de la Ville de Luxembourg, is what I directed, in my own relay translation into Swedish. In both works, Carson spells Sophokles, Kreon, Polyneikes, and Eurydike with a "k" rather than a "c". Where I mention these names in direct connection with Carson's translation, I have chosen to go with Carson's spelling, but in sections focused on a wider argument or discursive reflection, I have stayed with the more conventional "c".

of the Chorus, Carson, whose translational work is poetic, drastic, full of play, at times uses language and word choice to let the reader/spectator know that the text is aware of itself as text, as translation, and that the play, perhaps to a greater extent than its characters, understands its own history and fate. While a full exploration of Carson's translation is the topic of another essay, I bring it up here because it encouraged me to develop a corresponding theatrical language. I wanted to direct *Antigone* on the one hand as an exploration of tragedy as theatrical form, and on the other as a sustained meditation on grief and grievability. Carson's characterisation of tragedy resonated with me because of what it suggested for the potential of performance – and also for what it says about grief.

3. GRIEF, RAGE, GRIEVABILITY

"There is always rage in grief" – Judith Butler's reflection, referring to a Freudian framework and offered as part of a conversation on notions of grievability in her work, provides another point of resonance (Butler 2021). Uttered in the context of a discussion on the potential political force of grieving, Butler's words echo those of Carson – albeit with inverted causality[2]. These perspectives – rage driven by grief (and vice versa), their political as well as dramaturgical force – converge in Sophoclean dramaturgy and appear to do so in particular in the character of Antigone. For even beyond the loss of Antigone's brother(s) and the "archives of grief" accumulated through her family's history (Sophokles/Carson 2015: 32), it is possible to imagine that it is the politics of grievability in Creon's Thebes, exacerbated by the framework of war, which lays the ground for Antigone's course of action.

"What *makes for a grievable life*?" Butler asks in a different context (Butler 2004: 20), where, in passing, she also mentions Creon's prohibition on public acts of grieving – in regard to certain deaths, not others (Butler 2004: 36). Through his edict, Creon effectively renders Polyneices ungrievable, de-recognising his subject status and his right to dignity in death. Antigone's response, which is to insist on public mourning and (counter-)action, appears driven by rage as much as grief and is decidedly political. When Ismene attempts (and fails) to dissuade Antigone from challenging Creon, she pleads with her to "at least keep this secret". To this Antigone answers: "oh no, proclaim it to all! I insist!" (Sophokles/Carson 2015: 15) That the act be public is part of its force.

However, grievability is a complex question in the play. When Creon accuses Antigone of dishonouring Eteocles, she retorts: "it was no slave that died it was his brother" (Sophokles/Carson 2015: 29) – a remark that says something about her own idea of whose life is/isn't grievable, and by extension which lives mattered and ordinarily merited public acts of grieving in Athenian society. It also says something about the quality and degree of transgression in Creon's edict. Furthermore, the question of a grievable life can be extended to Antigone as well: who mourns for her? No one, according to her own account, and this is perhaps part of her *hamartia* – that she does not conceive of her own life as grievable, cannot see the capacity for grief and rage in those around her, cannot see the complex effects and consequences of the acts she initiates. It is a blind spot she shares with Creon; neither of them seems to encompass the extent to which their own actions will add to that archive of grief.

Butler suggests that Antigone may in fact be incapable of the mourning she asserts her right to perform, pointing

2 In a remark made during an online seminar at Aalborg University, entitled The Culture of Grief, Butler suggested that "Carson is right" in regard to the interconnectedness of rage and grief. *The Culture of Grief: Philosophy, Ecology and Politics of Loss in the Twenty-first Century*. https://www.en.hum.aau.dk/events/view/the-culture-of-grief----philosophy--ecology-and-politics-of-loss-in-the-twenty-first-century.cid455301. Dec 3 2020.

to the "unspoken grief" for Antigone's father, mother, other brother – even for Ismene – that lies hidden in her claim: "though Antigone seeks to overcome [Creon's] edict, it is not entirely clear all of what she grieves or whether the public act she performs can be the site of its resolution" (Butler 2000: 79-80). Butler goes so far as to call it a "refusal to grieve", which she argues is "accomplished through the very public terms by which she insists on her right to grieve" (Butler 2000: 80). Perhaps Antigone is not after all the primary subject of mourning in the play. She certainly is not the only one. Yet in a sense this is something that the play hides or deflects; all acts of grief but the one Antigone insists on performing are relegated to side narratives, with the exception of Creon's plaint in the final scene. Could this be staged differently?

4. THE INBETWEEN

As a feminist director and researcher in the arts, with a certain pull toward the intersection(s) of performance and philosophy, I tend to approach mise en scène as a mode of critical inquiry. It interests me to explore the tension between received understandings and new ideas, and with *Antigone* I wanted to create a performance that was *both* faithful to the conventions of Greek tragedy *and* innovative in terms of how it tends to be staged. I am drawn to classical plays and the canon because I like working with modes of relationality, between past and present, between experience and reflection, with and against histories of interpretation. I had a feminist staging in mind, but one that didn't – as is so often the case – centre Antigone as a singular (or solitary) figuration of agency, power, or the political. Rather, I wanted to explore dramaturgy as a potential site of resistance, and critical and discursive engagement as a creative (or 'artistic') strategy.

As a spectator of tragedy, writes Carson, "you can be aware of your own awareness (…) as you never are at the moment of experience" (Carson 2008: 7). I imagined I could find ways to develop this mode of awareness in my mise en scène; however, perhaps unlike what Carson implies, I sought reflection not only on the spectators' own experience, but on the drama itself. In a Brechtian manner I wanted to immerse my audience in the tragedy of *Antigone* while simultaneously reminding them of the history shaping that tragedy, prompting them to ask themselves whether alternative understandings and emotional responses are possible. Moreover, I was interested in showing the work's experience (and awareness) of itself – meaning a method of self-reflexivity permitting the drama to unfold with a certain gaze upon itself. The focus of my exploration is always what performance *can do*, what it affords, what it brings about; here, among many other things, it had to do with how the work might encompass its own canonisation.

For part of my interest in *Antigone* was its history as one of the world's most frequently performed and extensively commented-upon plays. From Aristotle through Hegel and Freud, Sophoclean drama has had a foundational role in theories of subjectivity, desire, kinship, and politics, in addition to poetics and dramaturgy. However, as Bonnie Honig points out, it has also been "harnessed to, and in turn licenses" particular lines of inquiry in the discursive field (Honig 2013: 185). Genealogies of tragedy, psychoanalysis, and (Hegelian/speculative) philosophy seem inextricably linked, conditioning contemporary understanding of the

artform (one could say that these traditions have become the foundation of theatre, even as theatre was the foundation of those traditions). I wondered if this premise could somehow be incorporated into the mise en scène or serve as a point of departure. I also had the sense that theatrical realism, due to its contemporaneity with nineteenth-century philosophy and the development of psychoanalysis, has shaped modern conventions and frameworks for reading character, plot, and dramatic conflict in tragedy. I wanted to explore the "liminal space", as Freddie Rokem calls it, "situated somewhere 'between' the discursive practices" of performance and philosophy (Rokem 2010: 3), and moreover expand that space to include performance practices as well.

Carson's translation of Antigone's dirge – in which Antigone laments her own death, claiming that no one else will – provided me with a valuable point of entry. It is here that Antigone describes herself as "a strange new kind of in-between thing" (Sophokles/Carson 2015: 39). In the context of her lamentation, the 'inbetween' destines Antigone to something impossible; Carson connects it to the Greeks' abhorrence of transgression, mixing, and "filth" (Carson 2015: 6-7). However, she also reminds her reader that Antigone, through her embodiment of the inbetween, can be understood as "the champion of 'withness' from the beginning of the play until her death" – that 'withness' is "Antigone's morality, Antigone's desire, Antigone's disaster" (Carson 2015: 7-8). This comes from Antigone's self-described affiliation with the verb "*synphilein* (to love with)" (Carson 2015: 7). For the purposes of my production, the inbetween – drawing together notions of transgression and withness – seemed a brilliant, inspiring term for working in that liminal space, simultaneously with and against the grain.

Claiming that *Antigone* is a "pile" of contradictions and excess, Carson emphasises the blending of things that ought perhaps not to be blended as part of the play's dramatic conflict. While calling Sophoclean dramaturgy "the net", maintaining that "he tucks in every stray thread", she also suggests that the play itself offers some resistance to such "terrifying" neatness (Carson 2015: 8).[3] I found it compelling to imagine resistance and contradiction woven into the net, and to consider what autonomous agency is thereby granted the work and its characters.

Convention around Antigone places her at the centre of identification as a lone, heroical, often feminist figure; moreover, a certain unassailable logic tends to be attributed to her character and (anti-patriarchal, anti-state) actions. This figuration is arguably an inheritance from Hegel, whose dialectical logic positions Antigone in symmetrical opposition to Creon – what Honig calls "the Creonic framing" (Honig 2013: 170). Upon a close reading, however, Antigone's character may be single-minded yet is highly contradictory, she is only present in three scenes out of eight, and she exits the play about two-thirds through. As such, it is uncertain whether her character really 'works' as traditional dramaturgical agent and protagonist, something that has given rise to commentary about Creon being Sophocles' 'real' protagonist and dramaturgical heir to Oedipus (Grene 1991: 3). Meanwhile, does Antigone have to be imagined as a 'proper' Aristotelean or Hegelian protagonist to merit our sympathy and identification? Ultimately, which actor(s) do we imagine acting for us? Could Antigone's narrative and character be staged in terms of withness, and moreover as the transgressive, messy, "strange new kind of inbetween thing" she claims to be?

3 Carson offers variations on this description, using some of the same wording, in a podcast produced by Tania Ketenjian for the Brooklyn Academy of Music in connection with performances of van Hove's production. The podcast can be accessed here: https://www.theguardian.com/stage/audio/2015/sep/24/bam-antigone-anne-carson-juliette-binoche-podcast.

5. HEGELIAN RETURNS

With this in mind, I wrote an essay examining the Hegelian legacy of the drama within philosophy as well as performance interpretation; in it I explored what it might mean to create a version of *Antigone* that could refocus the quest for protagonist status, beyond the dialectical relationship of Antigone and Creon. Or rather, I asked myself, could that relationship be reframed by a feminist gaze? I suggested repositioning feminine subjectivity within tragedy by taking both Antigone and Ismene seriously as dramaturgical and political subjects and agents, forming a kind of triangulation beside the canonised focus on dialectics. Moreover, drawing on Carson as well as theorists like Butler, Phelan, Honig, and Cecilia Sjöholm, I concluded that relationships between women had been rendered insignificant by histories of discursive and artistic interpretation – "almost invisible until now" (Honig 2013: 170) – and that acts of "re-emplotment and genre-bending" (Honig 2013: 194), even a reimagining of the very form of tragedy, would be necessary in order to visualise differently their agency, relationship, and import.

In particular, inspired by Honig, I came to centre on Ismene. This historically overlooked character, appearing in a mere two scenes before disappearing from the play *and the plot* about halfway through, embodies the paradox of being a character without a trajectory. She is often portrayed as incapable of action, and in her reception history she is considered non-essential, present mostly to serve as a foil for Antigone. Honig suggests, however, that the dialogue between the two sisters in the first scene can be seen to reveal an unexpected political potential; in her reading, Antigone conspires with Ismene – who agrees with Antigone's cause but objects to her methods – to disobey Creon and bury Polyneices.[4]

Introducing the possibility of "solidarity of action in concert among equals" (Honig 2013: 152),[5] rather than casting the sisters as opposites, Honig then posits a scenario in which Ismene, in an attempt to spare/prevent Antigone from undertaking her public act of grief and disobedience, secretly performs the first burial. Thus, when Antigone is caught performing the second burial and Ismene claims her part in the deed, she is speaking the truth. The scene in which Creon confronts the sisters consequently gains a whole new subtext, re-organising the play toward an emphasis on "tragedy's own exploration of the problem of political agency as action under conditions of (near) impossibility" (Honig 2013: 152). Though their strategies may differ, both sisters can be seen as political actors, and moreover as collaborators. A political theorist, Honig also stresses the importance of reading *Antigone* dramaturgically, imagining the contribution of the actors toward this "alternative interpretive strategy" (Sjöholm 2004: 33). In her detailed analysis of the play's dialogue, she frequently invokes possible intentions, postures, and intonation on behalf of the characters, which might convey her reading and facilitate critical interpretation toward "love, anger, rivalry, complicity, mutuality, devotion, and care" rather than the "hegemonic" framing "in which heroic action alone, solitary and disruptive, counts as action" (Honig 2013: 170).

Honig's argument convinced me of the potential of a feminist reading of the drama based on dramaturgy and plot, rather than on a singular 'strong woman' character – still centring questions of grievability, law, and ethics, but expanding the narrative to include more subject positions and perspectives. In addition to Carson's notions of witness and the inbetween, Honig's foregrounding of the sororal relationship as non-antagonistic, the emphasis on political action, and her invocation of

4 For a full discussion of Ismene's reception history, as well as a potential re-reading of the relationship between Antigone and Ismene, including the re-emplotment that Honig proposes, see Chapter 6: "Sacrifice, sorority, integrity: Antigone's conspiracy with Ismene", pp. 151-189, of *Antigone, Interrupted*.

5 The notion of "acting in concert", notably, is borrowed from Butler; see the Introduction to *Undoing Gender* (New York: Routledge, 2004) and *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015), the latter based on a 2011 lecture series at Bryn Mawr College.

"equals acting in concert" gave me the keys I needed to envision the form of my own staging. However, workshopping the central re-emplotment that Honig proposes – that of Ismene performing the first burial – I found that this alternative course of events was difficult to convey through performance. Honig's reading is a brilliant theoretical construct, and feasible on a level of textual analysis, but in order to render this 'other' plot legible (even imaginable) to a spectator it would be necessary to add scenes and/or text. How else would an audience surmise that Ismene, during her first absence from the stage, has gone to perform burial rites for Polyneices?

My challenge to myself is always to perform canonised text 'as is' and to articulate critique and inquiry through staging; thus I gave up on this plotline. I made the decision to focus instead on what I could do with performance as method, and to re-emplot the play by way of re-framing the gaze. The frame itself would be the present, here-and-now moment of the audience encounter, with the central drama in a sense playing itself out in the interiority of Ismene's mind. As I wrote in my essay, "we really have no idea what happens to Ismene, the one principal character who is unaccounted for at the conclusion of the final scene. For this reason, Ismene as character and agent embodies a certain radical potential: her survival, however marginalised, signals the possibility of escape" (Hagström-Ståhl 2019: 150).

6. THE TIME OF THE WITNESS

Without forgoing the Hegelian conflict between Antigone and Creon, I decided I would *also* foreground the role of Ismene and her relationship to Antigone (as well as Creon) by framing and resituating the play from the vantage point of Ismene as a witness to, and survivor of, its events. I came to this reading by considering what emotions must fill Ismene, having done everything to prevent her sister's death and yet being forced to go on living without her, the very last of her troubled family line, in a ruined Thebes. "I'll be so lonely", Ismene says to Antigone, but Antigone is unmoved: "for me to die is altogether adequate (…) take heart and live, Ismene". When Creon accuses Ismene of siding with a criminal, she pleads with him: "how could I go on living without her". He, however, dismisses her with a curt "don't waste my time". Creon is going to sentence her to live despite her claim that she and Antigone are equal in guilt (Sophokles/Carson 2015: 30). In my version we would experience the rage and grief caused by the futility of (Ismene's conventionally downplayed) action, as well as frame these emotions with regret – Ismene's (present) regret that despite her resolve, Antigone's tragic fate was fulfilled. As such, my hope was that the play could take on the mythic and political proportions that its genre demands, while at the same time offering an intimate contemplation of bereavement and loss.

By staging the double or mise en abyme plot of Antigone *and* Ismene, I would comply with the dramaturgical premise of unavoidable destiny – in Carson's translation: "fate (…) / comes down on / everyone / in the end" (Sophokles/Carson 2015: 43) – and yet suggest a form of survival, which would provide no happy ending but rather a form of ambivalence. Setting the play in the simultaneously present, past, and afterwards moment of memory, I could enact the kind of temporality I sought. The framing plot would thus be that of Ismene looking back with all the vicissitudes and uncertainties that acts of memory entail; significantly, she would be drawn in to replay her memory without being able to change the course of events.

Staging Ismene's process of recalling – and re-enacting – the tragedy of losing her sister could also be done without adding dialogue. I imagined Ismene on stage throughout the play, in silent contact with the audience. I created a video score of landscapes and shorelines, including a beachfront fort I came across, where the drama could have taken place; these grainy black-and-white sequences, while functioning as a form of scenographic reference, were intended as Ismene's memory work, as images in her mind's eye. The frames were devoid of people and shot as photographic stills, the movements of nature – waves rolling, the sun rising, a branch waving, clouds drifting across the sky – the only indication of time passing. During the scenes remaining after Ismene exits the stage, a close-up of her eye blended with the video images through a double exposure, as a reminder of her gaze.

As witness, Ismene would become a point of identification for the spectator; I pictured the performance starting and ending with a focus on her. However, my intention was firmly to enable an "alternative interpretive strategy" that would lend constitutive agency to Ismene without eclipsing Antigone as protagonist or diminishing the Antigone-Creon conflict. I would merely pick up on the glitch in the net offered by Sophocles' choice not to return to Ismene or seal her fate within the arc of the play.

7. ACTING IN CONCERT

Taking my cue from the notion of "equals acting in concert", as well as the modalities of theatrical performance in Ancient Greece, I decided to place emphasis on the Chorus as a collective of actors/agents who observe and provide commentary while speaking/singing with a joint voice. I wanted to foreground the role of music in dramatic performance, and in an imagined encounter between Ancient Greece and my own period I envisioned the Chorus as a musical ensemble, a band. I wanted the five actors in my cast to be that band, placed on stage to perform the tragedy of *Antigone* together.

As such, the stage became the site for rehearsing and performing *Antigone* as a play with an extensive music score – or as a concert with dramatic scenes – but it also functioned as the as-if interior world of *Antigone*. In collaboration with the composer Mikael Sundin, I organised the dramaturgy of the performance such that it would in fact function like a concert (or rehearsal for one) in parallel with the dramatic action; each chorus in the play became a song or a piece of music with recited lyrics, and the scenes were accompanied by a score building on the musical components of the different choruses. The set and lighting design, by Tobias Hagström-Ståhl, also emphasised the crossover aesthetics between theatrical and musical performance.

In what I would call a 'transhistorical' compositional method, Sundin combined elements of nineteenth-century compositions for piano with indie sounds from the late twentieth century, sometimes working in Dorian and Aeolian modes. The cast of actors performed the music on various instruments ranging from drums, keyboard, and electric guitar, to prepared piano, guitalele, clarinet, and omnichord. They remained onstage throughout the performance, each stepping in to take on sometimes more than one role in the play. Karin de Frumerie, who played Ismene, is a skilled musician and was able to give Ismene a presence beyond what I had imagined by becoming the band leader; as such,

one could see how Ismene guided the ensemble that was also the Chorus of *Antigone*, whose members took on the roles of the drama as interpellated by the play.

I limited the cast to five actors because I wanted to create a sense that they were 'solving' the play together, collaborating to tell its story by various means. Thus, the Chorus leader, played by Carina M. Johansson, could also appear as Eurydike, and Ramtin Parvaneh was first the Guard, then Haimon, then the Messenger; while Johan Karlberg remained Kreon throughout the performance, both Mia Höglund Melin, who played Antigone, and Karin de Frumerie made returns. Together, in a scene dedicated to sound rather than vision, they gave a dual voice to Teiresias. de Frumerie also performed the ode to Eros and made a reappearance taking the lines of the Chorus in the final scene, something I will return to below. When the actors were not in dramatic character, they functioned as band and chorus members, playing their instruments or observing the dramatic action intently.

My literal interpretation of the terms 'acting' and 'concert' was of course a play on words, but it also pointed to the political role of withness and collective action. Due to the interweaving of musical performance, dramatic action, speaking, listening, and looking, the actors were at every moment acting together; this was an attempt to find an aesthetic form for the collective and democratic politics which, according to Honig, *Antigone* is part of engendering (Honig 2013: 181). It was also to show that despite what Antigone – and Creon – might think and say, Antigone is *not* alone (and Creon wouldn't have to be either, if he didn't want to).

Moreover, I wanted to stress the importance of co-witnessing as historical process and as an ethical act. Rokem, writing on theatre performing historical events and portraying historical characters, suggests that through a performance's repetitive structure, both performers and audience members can become co-witnesses to that which otherwise threatens to disappear without a trace (Rokem 2002: 6). With a slight travesty on Rokem's argument, I want to suggest that while the plot of *Antigone* is mythical, the play as a 'work' (perhaps with a capitalised W) and a part of the Western philosophical and theatrical canon, is certainly historical. Arguably, its canonisation, and with it the acts of interpretation and omission that have foregrounded certain figures and rendered others invisible, is too. The witnessing that I imagined taking place via the performance was not only within the play, but also of the play.

8. THE TIME OF TRAGEDY

In existing interpretive and performance history, Ismene's loss cannot be imagined as such, because she is not a recognisable subject within the play. Indeed, as the play is written, a recalcitrant Creon becomes the voice of regret; his wrongdoing and his loss are centred in the final scene where the chorus returns to remind Creon that his hubris has caused this downfall. By making Ismene into a witness, my aim was also to let her become the indirect subject of the performance, repeating and rehearsing her loss with us.

I want to emphasise this notion of indirectness, and that Ismene's subjectivity rather than her protagonist status was at stake. My mise en scène simply strove to allow her gaze to have an impact on the understanding of the drama, working by extra-textual means – gesture, spatial positionality, musical performance, interaction, acts of looking – to imply

a commentary of sorts. To give one example: at the moment when Antigone utters the words "who will lament me / no one will lament me" (Sophokles/Carson 2015: 40), Ismene would look straight at the audience. One critic, picking up on this choice, described how "Ismene, previously told off [by Antigone], slowly looks up from her piano, her gaze resounding with grief", as such drawing the audience's attention to her own silenced position (Österblom 2019). Whether that gaze meant to contradict Antigone's utterance or express regret that Ismene was not in fact present to support Antigone as she went to her death, was left to the spectator. My intention, rather than to confer a decisive meaning, was to allow Antigone's dirge to resonate against something, against another acting subject.

Sundin and I also had Antigone sing the following lines of the dirge as a song:

O tomb
O bridal chamber
O house in the ground forever
I go to you
I go to meet my people
now numbered among the dead
father
mother
brother
I am the last and the worst of you (Sofokles/Carson 2015: 40)

She began the song a cappella, with a quiet, quavering voice. At "I go to you", however, Ismene softly struck a minor chord on the piano to accompany her. For the lines "father / mother / brother" Ismene also harmonised with her vocally, seemingly joining the song as a reminder that they are her father, mother, and brother too. Ismene, however, is not on the road to join them, and although what the audience hears is the sisters singing together with Ismene's support a possible comfort for Antigone, a temporal disjunct is inferred: Ismene is potentially sitting alone, belatedly, doing now what she couldn't, or didn't, do then. Antigone seems unaware of Ismene's presence, does not react to her chords or her voice. As such the sisters are, and aren't, in the space together. Such layerings, creating intricately and suggestively overlapping temporalities and co-presences, are a reminder of what can be uniquely conveyed through performance.

In one respect, my hope was that the whole performance, by subtle means, would be seen as Ismene's song of lament for Antigone. I also hoped that the mise en abyme structure would frame the Antigone-Creon relationship such that rather than become caught up in what Hegel calls "justification" for their actions (Roche 2006:12), the audience would see the disastrous – and seemingly preventable – consequences of such conflict. In other words, Antigone didn't have to be 'right', or heroic, or capable of transformative mourning, or even a 'proper' protagonist. We could look at her together with Ismene, perhaps with love rather than identification, in an always conflicted witness, experiencing the actions of both Antigone and Creon through the gaze of a character who attempted a different path of resistance and who has been relegated to the margins of history.

In the final scene, where Creon experiences *anagnorisis* and the Chorus serves as his interlocutor, I decided that certain lines of the Chorus as well as the Messenger would be spoken by de Frumerie in her double role as chorus member and Ismene. The idea was to stage one more

encounter between Ismene and Creon, perhaps taking place in Ismene's mind, where she gets the last word and Creon's suffering becomes slightly decentred. Thus, Ismene reappears in the play while simultaneously remaining in the 'present'/afterwards moment with the audience, to give Creon the news that Eurydice has taken her life, giving Creon the blame. She also stays with him until the end, hearing his complaint while subtly responding in a way that stays clear of pity and holds him to account – aided by Carson's translation, which gives the Chorus a wry tone that will not let Creon off the hook.

Kreon *O yes O dear yes*
no one else is to blame
I killed you, I killed you, O dear one, I did
someone, take Kreon away
he no more exists than someone who does not exist

Chorus *best to be brief*
when evil is all around your feet

Kreon *let it come let it come*
let my end come
I cannot bear to look upon another day of life

Chorus *that's the future this is the present*
you deal with the present

Kreon *to die is my only prayer*

Chorus *then don't pray at all*
you don't get to run this Sophokles/Carson 2015: 54

Allowing Ismene to have the last word, tethering Creon to the present and telling him he is no longer in charge, was on the one hand a straightforward 'coup' on my part. But it was also an aesthetic strategy toward unearthing and resuscitating "the feminine subject buried in patriarchal society" (Sjöholm 2004: 33). Moreover, it enabled a circular dramaturgy, closing the gap between 'then' and 'now'.

In a brief piece on *Antigonick* – the experimental version/translation of *Antigone* that Carson undertook prior to her 'straight' translation – Butler concludes that Carson's work leaves us "with the question, What time is the time of tragedy?" The answer lies precisely, Butler suggests, in a joining of past and present: "what happened then keeps happening: these repetitions mark the continuing life of unconscious rage, explicit sorrow, unpredictable and winning humour, and new aesthetic forms that traverse the temporal distance between then and now" (Butler 2012). Temporality, repetition and continuity, rage and sorrow – these were central notions for my work on the play (although I was also very much drawn to the humour and formal experiments of *Antigonick*, key elements of which also shape the second translation). Above all, there was the question of temporality – what it means to join past and present, the possibility of being both within and beside the experience – plus, of course, the question of what aesthetic form that would take. The time of tragedy is the time of performance, of immediacy and 'as if' conditionality, of encounter, of withness. In the case of my own directorial reading of *Antigone*, I would also say that it is the time of (the) witness.

9. LOOKING BACK

In her discussion of grievability, Butler reflects on what it means to mourn someone, suggesting that it "has to do with agreeing to undergo a transformation (perhaps one should say submitting to a transformation) the full result of which one cannot know in advance" (Butler 2004: 21). Such a transformation is arguably part of every deep experience, and it is part of the work of mourning that tragedy undertakes – meaning, what tragedy enables, and also performs. If tragedy exists to meet a constant need, in each iteration of grief and rage it sends us, as spectators, together with the actors who act for us, on a specific journey the outcome of which we cannot know in advance. I find this to be beautiful: the risk and unknowability that performance entails; the solace, compassion, and company that it offers.

Looking back, I think of the silence following the last notes of music, the hush of the audience, the waves still rolling, the curtains closing around the stage.

It's gone now. I miss it.

The baby sleeps.

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Mareike Dobewall (1984) is a director of spatial sound performances. Her work is developed on site together with local performers. The performers are introduced to her sense-based, site-sensitive spatial practice in an introductory workshop. Her works are purely acoustic and insist on the shared space. Mareike Dobewall explores the relationship between the bodies of buildings and the human body practically as she choreographs the bodies and sounds of the performers in the space.

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DIRECTING AS A SPATIAL-SOCIAL PRACTICE

Mareike Nele Dobewall

My approach to directing is *spatial-social*. The term is informed by 'socio-spatial' as defined in urbanism research. It sees social space as both a product and a producer of change. I put the space at the beginning of this interrelation since my practice as a director starts from the space. The space where the performance is created informs all other spaces that emerge during the creation and sharing of the performance, including social space. My spatial-social approach calls forth a shared creative process with the performers. While the collaboration starts at the encounter with the space, it is sustained by sharing the space. It is cultivated through dialogue and by way of interactive improvisation. At the beginning of my work, there is no story, no characters, no dramaturgy. The creation is nourished by recognising my partners in collaboration as complex entities and by what this multiplicity facilitates. I share my practice in the form of workshops, which bring attention to spaces as enablers for storytelling and as co-creators in *site-sensitive* performances. 'Site-sensitive' is a term that I prefer to use instead of 'site-specific'. My works are not only made on site or considering it. My practice focuses on the senses when working *with*[1] spaces. The site informs the way in which a work is created. The work aims to illuminate the site according to the way it reveals itself during the creative process. The improvisation tasks that I use as the base for creating the performance derive from my broad background in film, dance, theatre and music. The tasks that I choose are informed by site and situation. The material that develops by means of these improvisations is specific to the shared space, particular to the people involved and unique for the common time. Using this practice as a director means taking on two parallel roles: the first embodying the practice and letting go of control in order to let original material emerge, the second being the direction of the piece where the director guides and carries the work. The transition between the roles is organic. With the workshops, I open my practice up to the performers in order to guide them into our collaborative site-sensitive creation. In the way that I pay attention to each individual and stimulate collaboration among the performers with sensitivity to the space, the performers learn ways to pay attention to their spatial and social surroundings. Within the listening and sounding exercises that I describe later in this text, the performers are free to explore site-specific[2] material. As the process unfolds, the performers and I gain more experience with the site in relation to our role(s). This experience informs how we perform our specific roles in the later process. For the performers, it becomes evident that they are responsible for site-sensitive expression. As the director, I am informed both by the internal process and the impression their expressions leave in me as an observer. Therefore, my obligation is to connect the individual elements and to shape structures and content from these.

In this text, I will share a case study on the site-sensitive choir performance *Voiceland* (2015 -2018). Collaborative partners for this performance were composer Gísli Jóhann Grétarsson, the choir Hymnodia, scenographer Ylva Owren and a former herring factory in Hjalteyri (Iceland). *Voiceland* was created from the desire to develop a musical performance entirely made of voice. Through several workshops we created a living vocal performance at and *with* the space.

Since in the following text I will focus on my spatial-social practice as a form of contemporary directing, I will not go deeper into the collaboration that I had with the composer and the scenographer, which was intense and

1 Donna Haraway proposes to think *with* instead of thinking about, to acknowledge non-human entities as collaborative partners (Haraway, 2016).

2 In my own work, I use this term to define phenomena that are specific for a space/site. I have a critical view of the term *site-specific* since it is these days used for any artwork that is "conceived with the site in mind" (Irwin, 1985, p. 572). However, the material that is created in a site-sensitive creative process is specific to the site and therefore *site-specific*.

contributed strongly to the resulting performance. The focus here will be on the creative process with the singer-performers and the space.

I will describe the practice in two phases: 1) Searching for *Voiceland* and 2) The director as a guide to and through an unknown country. The first phase describes the introductory encounter between the performers and the space and offers methods for spatial interaction and site-sensitive learning. The second part explains how the material developed and the methods learned from the first phase are used to create a site-sensitive performance and describes how the encounter with a free moving audience is prepared.

1. SEARCHING FOR *VOICELAND*

Spatial-Social Listening

When setting out to find unfamiliar grounds, one needs to find the hidden. For this, it is helpful to let go temporarily of the known in order to go beyond it. Listening is one of the main tools that I use for this endeavour. The listening that I employ is one that actively engages all senses, encourages wonder, and anticipates surprise. It is listening as receiving and as reaching out. It is sensing as a mode of inquiry and learning.

Working in a group requires good listening skills at many levels. I call the necessary attention *inward-outward listening*. It employs interest in a space and for what happens inside and around it. All bodies, the human body as much as architectural spaces, have at least one inside space and one outside space that surrounds it. The surrounding space can be a physical frame that we can relate to. We and our collaborative partners move in it, breathe inside it and listen to it from the inside. We are several bodies inside another body. As our inner space reacts to our breath and physical changes, the outside space responds to our breath and other movement in it. When we share spaces, one encompassing space is also the social space[3]. It is created by sharing a space and the interactions and relations that evolve in the shared space.

While working as a group, although a lot of outward listening is demanded, we need to listen to the space inside ourselves just as much. This is not primarily related to emotions but rather a noticing of impressions and an acknowledgement of the dimensions of this space. What is happening physically to you during a certain action? How do the things we do, and experience resonate within you? If you change one thing, for example your body posture, what else changes as a consequence? How do changes in your body or your vocal expression affect your relation to the surrounding space? How do other bodies, their vocal expression and the surrounding space affect your body and your inside space? This inward listening is noticing small things, attention to impressions that are specific to the relations that we form in this context.

We can learn from the space when we work *with* it. The space reveals its secrets slowly to the attentive listener. At the same time, it teaches us about ourselves and our relations in the space when we explore it. The discoveries we make by this multidirectional and multimodal listening are essential for the collaborative process and for the creation of a site-sensitive performance. Listening to the space and the awareness of one's own presence in the space brings forth a sense of one's own individual expression. Expression can be physical, sonic or other ways of sharing presence outward.

3 According to Martina Löw, "space is constituted through acts as the outcome of synthesis and positioning practices" (Löw, 2008, p. 25). The constitution of space is herein a social phenomenon.

This experience simultaneously leads to a better understanding of the unique expression of the others, and it gives an impression of the sensing together that is particular for this group. Trust in the group and in the space is established, a trust that makes possible the exploration of unknown and unusual areas.

To explore practically the different listening modes, the following exercise is helpful:

Mapping the space through listening

I find mapping through listening a great exercise to tune into the space. On the one hand, it allows one to establish an individual relationship with the space and on the other it creates an opportunity to experience how it feels to be in the space with the people one is collaborating with.

The aims are to stimulate contemplation, to activate closer listening and to recognise the characteristics of the space. Additionally, it introduces learning about oneself and the collaboration partners grounded in the context.

TASK: Take half an hour to experience the space by listening. Be a receiver. Here, receiving is active, not passive, an active connecting with the environment, a touching and being touched through the activation of all available senses. It is noticing impressions, an embodied archiving of subtle and fragile appearances.

Register with all your senses. Feel the touch of the sound present in the space, see-feel the texture of the materials around you, taste the nature of the air that you breathe, etc. You can choose to move in the space or find a spot from where you receive. Feel free to bring a notebook if you like to write thoughts down or make drawings as a way to connect your mind and body with the space. Listen *inward-outward*. Notice how you feel but don't get caught up in your feelings. Observe the others but don't lose the connection to your own sensing. Listen – with all the senses.

With this task we train our listening skills and our attention to sound and the space. We practise sensing our surrounding in various ways. We are exploring tuning into the context. This investigation through sensing gives us the possibility to find the realm of the performance before it has taken form. Our active engagement with the space through multimodal listening brings site-specific phenomena to our attention. First, we share our experiences silently, as we listen together. Later, we listen to the recalls of individual experiences. Themes emerge that are directly informed by our interest in the space and our care for the shared space.

Spatial-Social Sounding

The expansion of listening is sounding. It is a way of reaching into the space and a (re-) tracing of impressions from the first listening by means of sound. Sounding activates the present relationships further and establishes new ones. Sounding in a space is one of the ways we can create an active dialogue with our environment. Each sonic expression has to be created. The form of sound one chooses triggers several reactions in the space. Different areas in the space will react in various ways to sonic expressions due to their geometries and the frequency-dependent absorption/reflection of the building materials. Spatial sounding and spatial listening tasks are a good way to actively stimulate spatial-social explorations. They reveal relations, make interaction explicit and they let sonic site-specific material emerge. As director, I observe the dialogue between the singers and the space

during the tasks. In this interaction, the potentials of the performers and the space in relation are revealed. Between them, exchanges occur that influence their expression/response and something in-between them materialises where their potentialities meet and find a common expression. In order to support the expressions that unfold specifically for collaboration between particular performers and the space, I develop the tasks further.

In *Voiceland*, we were looking for a new vocal expression for each singer and for the group. The space we worked in guided the process. The searching and finding happened on site with the space as co-creator[4] of unusual vocal expression through a spatial-social practice. In the first workshop for *Voiceland*, the explorations were guided by playful sounding tasks. Here are some examples:

4 Spaces act as co-creators in my work. I work with them as dialogue partners. By employing my methods of embodied spatial listening and spatial sounding, creative and sonic capacities in the instrument and the space are revealed by the space.

Soundball Game

This is a game that I like to play at the very beginning of a collaboration. It helps the group to get to know each other, and gives me an impression of the different personalities in the group.

TASK: Form a big circle where there is at least a two arm's-length distance between each person. One person has the *sound ball*. The ball is materialised with the help of one's hands and a vocal expression. The ball can range from tiny to huge. It can be heavy or light, soft or hard, or more flexible like chewing gum - anything goes. The form of the ball is expressed through sound as the ball is formed in the hands. The sonic expression and the way the invisible ball is thrown towards another person reveals its characteristics further. Eye contact before throwing is helpful here as in any other ball game. The person who catches the sound ball receives it with an according sound. This person then shapes the ball with their hands and voice anew and passes the new ball on, and so forth.

In this game, it can be lots of fun to become theatrical and exaggerate. It is also a good warm-up for the body and mind, and a good exercise to repeat regularly.

Consonants

When we sing, we use vowels. However, I have found that for active engagement with a space, its many areas and materials, consonants are a more precise tool to register interaction. This task is a dialogue with the space. The performers act by uttering a consonant to which the space reacts by reflection and absorption. The performer reacts to the response of the space by adjusting the vocal expression, and so on.

TASK: Move around in the space and send unvoiced consonants into areas that attract your attention. You can try to cover the whole space or focus on a certain area. You can vary often between consonants or keep one consonant that you find useful for your exploration and change expression within that consonant. I recommend starting with plosive consonants (*t*, *k*, *c* and *p*) and fricative consonants (*z*, *s*, *h*, *x* and *f*). The reaction of the architectural structures and material will be clearer that way. No reaction is also a reaction. It means that your consonant has barely been reflected. Vary the distance to the area you focus on, to learn more about the reflection and absorption.

The advantage of using consonants is that one can hear oneself well while the others are sounding too. Many of these consonants are also easy to send over a distance without

putting pressure on the vocal folds. Therefore, this exercise can be done early without much warmup. Some physical warm up[5] is however always recommended.

After the first exploration, it is rewarding to move on to voiced consonants (now you can also include *d*, *g*, *n*, *m*, *l*, *r*, *w* and *b*) and combinations of vowels and consonants. I recommend using short and sharp expressions first, in order to hear the reflections more clearly. Always use a tone that is comfortable.

Sound Painting

The singers are put into small groups that receive different images which they are asked to interpret with voice. I generally use images that have clear structures combined with a strong atmosphere.

TASK: Translate the image into vocal expression. Among yourselves, assign who will create what sonically. For what parts does a single voice work best? Where do you need to have several voices?

Be aware how to use time in your expression. How will you guide our aural imagination?

Try out how the space can support your vocal expression, both in character and in its spatial affect.

The small groups perform for each other and show their images afterwards. If there is time, it is rewarding to share after each group how sonic impressions and aural images were experienced by the listeners.

Breath Battle

I created this game as a way to search for unusual vocal expression. Through the subtleness and fragility of breath as a vocal expression, this battle sustains nuances while voiced battles can quickly become overwhelmingly loud.

TASK: Two groups stand on opposite sides of a room. With unvoiced breath as the mode of expression, the battle starts by one member challenging the other group. A member of that group in turn battles the other one with a breath-sound. The battle continues this way. Then couples and small groups can battle each other until in the end both groups give it their all to put the other group in their place.

With the vocal ensemble Hymnodia, we had 8 and 8 singers battle each other with breathy sounds. It was lots of fun and gave us much inspiration. Two pieces in *Voiceland*[6] use sounds that we discovered through the *Breath Battle*.

Superheroes

In this exercise, the singers engage with the space based on certain rules. Architectural features are here connected with certain sonic expressions. The singers move through the space and have different vocal superpowers to describe the space through sound.

The vocal superpowers are distributed. Some singers will describe the walls with a soft 'sch' others will send lines of sound up and down with a pointed 'zsc'. A corner is a sharp 'ta' while openings (doors, windows, spaces between columns) are 'iuu'. The floor is a deep vibrating 'oo', while the ceiling is a light breathing 'a'.

TASK: When you receive an expression that is connected to an architectural attribute, project your voice at the element in the space, paint it or connect to it in another suitable way sonically. Feel free to use your body to emphasise

5 For physical warm up I recommend breathing exercises and stretching. Tasks to find grounding like conscious footing and physical energy activation such as shaking, and body slaps can activate one's physical presence in the space.

6 The pieces informed by the *Breath Battle* are *Bubbles and Breath* and *Future*.

your sonic superpower physically. Have fun exploring how you can vary your expression. Find your own way of doing it. You can be fast or slow, loud or quiet, all over the place or strategically following a path. While you are moving and sounding, be aware of the others. Listen to what you are creating together and consider giving space as you engage with the space and the other performers. If your architectural attribute is rare, challenge your perception and see if you can define the attribute in a broader way. Choose how you take care of your spatial attribute. Even if you see four corners at once, you cannot appoint them all at the same time with your voice. Think like a superhero and surprise in the way in which you play the game. Take play seriously.

With this task, the space becomes a score that is interpreted individually, with awareness of each other and with responsibility for what is produced together. Later, when looking into the relation with a free-moving audience this game can be repeated with half of the group as performers and the other half as audience. The feedback afterwards helps to understand how it feels to experience this spatial-social interaction from the perspective of an audience member.

Superheroes is one part of *Voiceland*. It is improvised with special attention to the audience.

2. THE DIRECTOR AS A GUIDE TO AND THROUGH AN UNKNOWN COUNTRY

As playful and explorative as the first part of the process may be, as director I need to develop a clear idea of what we are working towards. For me this usually means finding some kind of essence, which is elicited through the described collaborative approach. Because the essence is naturally hidden and quiet, it needs to be listened for. As director, I listen for what lies in between. I listen to the area where the dialogue momentarily takes its unique form between the agents. It is also like an imagined expansion of the periphery of each collaborative partner, which I can notice only when they enter a dialogue with each other. After their interactions, I ask the performers about their perspective on the exploration for more insight into their process. In addition, I use my outside perspective to further and deepen our search. During the first phase of my collaborative works, a language develops, a vocabulary that derives from the way we work together. This project-specific vocabulary is very helpful in the second phase where we pick up things that we discovered earlier. We develop them further into a viable network that matures into the complex weave making up the performance.

In the second phase, we build on the experience of the first and move into further material-creation, material-shaping and structure-building. We think together, we try out together, we experiment together, we learn together. The spatial-social approach creates a spatial-social performance. The way in which we collaborate creates the form and character of the performance that we share in the end.

The structure that I develop is created through relations. Dramaturgy is explored in space, as movement and sound are distributed in time. With each new task, with each choice, with each try-out, we define together with the space what performance will take place there. A shared intentionality guides our propositions and choices. Together we create a sonic place which is also a social space that the audience will later be able to enter and explore.

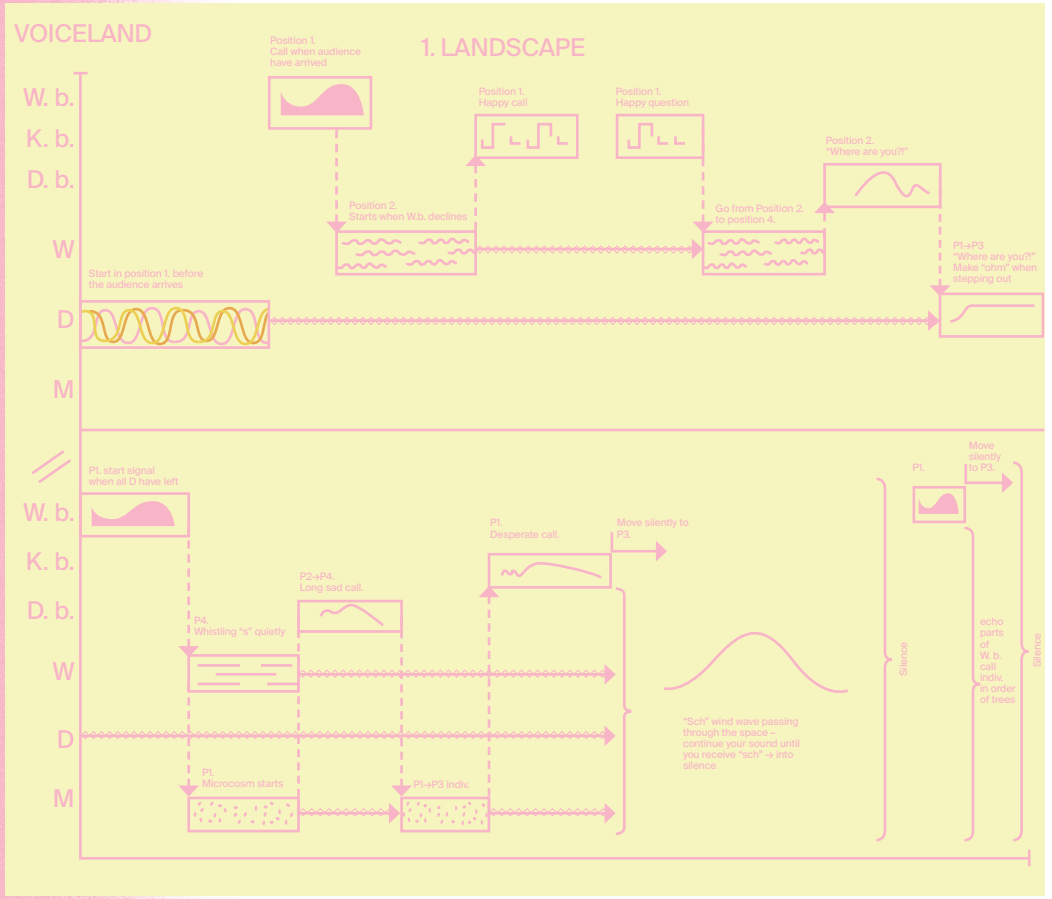
At this point of the process, I see my role as a guide. I have a compass that shows directions. I lead the way. As the landscape that we work on and in becomes progressively clearer, the selection of tasks becomes more constructive. In dialogue with my collaborative partners, I decide if we should take detours to bring something additional along. My favourite method for this situation and for common imagining is to gather in a circle. After each task or sequence, I like to give room for everyone to share what they have experienced and noticed. This sharing has the advantage that I know how everyone is doing, but also in that moment we can all learn from each other. To hear about the individual approaches to the task can motivate each performer to try something outside their own habits and pattern. In turn, this gives me greater complexity to work with when I construct with the collectively developed material. As I often join the exercises, I have my own inward and outward perspective. Hearing the different perspectives and experiences furthers my understanding of the material that we are working with from multiple angles. The circle method also gives me another insight into what I observed from outside during the exercises. With time, I will notice connections and try out interactions that seem interesting for the further development of the site-specific material that will make up our performance.

A work that is developed with determined sensitivity for the space is inherently an *open work*[7]. The relationships constantly develop and deepen. Understanding grows. This is why I call *Voiceland* also *a living vocal performance*. It is lively and gives room for further exploration with each performance and each encounter with an audience.

In my performances, the audience is free, meaning that the members of the audience can walk around and sit anywhere in the space. They are explorers of the performance. This freedom needs to be taken into consideration while the performance is being created. Here again, listening is the key, and what was learned during the first phase will support the development of the performance now. Spatial awareness (including awareness of the social space) is now embodied. The attention the performers give to themselves, to the other performers, to the (vocal) material and the space sensitises them for an attentive relation with the audience. It is my responsibility to create a stable and systematic structure for the piece that not only serves as the dramaturgy but also as a safety-net for the performers. The performers need to be able to adjust to the behaviour of the audience in a way that is fitting for the performance. As the safety-net, the performance structures give possibilities for controlling situations and finding a way back in case one gets lost for a moment. The structure therefore also needs to be flexible. I would describe it as a network where connections and relations emerge and dissolve, but as it is a four-dimensional network with several layers, stability is assured. To put it concretely: There are relations with other performers that are given through the material or are physical. There are relations to the space through positioning, actions, and movement (in relation to spatial attributes and to other performers) and there are

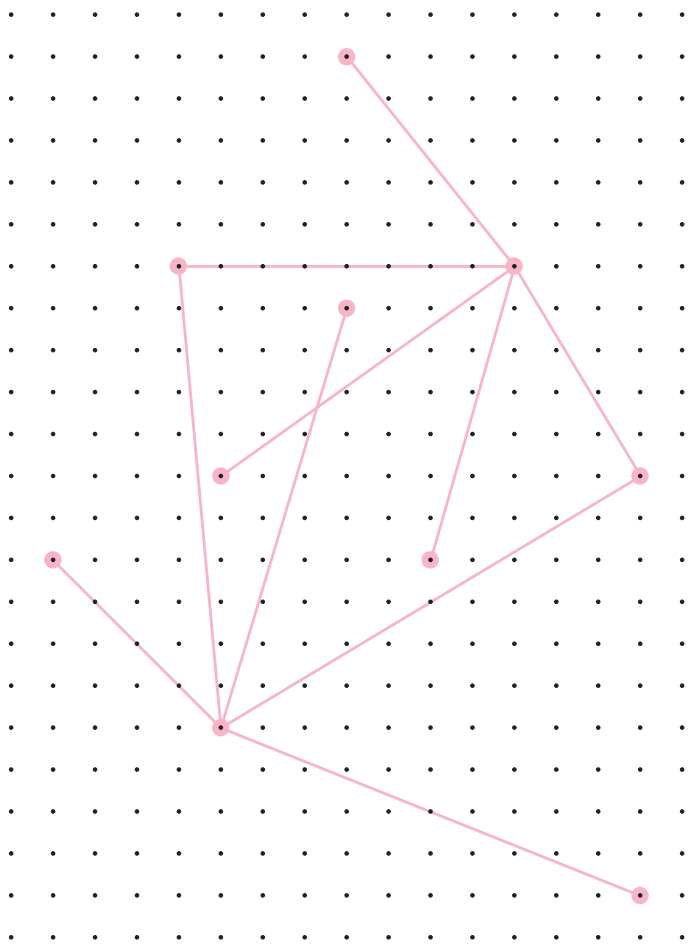
7 Open works for Umberto Eco are created through multiplicity of meanings and audience participation (Eco, 1989). Social Scientist Martina Löw describes spaces as “Expression of the possibility of pluralities” and “always open and indefinite with respect to futureformations” (Löw, 2008, p. 26).

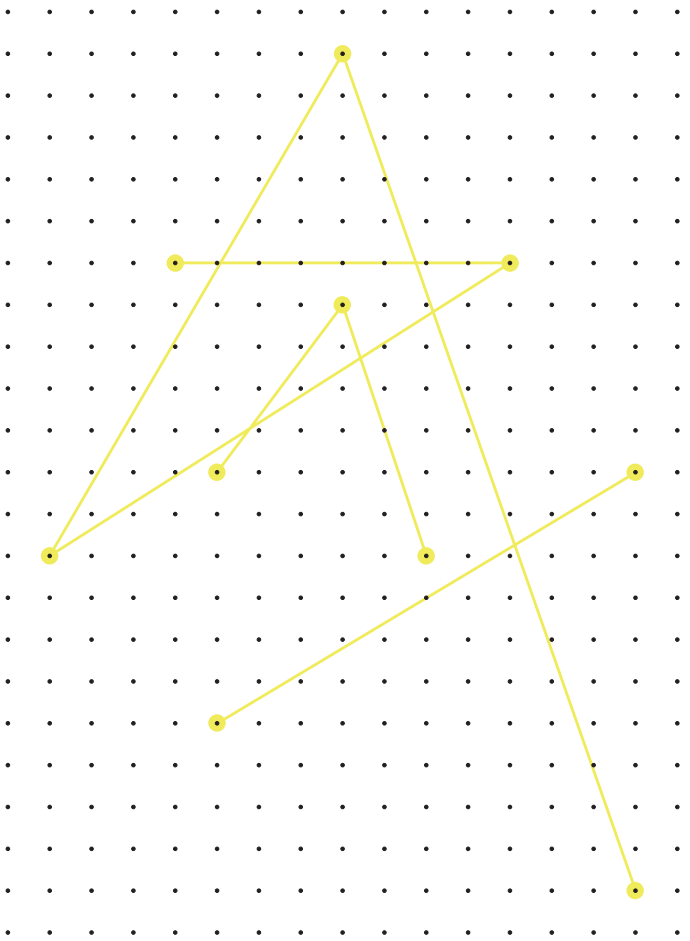
relations to the space that enable certain vocal expressions. In addition, there is the relation to the time structure at each step along the performance, which gives the performer a dynamic role in the whole.



This is the visual score for the first part of *Voiceland* called *Landscape*. In the instructions, you can see that sonic expressions and movement relate to the audience, to positioning in the space, to other performers and to other sounds.

The following two images show one layer of connections and how this layer changes over time. The dots at the end of each line represent the collaborative partners (spatial elements or performers), the lines show the connections.

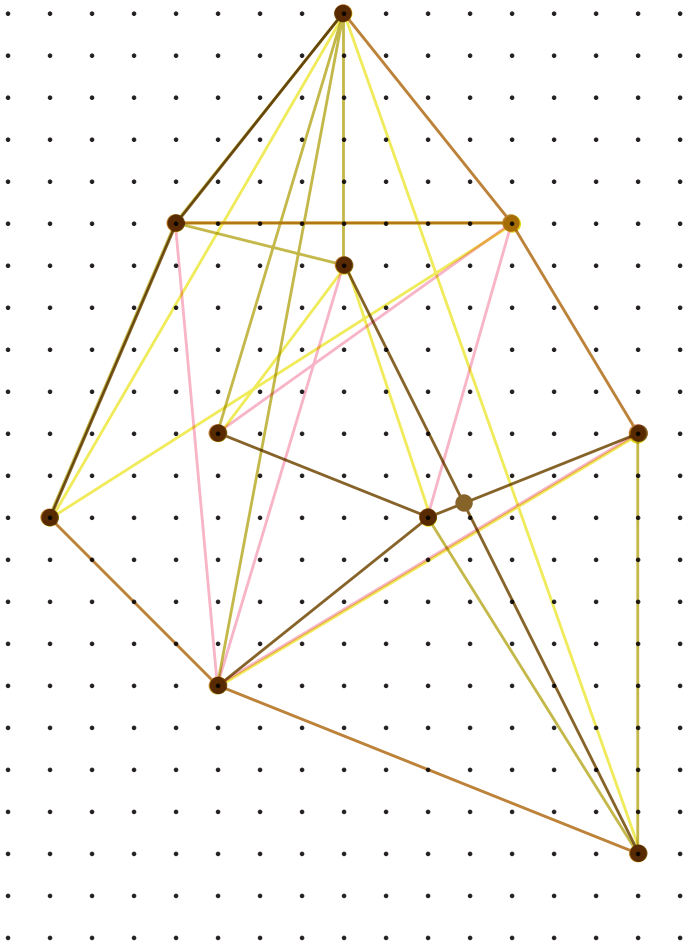




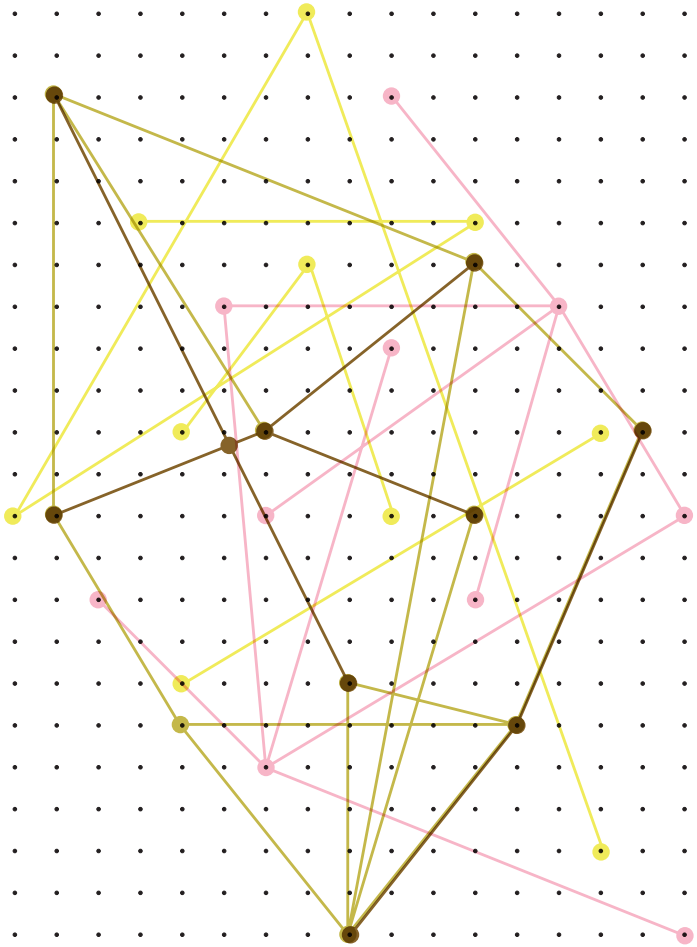
This image shows one relation the performers have in one moment in time.
Imagine each dot is a performer and each line is a relation.

The following image is an example of several relations in different layers at one moment. It could also be an example of one layer for a sequence, i.e., how this single layer changes over a period of time. In that case the different colours/shades suggest different points in time.

If one connection is for some reason interrupted/disrupted, either there is another connection in the space, or a new connection is foreseen in the temporal structure, which will reconnect the performer to the whole.



Usually, each performer has several connections at the same time, for example one sonic connection and two movement connections. In that way over a time sequence the structure looks rather like this[8]:



8 Each dot is a performer. The changes in color illustrate the changes of their positions in the space and of their relations over time.

In my work, I cultivate *space-care*. This term relates to the constitution of spaces through the sharing of space. Space-care is a practice directly connected to the attention towards space and the present relations as cultivated in the first phase. It initiates contemplation around the attention we give to our surroundings. Greater space-care is achieved by giving more attention to spaces and by taking responsibility for spaces. This includes acknowledging the space as a collaborative partner for the creation. Space-care grows during the creative process, and is visibly shared during the performances. In addition, the understanding of space expands here into the social realm.

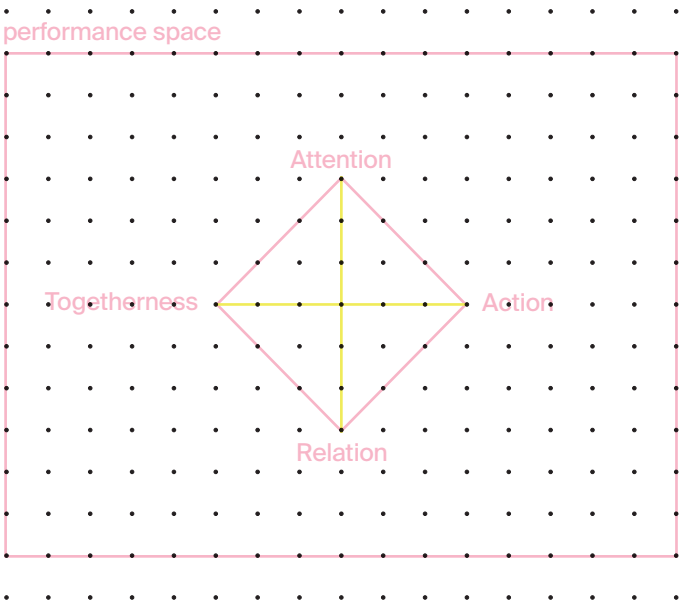
When entering my site-sensitive performances, the audience can move freely and their choices have a direct impact on their experience. This can take a moment to get used to. When space-care is practised by the performers, it can be sensed by the audience as care that expands towards them. Joint space-care gives a feeling of safety.

The forms of expressing space-care depend on the project and its context. *Voiceland*, as a piece that is created entirely of voice, is a vulnerable construction. While experiencing space-care through the individual devotion with which each performer employs their voice, the audience learns to acknowledge the responsibility that they have for the situation.

In the final phase of the creative process, heightened awareness of the things that we care about is continuously developed in order to tend to them more sincerely. As my works are open and responsive, we continue to play and explore as we move closer to the performance. The dramaturgy is spatial. New connections and relations can be added and others removed even late in the process. Due to the exploration in the first part of the collaboration, the singers stay inventive and active dialogue partners in the second part where my directions become more concrete. I see this stronger direction as a sign of confidence in the established trust and the material

we have discovered. At this point, I want the performers to concentrate on their role and grow in it, while I make sure we are all on the same path and that the spatial-temporal structure is functioning.

There are four focus areas in the second part of the collaboration. They are interconnected and always in relation. Cultivating these areas is an important part of my role as a director of site-sensitive performances based on my spatial-social practice. One can also see it as a compass for guides of spatial-social practices:



Attention

Attention is something that we give. In performance, one can think of attention as something one gets from others, but in the way that I work attention is a gift. It is an opening-up and a sharing. This attention is a performance mode. It is a way to recognise the existence of other entities present in the making of the performance experience. As the attention of the performer is visible, it also guides the attention of the audience. Both aural and visual attention are visible. Physical attention can also be visible; however the many forms in which physical attention occurs in the body are too minuscule to be seen, but some can be sensed in other ways.

Space-care should be mentioned here again as being attention brought to the space. The way in which the performers interact with the space reveals the ways in which the space enables the performance. The performers listen for the reaction of the space, their expression is dependent on the response of the space. During a performance this becomes evident to the audience and the visible and audible consideration for the space stimulates a certain attention from the audience. The more deeply understood and embodied space-care is by the performers, the more attentive the atmosphere will be in the space during the performance.

→ Separating the performers into two groups where one is audience and the other performers is a way to find out how to give, what is received by an audience, and how that feels. It shows that reception is as individual as expression. This exercise gives attention to the way one is present, moves and sounds in the space in a given context.

Action

In a spatial performance, the performers and their voice are choreographed. Sounds are placed, performers move. They send their voice into certain areas and attentively create presence in the way that they take up space. Inside the flexible networks with shifting relations, the performers

interact with other performers physically and/or sonically. They collaborate with the space and relate to the audience as they explore the emergence and vanishing of connections.

The sharing of the performance over time is a structured movement relating through interaction, memory, presence, and anticipation during the entire journey of the performance.

→ The interaction, the active negotiation of the space and the inherent constant reshaping of the network is practiced in all the exercises mentioned in the first part.

Relation

A person in a space is the relation I start thinking with. The size of the person and the dimension of the space will not change. When ten more people enter the space, the relationship between the first person and the space does not change, but the relations expand. The person is now also in a shared space with ten people. We could say that the space transforms through being filled with more people. When these eleven people move in the space, their relation to the space and its different attributes change as much as their relation to each individual. Relations shift in proximity, levels and considering the material. The experience of balance and volume changes in the relation.

When standing still, the first person may make a sound. Her body expands through this ephemeral invisible material. This sound moves through the space and interacts with everything it meets. The space is again more occupied, but only momentarily, as the sound dissolves into the inaudible range. Consequently, when all eleven performers use their voice, they all expand their body by the *body of sound*[9] and these bodies fill the room further and alter the perception we have of it. The bodies of sound interact with everything they encounter, including other sound bodies. When the singers move with their sounds, they vary their relations to other performers, to spatial elements and to sounds in the space constantly.

When the audience enters, quiet and listening bodies enter. They are free, their movement can be random, but their movement is also influenced by all the bodies in interaction as described.

→ Relations become evident during the creative process. Activation, deactivation and reactivation of connections can be practised with sound exercises and movement exercises, or both combined.

Togetherness

Every entity makes a difference in site-sensitive performances. The performers can be seen as a hosting community. When the audience enters the performance, they become an *ephemeral community*[10] together with the performers. Each individual expands the performance. As the voices and movements of the performers develop through and with the collaboration with the space, sharing the space with the audience transforms the performance anew.

→ Togetherness is at the core of this spatial-social practice. It is practised throughout the collaboration.

The spatial musical composition that I developed for *Voiceland* together with the composer Gísli Jóhann Grétarsson was built on the exploration of many relations and interactions. The performance has a structure with many levels on which the performers can orient themselves comfortably based on the embodied experience from the workshops.

9 *The body of sound* is a term that I have developed to give a name to the invisible entity that I work with in my site-sensitive spatial sound performances. When we acknowledge its existence, we can learn to shape it in relation to the space, where it becomes concrete and noticeable. The *body of sound* is a form, it can be created, and it shifts form in relation.

10 *Ephemeral communities* are in my work social units that occur through the conscious and active sharing of a space. They are limited to the duration of the performance.

As the performance takes place, I as the director, am no longer an active point in the network. The performance now has enough connections that give stability and sufficient flexibility to adjust to the interactions that will become a part of it. My last contribution to the work is welcoming the audience. (Unfortunately, this is not always possible since directors are usually already scheduled for other things after the premiere.) I introduce the audience to the kind of work that they will experience, using the project-specific vocabulary we developed in our creation process.

For *Voiceland* my welcome sounded like this:

You will soon be entering Voiceland.
It is a free country.
There are two levels.
You can walk around on both levels and rest when and where desired.
Voiceland is a country of voice.
Your listening will guide your experience.
For yourself and for a better experience for all other visitors we ask you to turn off your mobile phones.
We recommend that you be here in the moment instead of trying to capture it on your devices.
Please follow me.

When the time for the performance arrives, the singers are attuned to each other and to the space. In *Voiceland*, the singers are at that point truly inhabitants of a country of voice. The audience are visitors. They are travellers to *Voiceland*, welcomed with respect and interest. The singers have things to give and to share. They will give their expressions in voice, movement, and presence. The audience in turn brings their presence, attention, and curiosity. The immersion into *Voiceland* is voluntary. They leave the outside world behind and let *Voiceland* capture them. An *ephemeral community* arises where the audience learns from the performers how to be comfortable in *Voiceland*. The sonic land that the singers create is a space within a space, which stimulates another space: a shared space based on interaction, a social space. The space-care that the singers are trained in is passed on to the audience by the way that the singers perform, how they treat the audience and how they relate to the space. The singers share the joy of an open work as they keep exploring and share this with the audience. It is only at that time that some parts of the performance find their full expression as the audience is immersed in the unfolding performance. The performers can now paint with their sonic expressions in relation to the audience members and the *voicelanding*[11] takes shape(s).

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11 *Voicelanding* relates to the activity of landing with voice. It is the creation of spaces through spatial vocal expression. As it serves as a verb for a part of my artistic practice, I use this expression also independently of the *Voiceland* project.

LOOKING INSIDE

Embodied Directing.

What role does the body play in the process of directing?

What is happening in the director's body while participating in creative practices?

Can we transcend the Cartesian dychotomy of a director being identified as the mind as opposed to a performer being the matter?

How can a director use intuition in creative work?

What are the ways of synchronising logical and emotional impulses in the director's work?

Where does the source of creativity lie?

What is the purpose of theatre directing?

How can a director define the subject matter of the performance?

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THOUGHTS ON INTUITION & THE CREATIVE PROCESS

Contradictory and practical ways to become more intuitive in our work

Una Þorleifsdóttir

As a theatre director, lecturer and human being, I am deeply interested in intuition. What role does it play in the creative process, in daily life, in traffic, in the decisions that define my life? I am interested in the whole discourse related to intuition: the idea of understanding something without reasoning, in embodied memory and knowledge, in the phrases *follow your heart* and *trust the feeling*. Is intuition synonymous with the now – with mindfulness? With letting go of your rational thoughts. Trusting. What are the ideal conditions for intuition? Can it be taught? Can we get better at it? Where is it in the body? Is it spiritual? How does it work and how can I, as a director, activate the intuition of others?

In this article, I have collected some of the thoughts, questions and answers that I have found on my journey through the great variety of literature on intuition as well as offering contradictory and practical ways to become more intuitive as a theatre director.

1. INTUITIVE DECISION MAKING AND MY RELATIONSHIP TO THE CREATIVE PROCESS

For me, the creative process is a decision-making process. It relies on: my making decisions, daring to be bold in my decisions, being able to admit if the decisions I made yesterday are wrong today and on my being able to change my mind. It is my belief that any decision is better than none at all - that the creative flow of the process will halt if there are no decisions made on a day-to-day basis. For me, intuition plays a pivotal part in this creative decision making, as it seems that decisions are often made through the body, through embodied knowledge, without too much rational thought. The rehearsal space often resembles a football pitch where decisions are made physically, through an intuitive feeling for the game.

What are the parameters that enable me to be present in the moment in the rehearsal space, in the body, activating my intuitive decision-making process? For me: *preparation*, *trust in myself* and *listening* are the most important elements of this process. Before the rehearsal period starts, there is a classical period of preparation where I read, think, do research, analyse and rationalise the material at hand, searching to gain deep understanding and knowledge of the subject matter, its themes and building blocks. During the rehearsal period, this more analytical thinking sometimes needs to be revisited but then, for me at least, outside the rehearsal room. In my view, the rehearsal room is a place of experiment, flow, open questions and discussions that then lead to decisions. The methods used during this preparation period are quite easily taught and there are some really good books available that go through different methods and approaches[1]. *Trust in oneself* and *listening* are harder to teach. These are elements that we associate more with how a person is, to her personality or way of being. As a director, it has been very important for me to approach *listening* and *trust* as something that I can affect and change, as a skill that I can develop within myself.

As a part of that skill development, I find the philosophy of Martin Buber very useful. In his book *Ich und Du*[2], he talks about our relationships to the world around us and divides them up into two categories, the *Ich-Du* (I-Thou) relationship and *Ich-Es* (I-it). The *Ich-Du* relationship stresses the mutual, holistic existence of two beings, a concrete and authentic encounter where qualification and objectification

1 For example, Katie Michell, *The Director's Craft: A Handbook for the Theatre* and Michael Bloom, *Thinking Like A Director: A Practical Handbook*.

2 Marin Buber, *I and Thou*. Martino Publishing; Mansfield Center, CT, USA, 2010.

of one another plays no role. Buber emphasises that this relationship has no composition and communicates no content. We could use words such as *encounter*, *meeting*, *dialogue*, *mutuality* and *exchange* to describe these kinds of relationships and he uses a variety of examples to illustrate *Ich-Du* relationships in everyday life. For example: two lovers, an author and a tree, two strangers on a train. The *Ich-Es* relationship is the opposite; in an *Ich-Du* relationship the two beings encounter one another, but in an *Ich-Es* relationship the two beings do not actually meet. In an *Ich-Es* relationship, the I qualifies and confronts an idea, or conceptualisation, of the being in its presence and treats that being as an object. Objects are considered as mental representations, created and sustained by the individual mind. Therefore, an *Ich-Es* relationship is a relationship with oneself; it is a monologue. The *Ich-Du* relationship is, on the other hand, a dialogue. In an *Ich-Du* relationship there is active listening, active concentration on the here and now (Lavaste 2020).

Do I have a monologue or a dialogue relationship with my creative process? Do I enter the rehearsal space open and willing to encounter the material and the other artists present without any qualification or objectification? Am I ready and willing to give in, to listen, to be in the now of the process, to trust? Or do I enter the space with preconceived ideas about how the process should be, about the others present and the material, confronting them and qualifying? Both people and ideas?

I think it is important for a theatre director to ask herself these questions in relation to her creative process, because the way we enter into the process, the encounters and the experiments that take place there, will inform the decisions we will and are able to make. It will also influence our ability to be aware of our intuitive feelings and impulses within the process. It is therefore imperative to be aware of the relationship one has to the creative process and to the decision making inherent within it.

In trying to understand one's own processes and the ideas that inform it, I have found it useful to ask myself, and my students, the questions set out below with one recent creative process in mind. The questions are aimed at being a personal exploration of the director's relationship to her creative process.

What ideas that you have about yourself and art/creation influence your processes and work?
Do you want to change them?
What elements and patterns are repeated?
Is there a habit or tendency that is repeated?
What emotions are repeated?
When were you in your head?
When were you in your body?
What unwritten rules are you following during your creative process?
What written rules are you following?
What movements, aesthetics and qualities/features do you use repeatedly?
When did you hit a wall?
When was it hard and why?
When was it easy and why?

It is through asking questions like these, through analysing my relationship to the creative process and through taking it apart that I can gain further trust in myself within the process. And in knowing the process I start to become

aware of the ways in which I make decisions and of the role of intuition within it. From that, trust and self-assurance are built. When there is trust there is also more room for active listening, both in regards to my intuition and the input of other artists.

As discussed above, intuitive decision making is an integral part of the creative process. It may seem counterproductive to analyse and dissect one's own processes when something that we normally see as undefinable or spiritual plays such a big part in it, but as Susan Melrose writes in *Chasing expertise: reappraising the role of intuitive process in creative decision-making*: "Intuitive process, […], is a vital *knowledge practice* in art-making" (Melrose 2015: 1). As our practical processes, attitudes and methods can be defined and redefined through analysis, that work becomes the gateway to our intuition.

2. INTUITION – A SPIRITUAL PRACTICE

We most often talk about and define intuition as an awareness or feeling for something lying outside our focus of attention, something that we are aware of subliminally or unconsciously, referring to it as a *gut feeling* or a *voice within us*. Often described as a sort of sixth sense, a psychic ability even. In Jungian psychology, it is defined as the collective unconscious, as an ancient part of the mind that calls us to action and makes us feel connected to humanity (Caroll 2017: 31). The root of the word comes from the Latin word *intueri*, meaning *to look inside* or *to contemplate* (Caroll 2017: 5).

In practice, intuition might feel like an unconscious ability making it possible to know something without any proof or evidence, an unconscious experience encouraging us to do something without logically knowing why we do it, feel it or think it. Like a voice resonating throughout the body and mind.

How can we then, as theatre directors, work with this unconscious or even spiritual force? If intuition plays such a big part in my process how can I then approach it in a meaningful and practical way so that it is applicable within my creative work? How can I as an artist become more aware and connected to this inner voice?

Molly Carroll, in her book *Trust Within: Letting Intuition Lead*, writes about intuition as the practice of listening to all our voices, of paying attention to our bodily wisdom, of trusting our hearts, or of surrendering to life (Caroll 2017: 9). We can also think of it as letting go of rational and analytical thought. In this context, Carroll states that awareness is the key to intuition. We need to be contemplative and aware in our lives and work to be able to notice and hear this inner voice (Caroll 2017: 44). Carroll, furthermore, writes that when we are more in touch with ourselves, we will have a clearer pathway to our intuition, and that with more self-assurance we will not question our *gut feelings* or premonitions (Caroll 2017: 35).

Therefore, active listening, as mentioned above, an *Ich-Du* relationship with ourselves, our body and feelings, a relationship that is not analytical, becomes an important building block in creating deeper awareness of our intuitive thought.

How do we create, build and develop such a relationship with ourselves? How can we be aware and actively engage in listening to our intuition as artists?

When we approach intuition thinking of it as a spiritual, unconscious voice, the practice of listening becomes a practice in mindfulness. In being in the moment, allowing the mind

and body to respond without thinking, of creating stillness within us. A practice in trusting that all the preparation done before the beginning of rehearsals lies there within me, that I do not need to analyse, only trust the ideas and feelings that come to me in the moment. "Intuition works when you can be present enough to hear a calling, feel it in your body, and adhere to its message, even though you may not know the outcome. Trust that you need to go where you need to go. That you need to do what you need to do […]"(Caroll 2017: 54).

There are a number of ways that allow us to be more aware and present within ourselves, some of them being mindfulness practices – paying attention to our surroundings, living in the moment and meditating. Other practices, like letting go of technology, doing yoga and walking in nature in silence, are also useful in creating this awareness and developing our ability to listen to ourselves, of being in what we can define as the body and not in an analytical mindset. In essence, creating a space where you feel you can listen and be present, a space of stillness and connection within you that allows you to feel rather than think. With practice, you can enter into this form of awareness and listening within the rehearsal space and get better at tapping into your intuition during the decision-making process, embodying the process instead of rationalising and analysing it. It is also possible to take these practices into the rehearsal space with warm-ups, communal meditation and active listening games.

3. INTUITION AS KNOWLEDGE

When defining intuition, we see it as a phenomenon that tends to arise holistically and quickly, without awareness of the underlying mental processing of information. It is often defined as the power or faculty of attaining direct knowledge or cognition without evident rational thought or inference.[3] For most of us, the word refers to a source of knowledge. As explained above, if we only approach it as a question of listening and being present within ourselves, it becomes nearly impossible to change or develop our intuition as it is a constant knowing, or a *sixth sense*. If we, however, look at intuition more as a decision-making habit or pattern recognition, the possibility to develop, influence or to change our intuitive feelings and knowledge arises.

Throughout our lives, we develop decision-making processes. In *Educating Intuition*, Robin M. Hogarth defines these processes as intuitive decision-making habits that inform many of our everyday activities. According to Hogarth, our intuition is formed passively through experience and is domain specific, which, in turn, implies that our intuition is partly the result of the vicarious experiences to which we have been subjected (Hogarth 2010: x). Hogarth goes further and states that it is possible to improve our decision-making skills by taking steps to educate our intuition through a variety of learning exercises.

As theatre directors, we have adapted to the environments we have experienced. If we follow Hogarth's argument, our intuitive decision-making processes are formed through our theatrical or performance-based experiences, both good and bad, through our experiences of being in the rehearsal room, during our studies and through the everyday experiences that have similar patterns or processes to the rehearsal/development process. Through experience, we have developed a sense of what is and is not normal, how we should and should not behave, what we should and should not do, etc. We therefore

3 See for example discussions and definitions in the Merriam-Webster dictionary (https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/intuition) and in Psychology Today. (https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/basics/intuition)

readily make assumptions within the creative process based on our prior experiences. It is thus imperative to *notice what we notice*[4], as our experiences also inform our ability to see and listen, our ability to expand as artists and to develop our intuitive thought, to even alter it or reshape it.

Our skills – both practical and mental –improve through practice. The same is true for our intuition, especially if we define it as the accumulation of knowledge, experiences and pattern recognition. Hogarth states that, in order to educate intuition, it is important to emphasise *what* you learn from experience and *how* you learn, since the main process of learning through experience involves noticing connections, connections that are subsequently strengthened (Hogarth 2010: 217). Hogarth emphasises that we need to be deliberate in our processing of experiences (analyse them/put them in context); a failure to be deliberate is a passive attitude toward life, a life in which you learn from experience but in which you play no role in choosing your experiences. You become simply the product of what happens to you. We need to be proactive, active managers of our information-processing resources (Hogarth 210: 223-224). We need to be willing to examine our assumptions, be willing to question what we think we know, so that we can then progress more effectively. Even though intuitive learning takes place largely tacitly, only by being aware of the process can we manage it (Hogarth 2010: 223-243).

We must learn to *observe better*; to separate fact from opinions and avoid rushing to premature conclusions, but we also need to know what to look for and be aware of how ideas or theories affect what we see; we need to be able to question our ideas about what we see; can you really see the facts as they are instead of through a filter of preconceived notions or theories? We need to train our *observational skills, learn to speculate more intelligently about what we see, always be willing to test our ideas, and learn to think carefully about how we can generalise from experience* (Hogarth 2010: 215). We need to make methods intuitive and in the process we must seek feedback, acknowledge emotions, test our ideas (when you have what you think is a good idea ask yourself what could change your mind), explore connections and accept conflict in choice. All of this needs to be made part of our intuitive decision-making processes (Hogarth 2010:223-243).

Then we must practise, practise, practise. The most important thing to practise according to Hogarth is to *systematically question our ideas* – asking in everyday situations: *Why do I think that? How would I know if my idea is/was wrong?* The next important thing to improve is *our power of observation*; to see what is there, not what we think is there. To be able to learn from what we do not see (Hogarth 2010: 241).

One of the benefits of intuitive thought is the speed with which conclusions are reached. However, this quick thinking also includes the potential for repetition. Hogarth states that practising the main skills of *observation*, *speculation*, *testing* and *generalisation* will add a circuit breaker to our intuitive thinking and that these skills will, with exercise, become ingrained in our thinking and therefore expand our intuition.

In his work on Real Time Composition Method, the choreographer João Fiadeiro discusses the need to prepare for something that we do not know within the creative process, the need to be willing to make time within the creative process to be doubtful, to ask questions, not to solve things but to *not know* together. He talks about the importance of pausing while creating and listening to what is happening

4 A phrase connected to Þorvaldur Þorsteinsson's work and artistic philosophy. He was an Icelandic playwright and a visual artist.

in-between. Fiadeiro furthermore considers the importance of stopping our immediate reflections, our intuition, to be able to enter into unknown and new territories, because the first things we generally offer creatively are reflections, patterns and habits. According to Fiadeiro, we need to stop this immediate reflection, our habitual responses, suspend them, to allow other new possibilities to emerge (Fiadeiro no year: 1).

Hogarth and Fiadeiro both point us in the same direction. Practise your intuitive thinking, create circuit breakers, break your habitual responses that were formed by experiences to expand your intuitive decision-making processes.

4. STILL THINKING

The thoughts and ideas presented above might seem contradictory; find stillness to hear your intuitive voice and then suspend it, educate it and create circuit breakers or new connections. For me, as an artist, these contradictions are what makes the journey into my intuition and the creative process so challenging and yet so rewarding. By undertaking a journey of listening, of observing, testing, suspending habitual reactions and questioning, my intuitive decision-making processes have changed, evolved, and new patterns and habits have formed. My hope is that you will enter upon your own journey of exploration.

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Milda Al-Slamah (1986, née Sokolovaitė) is a Lithuanian performance maker and researcher who, in her artistic practice, aims to investigate audience engagement, attention management and the use of accidental occurences. Having obtained her BA in Theatre Practice, Performance Arts, at the Royal Central School of Speech and Drama, University of London, she then completed her MA in Acting at the Lithuanian Academy of Music and Theatre, where she now continues her research in Theatre Directing at the doctoral level.

Milda's artistic works feature performances with an experimental twist, such as *Story: Anonymous* (2015), which was devised collaboratively with strangers; *(IN)DEPENDENCE* (2017), which featured different actors in each showing without any prior knowledge of the performance; and *(in)security* (2019), which toyed with the idea of audience as co-creator. All of these performances, along with the more current works in progress *Connections* and *Mind The Gap*, add to her continuous artistic research into immaterial forms of theatre.

LET'S TALK ABOUT THE WEATHER INSTEAD
A few thoughts on directing the theatre of self-organisation

Milda Al-Slamah

1. INTRODUCTION: ATTEMPTS TO GO BACK TO NOT KNOWING

There is nothing to be taken for granted - neither in theatre, nor in life.

Quote from the *Blitz* theatre company manifesto[1]

There are experiences in life that have the power to shape you. For me, one such experience was an unexpected encounter with the Greek theatre and film actor, director, and currently screen-writer, Christos Passalis[2] who has brought my understanding of devising theatre to a whole new level. When I met him in 2016, devised theatre was already quite familiar territory for me (or so I thought…); even though I come from the strictly director-led vision theatre-making tradition, which has always been dominant in Lithuanian theatre, back in my bachelor years while studying in the UK I became very well acquainted with collaborative and devised theatre processes. Although it never ceased to amaze me how creative work could be developed collaboratively, without anyone in particular taking the lead, it was only years later that it occurred to me to investigate not only how, but also why, the mechanics of devising theatre work.

Having tried to develop work collectively from scratch in my own practice, I was surprised each time to find out just how much creativity seemed to lie dormant in each person, regardless of their vocation, and how it could flourish in the process of devising theatre. Contrary to the understanding I was raised to believe in, true creativity seemed to be possible only when the necessity to 'prove yourself right' or cling on to that 'grand idea' of one's vision would vanish. It seemed to be hidden in a place of uncertainty which brought the collaborators to a position where they were all equal not in KNOWING, but in NOT KNOWING, and therefore had the chance to discover creative solutions together. Yet it has not always been clear to me how to get to that place of uncertainty because giving up knowledge about making theatre seemed to be equally as challenging as acquiring it, which is why the 'how to' tool handed down to me in the workshop with Christos Passalis seemed so important.

This director and actor from the company *Blitz* (whose website introduces the company with a manifesto: "All [company] members are equal throughout conception, writing, direction and dramaturgy process"[3]) hosted a new narrative development workshop at the Lithuanian National Theatre in Vilnius in the summer of 2016. The purpose of the workshop was to introduce the attendees to the collective dramaturgy development method used in *Blitz's* creative process. This method includes one simple exercise of having to stand up, recall a moment in your life as if it was a photograph, and start describing it beginning with words "In this picture…". Christos confessed that this was an exercise borrowed from the British experimental theatre company *Forced Entertainment*, and is used in the *Blitz* creative process in the following way: after the narrator starts telling a story beginning with the words "In this picture…", other people from the creative team can join him or her and either continue to tell the story or add to the picture by starting to act it out. In this way, the still image acquires movement, the moving picture becomes a narrative and all that is narrated can become the basis for a full-blown show. At every stage of creation, these and similar exercises for developing work are filmed and the company then reviews the material in order to collectively select what would be included in their new show. Thus, the decision on

1 Quote taken from the official company website www.theblitz.gr

2 Christos Passalis is one of the founders of the Blitz theatre group, formed in October 2004, in Athens, along with Aggeliki Papoulia and Giorgos Valais. Having developed their own way of devising theatre, the group has created 16 performances and presented its work at the Theatre de la Ville, the Schaubühne, in the Festival d'Avignon and in various major theatres and theatre festivals around the world.

3 Quote taken from the official company website www.theblitz.gr

how to direct the show does not follow one person's directorial vision, but rather becomes the collaborative effort of the whole group. As the work develops, it evolves according to the collective feeling for its direction, suggesting which decisions work and which do not for that particular show.

What, then, is so special about gathering picture-evoked personal narratives to create theatre? Well, for me the beauty of this method lies in its simplicity because telling stories is something that we are all capable of doing (regardless of vocation or preparation). The key to liberating the creative forces seems to be the unpretentiousness of the task – the fact that it does not oblige one to 'create something' (with the accompanying pressure to make something magnificent), but simply asks one to express something that revolves on the tip of the tongue. In this way, the slogan 'express, not impress' is a prerogative placing all co-creators in an equal position of uncertainty about what happens next – what stories will emerge into existence?

"Theatre is a field where people meet each other and exchange ideas in the most essential way, not a field for virtuosity and readymade truths," claims the *Blitz* company's manifesto and, as I came to know, the company's creative process truly lives up to it. By making space for co-creators to share their stories, *Blitz* brings into existence a narrative that belongs to all, yet, at the same time is not identifiable with anyone in particular, and so creates order from the dis-order of the creative mind(s). Yet where does this order come from and how can it be explained? What lies behind this collective 'feel' for making directorial decisions? How can the understanding of this process enhance our toolkit for creating theatre? I was intrigued by these questions and so I turned to research outside the realm of theatre in an attempt to find answers. It was there that I was introduced to the concept of self-organisation, whose workings I will attempt to make clear in the text that follows.

2. EFFORTLESS SELF-ORGANISATION

As the crowds cheer the fall of the breezeblocks that have been lined up to trigger one another in a performative installation playfully called *Dominoes*, the thought occurs that making art must be quite simple because when it works it appears to work with no effort at all. As if those stacked giant-sized 'domino tiles' triggering each other into movement have a life of their own.

Dominoes in Melbourne © SarahWalker.

Dominoes was produced in 2009 by the UK's *Arts Admin* under the direction of *Station House Opera's* Julian Maynard Smith, and today has travelled to over 20 cities, from London to Melbourne. Despite the fact that it takes hundreds of volunteers to make this 'domino effect' happen in each city where it is shown, on the day of the performance human participation is actually not needed as the performance plays to its own rhythm. In this way, the work stands as a perfect example of self-organisation – because when that first breezeblock triggers 'its fellow' the rest of the chain just follows on, organising itself into a river-like current.

"*Dominoes* takes as its starting point the simplest of ideas… a line of dominoes. Thousands of breezeblocks are used to create a moving sculpture which runs across the city, unfolding over the course of the day." This description on the *Arts Admin* website[4] quite accurately captures what happens on the day of each showing. What it doesn't describe, however, is the feeling experienced by those observing it – something that can be felt only when watching the documented performances in different cities. What draws my attention when I play its world-wide tour on repeat, are the comments of the volunteers involved in the performance in Milton Keynes[5] - they speak of it as of the experience of a lifetime, which the director Julian Maynard Smith adds, is "an opportunity to do something childish". Indeed, watching the breezeblocks fall along a track curving through public squares, malls and even private houses, feels like watching a child at play in a town completely disregarding norms for decent behaviour known only to adults. By flowing in a current through places where seemingly it should not go, the performance creates life followed by claps and cheers and a sense of wonder in those observing it.

4 Information taken from the following website: https://www.artsadmin.co.uk/project/dominoes/

5 Comments taken from the video documentation *Station House Opera: Dominoes* https://youtu.be/k3_LgS-LU_Q8?t=464

"A two-kilometre-long domino ribbon of white building blocks has done more to bring together the neighbourhood, all ages and all cultures, than a decade of integration programs all together." Flemish daily newspaper *De Standaart* praises the success of *Dominoes* in Ghent[6]; while the volunteers at the London event in 2016, which followed the route of the great fire of London, go even further in describing its success – they call it not only enjoyable and creative, but even a mysterious experience[7].

But what is so mysterious about witnessing a line of breezeblocks triggering one another into movement? It seems that knowing the rules of gravity and predicting how the breezeblocks will fall, or even arranging for it to happen, is one thing, but it is quite another to actually witness the fall taking place without any human involvement. In this sense, *Dominoes* stands as living proof of cause and effect, a phenomenon familiar to all of us but which still seems incredible as you see it unfolding in front of your very own eyes. In other words, there appears to be something fascinating in the possibility to observe an event happening not because we *make it happen*, but because we *make space for it to happen*.

"It's not the magic, but it feels like magic" writes researcher Dawson Church PhD in his book *Mind to Matter: The Astonishing Science of How Your Brain Creates Material Reality* quoting physicist Doyne Farmer (Farmer in Church 2018: 241) who describes what it feels like to witness the self-organisation of emergent systems. Those emergent systems are precisely what *Dominoes* represents: structures that come into place not because of forces within the systems, but because of forces outside them[8].

The physical chemist and Nobel laureate Ilya Prigogine was one of the first scientists to study self-organising systems,

6 Information taken from the following website: https://www.artsadmin.co.uk/project/dominoes/

7 Comments taken from the video documentation *Dominoes 350: The Film | London's Burning* to be found here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=moGzH5-hO-pA&ab_channel=ArtsadminUK

8 In the case of this performance, the force coming from the push of that initial breezeblock from the point of view of the observer is an external force.

exploring how order can emerge out of apparent chaos. His work is being continued today by the Institute in Santa Fe that studies the emergent properties in complex systems. This work has led to findings helping to identify five characteristics of self-organising structures. Those characteristics are:

- *Radical Novelty: new features are spontaneously developed.*
- *Coherence: they maintain themselves over a period of time.*
- *Higher holistic order: they exhibit the property of wholeness.*
- *Dynamic process: they evolve.*
- *Apparent: they can be perceived.* Church 2018: 241

If we apply these characteristics to theatre practice, might they guide us to the discovery of what we could consider to be the theatre of self-organisation? And if so – how would this theatre be different, if at all, compared to 'ordinary' forms of theatre? From my experience gathered in professional practice so far, it appears that this type of theatre cannot be defined through categorisation based on the material circumstances of a theatre show; in other words, it is not distinguished by visual aesthetics such as stage design, costumes, acting style etc. This is so because its defining feature cannot be pinned down to material circumstances, but is rather something associated with immaterial communication, and constitutes this kind of theatre's ability to connect with the given circumstances of the present moment.

As an example, let me share a moment from personal experience. In 2018, a quite small but very significant revelation came to my attention which opened a perspective on the importance of self-organisation in theatre, although I still had no terminology to define it. We were devising a performative piece *A Window to Nature* as a part of the *Young Theatre Days* festival in Klaipėda, Lithuania. In the collaborative devising process it was decided that we, the six performers, should present ourselves to the public as exhibits from some distant future gallery representing long-forgotten forms of human nature when human beings had already become extinct. Upon encountering a member of the audience we were to 'wake' from being a 'frozen statue' and perform some kind of action representative of what is it like to be a human being.

While some of my performer colleagues in this piece chose very visceral roles and actions (such as pouring hot wax over their body or imitating a domestic violence scene), I decided to limit myself only to establishing a connection by gazing at audience members selected at random, and although I didn't foresee any role to be played, my simple appearance in the view of those observing me was enough to bring tears to somebody's eyes and for somebody else to express an intense desire to save me. Somehow, without assuming any role or scenario and relying solely on a connection with the audience, the performance appeared to be very powerful. That was a moment of clarity for me: I discovered that it was possible to perform without making an effort at performing anything at all, because the moving experience between me and my witness was not the result of actions I performed, but of the connection we established between us. This connection appeared to have a life of its own and allowed something previously unknown to both me and my witness to *emerge* into the present moment.

Of course, the idea that a performer doesn't have to do anything physical in order to perform has been explored before. It was most notably expressed very eloquently in Marina Abramovic's piece *Rhythm 0* performed in 1974, where the performer turned herself into an object without willpower for

the audience to play with, making the crowds rally in an attempt to both harm her, as well as save her. In a very different way, but again very powerfully, this idea was repeated in one of her more recent performances *The Artist is Present* (2009), where the artist literally did nothing but share her presence through eye-to-eye contact with one audience member at a time, and at the same time blew away the minds of many by demonstrating the significance of such an experience. These are only two world-renowned examples of performances reflecting the idea of self-organising structures coming into existence without the performer making a significant wilful effort. There are many more possible examples but they don't have to be as extreme in nature as the above-mentioned performances that eliminate the living performer altogether (*Dominoes*), assign no role to the performer to play (*Window to Nature*), or rely on audience participation (Marina Abramovic' works). So now we should look at an example of what we might consider a self-organising work without such severe restrictions.

3. SPECIFICITY

"Those tears were real"[9] recalls Mohammed Al-Amiry, one of the directors of the *No, We Are Not Tired* street performance, which became an important part of the 2019 anti-government protests in Iraq. This piece was performed by artists in the city of Basra, first shown in their hometown and later brought to the streets of Baghdad. It depicts the daily reality of the protestors in Iraq who first took to the streets in October 2019 demanding a revolution. After experiencing the violence of security forces using not only tear gas against protestors but also guns loaded with real bullets, the artists decided to re-enact the atrocities that were taking place on the streets of their hometown.

Having recreated the lives and actions of real people attacked, or in some cases even killed, just days earlier, this performance struck the audience as being so realistic that its illustrations were echoed in the press as being the documentation of real events[10]. This event resonated so deeply with the live audiences that it brought out real tears in both the audience and the performers, and became an opportunity to grieve for those lost in the struggle against the oppressive governmental regime. Now, what should such a type of performance be called? 'Site-specific' for being based on events that took place at the site of its showing? Or possibly 'audience-specific', for intending to comfort those who lost their loved ones in the on-going street protests? Or perhaps 'time-specific', for responding to an important moment in history? Whatever name is chosen, the fact remains that it can be defined by its sensitivity to the conditions under which the performance was being shown. It was specific to the circumstances it was shown in and therefore could not be re-created without them.

9 Quote from a personal conversation about the performance with Mohammed Al-Amiry.

10 Futher information about its reception can be found at the Egyptian newsportal Dostor (original text in Arabic): https://www.dostor.org/2928515

Moment from performance “No, we are not tired” © BasrahArtists.

Over the past few decades, a great deal of attention has been placed on trying to answer the question: “What is site-specific theatre?” However, it always seemed to me that the question was wrongly put. It feels more important to ask how does site-specific (or, for that matter, audience, time, human-specific…) theatre work? I eventually found the answer to this question not in the theatre at all but in a totally different discipline when I stumbled upon *chaos theory* in mathematics. This theory directed me towards a concept so appropriate that I couldn’t resist adapting it to the field of performance-making – this concept was *sensitivity to initial conditions*.

“Sensitivity to initial conditions is the death of reductionism.” writes physicist Michel Beranger in his paper *Chaos, Complexity, and Entropy: A physics talk for non-physicists*.

> *It states that any small uncertainty existing in the initial conditions will grow exponentially with time, and eventually (very soon, in most cases) will become so large that we will lose all useful knowledge of the state of the system. Even if we know the state of the system very precisely now, we cannot predict the future trajectory forever.* Berenger 2000: 7

In this way Berenger explains *chaos theory*, emphasising the most important feature of chaotic systems – sensitivity to initial conditions. This feature, discovered by meteorologist Edward Lawrence while working on weather predictions, showed that even the slightest inaccuracy in the initial calculations (for example, in the case of weather predictions, an imprecisely recorded location of clouds), can result in future predictions that are largely inaccurate, even to the extent that instead of forecasted ‘sunny spells’, you might end up witnessing a murky snowstorm. This led to the conclusion that, since in the world as we know it today there is no flawlessly accurate information (for there can always be a minute uncertainty that should be taken into consideration), all predictions are fallible due to their sensitivity towards even the tiniest inaccuracy in the initial conditions.

This characteristic, which caused considerable controversy in the world of science, laid the foundation for *chaos theory* and put a question mark on the credibility of scientific knowledge, but had quite the opposite effect in the world of arts where it has been warmly welcomed. It became the reason why we have today site/time/human and what-not specific theatre which is *sensitive to the initial conditions* of a performance. In fact, this *sensitivity* in the performance context could be considered a defining feature of various *performative practices* that go back as far as John Cage’s works

and the appearance of *happenings*, the *Fluxus* movement, *Performance Art* and all forms of improvisation. Coincidentally, these practices all emerged around the same time as chaos theory (1950s to 60s), with the difference, however, that they brought a new set of questions into the world of science, while in the world of arts sensitivity towards initial conditions provided many new answers about how to conduct artistic practices. In this way, a trend which has become so important in theatre making today evolved – a type of theatre responding to the initial conditions of a performance, making them a part of the performance rather than ignoring them and aiming to create a fictional world detached from its given circumstances. This sensitivity may be in relation to space, or the audience, or the moment in history, but in all cases it revolves around connecting to the present moment. As I mentioned earlier, this is the defining feature in the theatre of self-organisation and distinguishes it from other forms of theatre. But how do we go about directing this kind of theatre? There may well be no definite answer, but there might be some pointers, and in order to identify them, it might help to go back and reflect on personal practice.

4. SYNCHRONICITY

March 6, 2017, *Balcony Theatre*, Vilnius. We are halfway through the opening night of the performance (IN)DEPENDENCE and I am waiting for the sound of messenger notification - my cue to proceed with action on stage. The milliseconds of waiting stretch to eternity, because I recollect that, during the run-through, technology let us down and the expected sound never came. As I run the scenarios in my head of how I should act if the cue fails again, I suddenly hear the blissful sound of messenger notification.

"It worked!" I think to myself and proceed with a sense of relief. However, but minutes after the show I understood that the situation wasn't exactly as I imagined.

"Did you hear the messenger sound?" my sound designer enquires.

I nod in response.

"It wasn't me." he says, and proceeds to explain that the messenger sound must have come from someone in the audience whose phone was not on 'silent mode'. That's how an accidental addition to the soundtrack of a show brought me closer to discovering the concept of synchronicities.

The quite unlikely experience of an audience member's phone ringing when it was needed for our soundtrack and exactly at the time technology failed, led me to think more about these fortunate coincidences that, when you start noticing them, seem to happen more and more often in creative processes. During the show (IN)DEPENDENCE they happened frequently and manifested in ways that we could never foresee as the creators of the show. Since every performance required a new actor without prior knowledge of the script (he or she would perform by following the instructions given by me or indicated in the script handed to them just before the performance) it was surprising to hear how many times different actors found that the script related to their personal circumstances and wondered if it was written specifically for them.

Moment from (IN)DEPENDENCE © Modestas Endriuška.

However, the truth is that it was never adapted to anyone in particular. Apart from slight editing additions, the content of the script and the story of the play remained the same for every actor. The coincidence that affected me personally most of all was that, after the run of the show, I experienced exactly the same circumstances in real life that I had performed so many times in (IN)DEPENDENCE: my grandmother became very ill and ended up in hospital, exactly as was scripted in the show.

Now, although I do want to dismiss outright the hypothesis of clairvoyance because it would be rather naïve to believe that, by writing the illness of a grandmother into the script of my performance, I was predicting it would happen shortly after in real life. Nevertheless, it did feel as if there was too accurate a match between fictional stage life and real life to simply just call it a coincidence. That was probably the reason why I started searching for an explanation. A couple of years later my search brought me to a new concept which put many of my experiences in order. It turned out that the feeling of a 'magical coincidence', which eventually became for me a marker of every successful creation, had a name: *synchronicity*.

I discovered the term synchronicity while reading the previously quoted book by Dawson Church which explains how what we create in our mind relates to the creation of material reality. But it was only the term itself that was new to me; I was already very well familiar with the feeling. According to the proposed understanding, in the process of devising theatre I was not faced with simple coincidences but rather with a phenomenon that had a quite solid scientific explanation behind it. The pioneer in the development of this concept was Swiss psychiatrist Carl Gustav Jung who described it as: "a meaningful coincidence of two or more events, where something other than the probability of chance is involved" (Jung in Main 2020: 93). Intrigued by this meaningful coincidence, Jung gathered evidence about it during therapy sessions with his patients and later noted that: "Synchronicity reveals the meaningful connections between the subjective and objective world." (Jung in Church 2018: 217). This phenomenon later crossed the boundaries of psychotherapy and today you can come across it in the study of complex systems. According to the mind-matter researcher Dr. Joe Dispenza, who in his work connects the dots between ancient spiritual practices and contemporary sciences, synchronicity can also be the outcome of mental rehearsal, which he explains as follows:

"When you have thoughtfully rehearsed a future reality until your brain has physically changed to look like it has had the experience, and you have emotionally embraced a new intention so many times that your body is altered to reflect that it has had the experience, hang on . . . because this is the moment the event [which you have mentally rehearsed] finds you! And it will arrive in a way that you least expect <…>" Dispenza 2012: 83

Following this train of thought, the audience member's phone ringing just at the appropriate time for the soundtrack of the show, or the experience of discovering that my grandmother was ill in real life, just as I had done so many times in my performances, might well be the outcome of events I had rehearsed in my imagination to prepare for my show - my mental rehearsal. Of course, there are questions to be asked: if synchronicities are the result of mental rehearsal, are we ourselves in charge of creating them? Or are the mental images appearing in our mind predetermined by information in our subconscious over which we have very little or no control? Answering these questions requires more in-depth research into the workings of the human mind, but for the purpose of this article it is important that synchronicities can be understood as a significant sign marking the coming into action of the force of creativity and the emergence of self-organisation.

"Synchronicity which seems so mysterious when we first encounter it, turns out to have solid scientific explanations behind it. Spontaneous order arises in living systems, from the atom to the galaxy" (Church 2018: 217). If this is indeed the case, then in practical terms training oneself to notice synchronicities can become one of the tools for directing the theatre of self-organisation. This can be done by actively seeking to connect the performance concept with its context, as was done in the discussed site-specific works *Dominoes* and *No, We Will Not Rest*, or by making space for those connections to emerge during the performance as was done in the performances *Window To Nature* and *(IN)DEPENDENCE*. The *Blitz* company seemed to be taking the same route by allowing stories to emerge when 'drawing pictures' in the minds of co-creators. This way of being sensitive to the circumstances of the current moment when making a performance should make space for synchronicities to emerge and for order to arise out of disordered performance elements.

Bearing this in mind, it would seem that some kind of strategy for liberating the creative force in the making of a devised performance is possible. This strategy could be coded with four S's: Sensitivity → Specificity → Synchronicity → Self-Organisation. It follows that being sensitive to the given conditions of the performance environment leads to a work that is specific to the circumstances of the showing. In turn, specificity results in focusing on certain aspects of the present moment that allow us to notice meaningful connections between the subjective and the objective world. In other words – it allows us to perceive synchronicities, and awareness of these should remind us to make space for self-organisation to emerge. The result of this chain of events should be none other than creating the theatre of self-organisation. The only complication is that this type of theatre, which emerges at its own rhythm and appears, in Dispenza's words, "in a way that you least expect" (Dispenza 2012: 83), might be difficult to create because it lies dormant in the place of the unknown and so can only be discovered when you're not looking for it. This explains why, rather than looking for a creative solution

by wracking your head, it is sometimes more beneficial to step back and, following the example of the pioneer of chaos theory meteorologist Edward Lawrence, say: “Hey! Let’s talk about the weather instead”.

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NOTES ON THE DIRECTOR'S BODY

Riko Saatsi

Oh, doctor, every time I take a breath… Always tell it, always get rid of that tickle in the stomach that bothers you.

Julio Cortázar: *Blow-Up*

1. A MUG OF WATER

Some 17 years ago, as a student of directing, I was finishing my former studies in philosophy during the summer break before the second semester at the Theatre Academy in Helsinki. I was manically writing my master's thesis, immersed in my research question, and afraid that I didn't have enough time to debate the complex issue properly. But I still needed to finish my thesis during the holidays and I had to get the extra months of state study grants (i.e., financing) for another master's degree to continue my directing studies. My philosophy thesis dealt with the problem of metaphor in the semantic context of meaning. My approach contested a wide theory, that needed to be scrutinised from several perspectives, which expanded the amount of work to be done week by week. At the end of August, after four months of intensive reading and writing – that had started with a structured timetable, but had turned into days of 17 working hours – I was writing the preface and felt thirsty. I stood up and trudged to the kitchen to refresh myself with a mug of water. Nothing came out of it. My hand shook so hard and persistently that all the water spilled out of the mug. I remember how thirsty I was when I sat down again at my table and continued to develop the preface. The thesis was soon finished, and was applauded by my professors. I was able to return to the Theatre Academy and continue my directing studies. However, a few months later it all struck back at me. Because of some long-term personal complexes and my state of exhaustion, I eventually ended up in a mental hospital. During the long process of my recovery, I realised that in that situation in the kitchen, while spilling the water out of the mug, my body had tried to communicate. I assumed that studies in philosophy had led me to overrate the mind and depreciate the body. I started to pay attention to my bodily sensations, vibes, and emotions. I awoke to a few simple and obvious facts: my body is where I am, and when I act, it is my body that acts, and – primarily – my body possesses knowledge way before my consciousness can reflect it.

2. ACTS OF THE BODY

The philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty points out that "one's own body is in the world just as the heart is in the organism".[1] Sensing is "living communication with the world that makes it present to us as the familiar place of our life".[2] In other words, according to Merleau-Ponty, I communicate with the world with my body as part of it, and the sensible world – the world I live through – is where I act and interact. For us, it is not necessary (or possible) to dig deeply into Merleau-Ponty's philosophy. It is enough to adapt two ideas: i) the idea of the embodied mind, and ii) the idea of action. Both are needed for the perspective I will apply to perception.

Philosopher Alva Noë, who builds his philosophy of the embodied mind significantly on Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of the body, argues that perceiving is a way of acting. Perception depends on capacities for action and thought, it is a kind of thoughtful activity of the body as a whole:

1 Merleau-Ponty 2012: 209.

2 Merleau-Ponty 2012: 53.

Perception is not something that happens to us, or in us. It is something we do. […] The world makes itself available to the perceiver through physical movement and interaction. […] All perception is touch-like in this way: Perceptual experience acquires content thanks to our possession of bodily skills. What we perceive is determined by what we do (or what we know how to do); it is determined by what we are ready to do. In ways I try to make precise, we enact our perceptual experience; we act it out.[3]

3 Noë 2006: 1.

As in my starting example regarding my studies in philosophy, when discussing directing, my experience is that the mind is often overemphasised. In the education of directors, it is common to approach the studies by focusing on directors' mental processes, i.e., the rational, the critical, the analytical, the interpretative, the designable and the reflective sides of the profession. This is understandable: a large part of a director's work is abstract thinking which, in the end, has to be translated in multiple ways into concrete acts on the stage. Still, in the discourse of directors – or when defining the profession in education – the aspect of 'I think' is often stressed over the aspect of 'I can'. 'Knowledge-that' and 'knowledge-how' are not easily separated, but to fully comprehend the nature of a director's artistic process, I believe that we need to adopt a more holistic viewpoint. If perception is touch-like and something we act out, as Noë argues, two things can be derived: i) the acts of the body are an essential part of perception, and ii) because perception is at the core of a director's artistic work – from the starting impulses to rehearsals on stage and ultimately to the final evaluation – the body, or the embodied mind, is obviously present throughout the director's artistic process. Therefore, to apprehend the intuitive and the affective dimensions of directing, I believe it is crucial to consider the perspective of the director's body and embodied mind. The reflective and the analytical sides of the profession are important, but we should not neglect the living body side.

Within the confines of this article, I try to approach questions related to the director's body from a personal standpoint by sharing some tangible – and often trivial – notes I have made about my own body during my artistic processes. I will examine the notes within the loose framework of the phenomenology of the body, trying nevertheless to avoid the complexity of academic philosophical theories. Instead, by sharing selected personal and touch-like examples, I try to shed light on the director's body processes, and to remind us of the undisputed connection between our living and acting bodies and the director's artistic work in general. The following notes are not comprehensive, and do not aim at any academic accuracy. Neither are they intended to build any kind of theory of intuition. The notes are subjective, they are my perceptions of my body. I'm not arguing that directors in general, during their artistic processes, go through my kinds of bodily processes. But I do believe that there are similarities. I'm convinced that in every director's artistic process there is a personal body process going on simultaneously, impacting on the artistic process and on the developing performance. By sharing the notes I've selected, I urge readers to pay attention to their own bodies, and to question and to interrogate their body processes when directing.

3. THE EMOTIONS

The impulses that initiate my artistic process are without exception connected to emotions. I believe, as psychiatrist and philosopher Thomas Fuchs argues, that emotional life is not something within, not something in my head or in my brain where I evaluate the incoming stimuli. Emotions are embodied, between me and the world. Emotions are lived and spatial, they are inseparable from bodily resonances. As Fuchs points out, the body is a constant resonance organ for emotions:

This resonance is the way which you are interacting with a certain situation with its affective qualities. The situation is what sets you into resonance, but only because you are resonating with the situation. Relations and interactions between the body, the situation or the other person create the emotion. In other words, emotion is something that you feel in relation with the world and with others and it bridges the distance between things and yourself.[4] Thomas Fuchs

When starting a new artistic project, I have learned to be curious about my emotions and bodily resonances to impulses that I consider potential and interesting. The stronger the emotion is, and the more powerfully my body resonates, the more likely it is that there is something possibly interesting behind the impulse. Emotions that I experience are essential sources of information: they set me in relation with the world. Every emotion carries its own message from reality. Emotions reveal what is valuable for me, and what is not, and they both move me and push me to act. Strong emotions like exaltation, amusement, shame, guilt, hatred, ill will, disgust, or affection play an important role when searching for a starting point that has both personal and social relevance, and that is defined, concrete, simple but broad, and both familiar and unknown. If I start to foresee visual and spatial images or situational visions, I know that the impulse resonating in my body has reached the unconscious and set something in motion. Only then do I start intentionally to analyse the material – in the beginning rational thinking plays a minimal role. I believe that the unconscious is also embodied and enacted. As Fuchs points out: "everything which is unconscious is not somewhere in the brain or somewhere in the psyche, it is enmeshed in your way of being: behaviour, attitudes, body, habits, ways of interacting with others and the whole way of living your life in a certain environment".[5]

I try to clarify the role of emotions at the beginning of my artistic processes with an example: in a project based on Peter Greenaway's film *The Cook, The Thief, His Wife and Her Lover*,[6] my artistic process as a director and dramaturge started from the disgust I felt at the rise of right-wing politics in Finland, and the change to harsh political discourse in society and in parliament that now seemed acceptable. Meantime, at a children's birthday party, I was amused by eating sweet cookies baked in form of a human being. I started to think of cannibalism. Because cannibalism as a theme was already directly connected to my body, I became curious about my feelings – certain body states – that were connected to food and eating, such as hunger, thirst, pleasure, disgust, gluttony, and nausea. I was fascinated by the fact that everybody has an intimate relationship to food. I considered digestion both from the personal and political point of view, and I was interested in how digestion could be seen as connected to social status and how a certain taste could reveal it. One of the first things I wanted to do was to visit a top-class restaurant to experience

4 Tirkkonen 2019.

5 Tirkkonen 2019.

6 *The Cook, the Thief, His Wife and Her Lover* was performed at KOM-Teatteri in Helsinki in 2017.

the impact of strict table codes and etiquette. As I felt that, in the existing political atmosphere, people would need only a gentle push to start tearing each other apart, I got stuck with the image of fine cannibalistic dining. I started the process of collecting material for a performance and found Greenaway's film. From then on, my predesign for the forthcoming group process was closely related to the film.

In this way, a new artistic process in my work as a director started by relating myself to impulses and paying attention to my body – the emotions I identify and the bodily resonances I experience. The process passes through many intuitive and analytical phases. If the emotional signal to a certain impulse is strong enough and the impulse resonates in my body sparking the imagination, I start to analyse and conceptualise my relationship to it, and dig slightly deeper into my experience and the things related to it. Emotions and bodily resonances are essential tools to focus the process on things that are relevant for me. Emotions guide me throughout the starting process by separating the relevant from the irrelevant. If I'm untouched or feel indifference, and nothing really resonates in my body, there's no point in going any further. Nothing between me and the world stands out and I have scarcely anything to give as a director.

4. BODILY ROUTINES

Throughout the artistic process – from the pre-phase of collecting and organising material, designing the stage aesthetics with the designers, building the dramaturgy, and planning the forthcoming rehearsal process, to the actual rehearsals with the working group – my emotions and my bodily resonances carry essential information on the developing performance and on my personal relationship to it and to the working process.

However, when the process passes from the pre-phase to the rehearsals, my working methods, perceived from the bodily angle, change radically. I have noticed that, to create conditions supporting my work as director and leader of the working group, I need to build strict personal routines that I follow throughout the rehearsal process. Most of these routines are deeply rooted in my body. The main goal of building the routines is to stabilise my relationship to the stage, and to create – if possible – an immutable connection with my body and the emerging performance. In other words, I try to create daily personal practices ensuring that the changes I perceive during the rehearsal process happen on stage and in the developing performance, not in me. The routines help me to concentrate on the ongoing artistic process; I try to pay minimal attention to other things outside the rehearsals. In my experience, the routines also make room for intuitive and associative working and support my aspiration to create a shared atmosphere and working conditions where the collective subconscious could emerge and reveal something unpredictable. Every new artistic process differs from the previous one by its themes and the concept chosen, and by the context and people I work with, but nevertheless, the routines I personally follow during the group process stay essentially the same.

For example, for every project I need to start by finding a simple uncomfortable stool to sit on. The stool needs to be hard, with no padding, and it needs to be low enough that my feet are solidly in contact with the floor. It is essential that the stool has no backrest, that I need to lean forward so that my position and attention to the stage stay active. This simple

stool becomes an anchor on which I build my relationship to the rehearsal space that I share with my working group for the following months.

During the rehearsal period, I eat, if possible, the same food every day.

I wear the same loose comfortable clothes all the time.

I follow my invariable bodily routines early in the morning before the rehearsals, and while preparing myself for work. I walk the same route from my residence to the rehearsal space daily and most often exactly at the same time. During the breaks, if I'm alone, I refresh myself by taking a nap or by doing the preferred bodily exercises I repeat daily. If I need to drop into a grocery store after the day's rehearsals to get something to eat on the way back to my residence, I visit the same shop every day and pick up the same things I chose on day one. To detach myself from the process and to sleep, I have certain bodily routines I repeat every evening.

As described, I try to live with as little variation as possible outside the rehearsals to be as sharp and open as possible in the rehearsals – to perceive the muffled impulses, to recognise the potential in the devised sketches that are blurred, to sense the varying energies in the working group and modify the group's orientation imperceptibly, to catch and develop the spontaneous and potential dramaturgic connections that pop up unexpectedly in discussions, etc. My daily routines are personal and private; with the group I act completely differently.

Through these routines, I seek to establish an environment where nothing, if possible, will come between me and the developing performance, and nothing in the relationship between me and the stage will change during the rehearsals. I believe that the stable personal circumstances I create, if I can, will offer me a true position to assess the progress on stage during the artistic group process and support my decision-making as a director.

I will clarify my argument with this example: when directing the play *Compassion* by Veikko Nuutinen[7], during the rehearsals the set and costume designer asked me if I wanted a haircut together with few of our actors. I agreed, why not? The result was unexpected. After my haircut, I felt that I had completely lost my vision: somehow the stage felt radically different, but I couldn't determine why. I knew that I am a neurotic person, but it still took me a while to understand that nothing had changed on stage, I had changed. Somehow a small change in my body had wrenched my relationship to the developing performance, and it took several days to restore my relationship to the stage. Reflecting on the situation afterwards, I believed my experience was related to the fact that – either consciously or unconsciously – I had built my bodily presence in the rehearsals in a way that made it comfortable for me to perform with others. The change in my appearance now mixed the image, turned my focus from the stage to myself, and messed up my work for days. I became annoyingly aware of my changed physical image and lost my concentration on the artistic process. In the end, my experience revealed something essential about the orientation I prefer in rehearsals as a director: I need to find ways to become invisible to myself - or in other words to be completely inside of myself - to focus solely on the stage and the people I work with, but yet still be sensitive to my perceptions of the bodily resonances that carry information on my relationship to the developing performance. The invariable routines help me to achieve this objective.

7 *Compassion* was performed at Seinäjoki City Theatre and at Korjaamo in Helsinki in 2012-2014.

By following strict personal routines during the rehearsal period, my whole directing process becomes in a way bodily ritualised. The routines I build and follow aim to create individual conditions where I can work optimally as a director.

5. A LIVING BODY ACTING WITH OTHER LIVING BODIES

Picture an ordinary situation during my rehearsals: I am sitting on the stool with my living body as a whole and mentally prepared for the day's rehearsals through the bodily routines I've followed. I sense the presence of other living bodies I breathe with and who constantly have a varying effect on how I experience the rehearsal space. From the bodily perspective two things interest me here: i) the birth of a shared space, and ii) the interaction.

According to the geographer Doreen Massey, space becomes shared not by the walls around us, but by the network of our relationships and by our social activity. Massey argues that space is a product of social relationships and interaction. We are all involved in producing it. Spatial relations are expressions of social relations. A place is a stage for an ever-changing network of social relationships, and it should be understood as part of the process by which social activity is organised in space and time.[8] To apply Massey's idea, through the network of our relationships within our working group, and through our social activity, the rehearsal space will slightly evolve into a stage expressing the collective thinking that we are all involved in producing.

Here again, when we are exposed to each other's thinking and the multiple ways of being, I believe that bodies – now plural – play an essential role. I find inspiration in the metaphor of tuning forks, that Fuchs utilises in his argument describing the interaction between bodies:

> *Embodied interaffectivity […] means that two resonating, affective bodies are interacting and in relation to each other. You can use the metaphor of two tuners of a musical instrument: if you bounce one tuning fork, the other one will start resonating as well after a certain time, creating this joint movement. That is also what our bodies do in relation to another person, another object or a situation.*[9]

As a director working within a collective artform – as an artist with other artists – I believe that a large part of my orientation, to follow Fuchs' metaphor, spins around the intention to create conditions and atmosphere where the 'tuning forks' of the artistic working group could jointly resonate. From the bodily perspective, I have some practices that I prefer to support this intention.

Talking is necessary and is probably the most common communicative praxis during rehearsals. But, as talking has its limitations, I prefer, especially at the beginning of a group process, to invest in shared experiences that we, as a working group, can live and explore together around the themes and the materials related to the desired performance. In my experience, thinking by acting together and sharing bodily experiences enrich the joint process with attributes that cannot be obtained merely by talking and analysing. The experience of falling through thin ice is very different from talking about hypothermia. For example, in my artistic processes, together with the working groups, I have visited an abandoned mine, a shooting range, a workshop held by a fine-cuisine chef,

8 According to Massey, we should think of the concepts of space and time together, not separately, because spatiality and temporality of the world are equal. Therefore, we need an inseparable concept of Space-Time. (Massey 2008)

9 Tirkkonen 2019.

and a primeval forest. Together with a period of director-led devising, with daily festivals of new scenes, I have found this joint thinking-by-acting phase useful for both theme-based and text-based projects. During the starting phase, I'm not much interested in clever analysis or deductions. I aim to build trust within the working group, encourage the shyest members to participate, and to elicit the potential of the inner and bodily worlds of the others. By acting and experiencing together, the group can become acquainted with the themes and the possible worlds related to the desired performance, produce many kinds of scenic material together in a playful and inquisitive environment, and imperceptibly develop team spirit. In my experience, starting the group process by analysing the material rationally often hinders the possibility of a collective subconscious emerging to reveal something unpredictable. In our profession, we have a natural tendency to control indefinite situations by defining and analysing the things that are related to them. Since creating a performance is not engineering, I believe it is worth struggling to distance oneself from a rational and analytical orientation and to strive to replace the immediate 'I think' approach with the open-hearted bodily approach of 'I can'. In my experience, it is beneficial to work as a group creating a sketch and generally first learning from the others in order to understand the outline of the pending performance.

I find it interesting how, during the rehearsal period, the shared space of our working group tends to evolve into a particular and self-dependent world that brings everyone involved in its creation to act in a specific way. During the process, through the initial contracts we make as a group to agree on goals, methods and practices, our bodies learn a specific way to congregate, to interact – and eventually to live together the period of shared artistic process with a specified group of people.

As a director, my own body – the 'tuning fork' – constantly resonates in the rehearsals with everything I'm related to. For example, it is only with my body that I begin to understand the distances, the character and the dimensions of the space and the lighting, and the spatial and visual changes I perceive. I cannot resist the resonances that the sound and music call forth in my body. It is with my body that I experience the presence of the performers, the touch-like materials in the stage set and props, and the dimensions of rhythm, duration, suspense, etc. As I possess the ability to feel kinaesthetic empathy, I experience the jumps and falls of the performers in my body, as well as their casual or stylised costumes, their sweating, their physical virtuosity, the obstacles they face and their stuttering and crooning, etc. Through my own physical movement and interaction as a director in rehearsal, the world, as Noë argues, makes itself available to me as the perceiver. So, by enacting my perceptual experience, and by connecting my perceptions to the wider context related to the performance, I am able to work to transform our abstract collective thinking into concrete acts on the stage and to orient the expression of the performers and designers in the desired direction. As I mentioned before, I believe that my body possesses knowledge long before my consciousness can eventually reflect it. Because things often happen fast during rehearsals, I generally count on the information that my body transmits, i.e., on my intuition, when rehearsing a scene or developing nuances of expression. When there is time and possibility to reflect – by following the run-throughs or when paying attention to the big picture and dramaturgy – I count mostly on analysis and the tools that are based on it.

During rehearsals, I interact and communicate bodily in multiple ways as a director with the working group. Obviously my gender, age, physical abilities and limitations, as well as my ethnic group and social background, have an impact on my communication.[10] There are many things happening bodily outside the spoken language: I interact for example with my pose (active or passive), with the form of energy I transmit (enthusiastic and positive, or deliberative and calm, or irritated and cranky, etc.), with my position in the rehearsal space (am I sitting in the audience, or entering the stage, etc.), and with the volume, rhythm and intensity of my speech and bodily expression (do I speak fast to speed up the actors' expression, or do I act substantially calm to cool down the atmosphere, etc.).

I'm also bodily related to the audience during the rehearsals. I explore the hypothetic position of the spectators and assess the developing relationship between them and the performance. However, the moment when the first spectators – often colleagues – enter the rehearsal space to help us with their comments is always a shocking experience for me, even if I personally asked them to come. It still puzzles me how much the spectators affect my body at first, as though the bubble we created as a working group is suddenly violently punctured and we're caught doing something ludicrous or prohibited. My bodily relationship to the stage and to the performance is abruptly changed by the spectators. I adopt the position of the audience, but somehow expecting them to be malevolent. I start to focus on nonessential details and mistakes, but fortunately I gradually adapt to the new situation. In discussion with the spectators after the run-through, the unpleasant bodily experience caused by my irrational reaction has finally gone, and I'm grateful for the spectators' comments that help us to proceed with our artistic process.

10 Questions related to gender, ethnicity, as well as to sexuality, are deeply connected to the topic of this article, but to scrutinise them properly, I believe they would need a separate article. The consequences and the implications that arise from these questions are therefore mostly beyond the scope of this text.

When polishing the performance, it is again my body – or the particular feeling of relaxation I experience – that confirms whether my work as a director is done. Quite often, I find myself in a situation a few days before the premiere, when a dramaturge or a set designer, after some of the final run-throughs says: "Yes, we're ready!" In principle I agree, but at the same time I'm confused because the tensions that have existed in my body during the rehearsals are still there. I go through my notes or the recordings we've made on the run-through, and eventually find things that are still not in place, that need to be fixed. We make changes and – finally – the tension in my body starts to wind down. Only then am I certain that my work for the performance is done. I need my body to confirm it.

6. ENDURANCE

Directing is a profession that demands resilience to many kinds of mental and physical loads. Stress is the constant partner of a director in an artistic process. The stress can be related to limited time and to the convergent premiere. It can be related to the fact that the director's work is reviewed publicly. It can be related to the responsibility for making decisions in front of the working group (and the incoming audience). It can be related to the conflicts that show up from time to time within the working group. There are uncountable reasons to feel pressure during the directing process because stress, and the ability to tolerate it, is very personal, and the grounds to feel and to cope with the pressure are related to one's personality. There are directors, like me, who come to find the storm of social interaction

in rehearsals eventually encumbering. There are directors who find the lone work hardest and want to share the directing position with someone else, because standing alone in charge and leading the group work is stressful. Whatever the reasons for stress, it is essential that it is deeply rooted in the body and significantly resonates in it. Stress helps us to get tuned and often improves our daily performance, but if it is of long duration, causing physical and neurological pressure, stress is eventually harmful and considered a psycho-physical disorder.

My relationship to stress is two-fold. In principle, I consider stress as a necessary feeling for my artistic work. It both assures me that the artistic objectives I have committed to are important to me, and it improves my concentration – I feel that I think better and achieve more under stress (think simply of the pressure of the deadlines). On the other hand, I find long durational stress exhaustive and eventually destructive to the routines I have built and tried to preserve during the rehearsals.

As I described earlier, I build and follow routines that I believe enhance my artistic work as a director. The experience of stress has undoubtedly affected the development of my routinised practices over the years. For maintaining endurance, one of the main things I try to ensure during rehearsals is to get enough sleep. My routines support my need to get both a good night's sleep and have refreshing daily naps between the rehearsals. Nevertheless, it is common that the stress I feel effects my sleep – often by playing with the subconscious. It entails nights when I'm not actually sleeping but following the visions that my subconscious brings forth when searching for solutions to certain problems on stage and testing the alternatives. Nights of this kind can be exhausting bodily, but it helps to drive these visions from my mind if I can wake up and write them down.

Usually, I try to include endurance sports in my daily routines during the rehearsals. I try to run or swim regularly, but frequently the sports are more or less replaced by smoking and alcohol, which I start to consume – and overconsume – in the latter part of the rehearsal period to cope with the increasing stress and the growing amount of work. I'm aware that alcohol effectively impairs my efforts to secure a good night's sleep, but the drinks are calming and alleviate my worries, and smoking is relaxing during the breaks and when analysing and refocusing the group's work.

The intensity and the concentration on the group become heavier when reaching the final weeks and days of rehearsals before the premiere. Probably because I'm aware that the rehearsal process has an articulated end point, my last days in rehearsal – if needed – can sometimes feel, from the bodily perspective, like a survival exercise. In the end, no matter what kind of personal principles I have set for myself in order to cope with the stress or to enhance my and the group's work, anything that needs to be done and can be done will be fixed on the stage even if it may sometimes be painful. (As a director you are, for example, exposed to accusations of not making the changes in time.) The shared stress eventually pushes the group forward to polish the performance.

In the end, the position of director leads me to a strange psycho-physical feeling of emptiness. The work that I have done for months has made me useless, the performance stands on its own and no longer needs me. This is a feeling I need to cope with. After the premiere, it is important for me to detach myself from the artistic process by reflecting on it and then focusing on other things in order to organise myself

in my daily life outside the rehearsals. As a result, this quite often means that I hate to return and see the performance that is now running to give feedback to the working group. My body remembers the long and laborious process I've gone through, and is reluctant to go back.

The period between the finished and the forthcoming artistic process contains the process of recovery. Because of the painful experience in my studies in philosophy that I referred to at the beginning of this article, I have a memory of stepping beyond the limit of my strength. From that experience, I'm able to monitor my resilience to stress and regulate the workload during my artistic processes. That experience also helps me to identify the personal limits within which I can reach for the maximum but still stay (more or less) sane. It also helps me to estimate the amount of stress and the resilience of the other people I work with. And as a cornerstone, the experience has taught me to recover. From a bodily perspective, recovery for me primally means endurance sports, especially road cycling. I believe that, as a director, I benefit from being in a good physical condition that helps me to carry the periodically wearing loads of my profession.

7. THE WORLD AS FLESH

Within the constraints of this article, I have tried to draw attention to the director's body. By the simple – and often trivial – notes I've shared, I've tried to bring out and visualise ways in which the director's body is intertwined with artistic process in many different and inseparable ways. The body is connected to perception by physical movement and interaction, and it is connected to intuition through the information transmitted by emotions and bodily resonances. The body interacts with other bodies, objects, and situations, and thus bridges the distance between the director and the world. The body conveys information on stress and the possible limits of resilience. As I believe that the body possesses information long before the consciousness can reflect it, and bodily information impacts the artistic process in many unexpected ways, I think it is important, during the artistic process, to perceive and interrogate even the weakest bodily resonances that are experienced – and to utilise them.

In my experience, the director's profession is often defined and described principally by the mental processes a director goes through. Because of the undisputed connection between the living and acting body and the director's artistic work in general, I think it is worth adopting an embodied and holistic viewpoint in order to explore directing from both phenomenological and personal viewpoints.

To conclude, I will return to Merleau-Ponty, who I referred at the beginning of this article:

> *In his later texts Merleau-Ponty describes the world as flesh. The world* is *flesh and with the flesh of my body, I'm part of the flesh of the world. I personally find this idea very stimulating. The flesh here is not a substance, but a kind of mediator that both intertwines me with the world and opens the world to my senses. With the acts of my body, I enact my perceptual experience, and explore – question and interrogate – my relation to the world.*[11]

11 Hotanen 2008: 83-122.

In the end, according to Merleau-Ponty, it's not we who are talking about being, it is the being who is talking in us.

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EMPTY

Mika Leskinen (1968) is a freelance theatre director from Finland. He graduated from Theatre Academy Helsinki in 1993. Although his main occupation is directing, he has written several plays and translated plays from English and Swedish for his directing purposes (Strindberg, Beckett, Norén, Kane). Leskinen has worked with independent groups (KOM-teatteri, Q-teatteri, Teatteri Takomo, Teater Viirus) as well as with repertoire theatres such as the Finnish National Theatre. He has worked as a full-time lecturer of directing at the Theatre Academy Helsinki 2006-2011, and since then as an occasional part-time teacher. Leskinen has been influenced by German theatre performances e.g., Castorf, Marthaler, Pollésch (and has also directed *Heidi Hoh arbeitet hier nicht mehr* by Pollésch in Finland).

ENTHUSIASM AND JOY: subjective notes on theatre directing

Mika Leskinen

1. THE MAGIC OF THE STAGE AND THE DIRECTOR

The theatrical performance is on. The actor plays a character – the character is put in a straitjacket. He kneels on a plank floor, as though he were in a stall, but it is his working room. A woman watches him behind his back. The man is desperate, on the verge of madness, he has been woven into a role of a madman – or he has woven himself into it. I am a sixteen-year-old upper-grade student. The man in the straitjacket is The Captain, the character Adolf, the husband, in August Strindberg's play *The Father*. The woman, the wife, is Laura, like the one to whom Petrarca wrote his sonnets, the unreachable, unrealisable love of his life. A gloomy moment in life and on stage is at hand. I sit in the middle of the auditorium in Willensauna, a 150-seat theatre space at the Finnish National Theatre. I look at the straitjacketed Captain, kneeling on the plank floor under the yellow glowing stage light, *and suddenly I see straight inside the human being.*

For me, this was the key moment concerning the possibilities and the depth of theatre, and it is unerasable. In my own performances I always try to reach or contact the same feeling of depth at the decisive moment.

Why is the man kneeling? Why the plank floor? Who has ensured that suitable actors have been found for the roles? Who trusted so much in the moment with a straitjacket, in its strong impact and exact duration?

Furthermore, why did this scene have such a strong impact on me? I understood that the neuroticism of the Captain had a correlation with my own youthful neuroses. I was no longer alone with them. Could one grasp the thematic content of the play in an exact and productive way? I was to think of this extensively later, when viewing the subject matter of a performance as a student of directing and a professional director.

It was the late eighties, my first year in Theatre Academy, and one day writing appeared on the wall of the fourth-floor rehearsal room: "Director is a power usurper who can't act or write".

I remember discussing this manifest with an actor student from my class and being somewhat stupefied by it. I argued that maybe this sentence had something in it. I must have wondered silently what the director really *can* do.

I wasn't destined to become an actor, but by then I had already performed ten years as a magician. Four years later, I was a part-time tango singer in a band for a couple of active years. I also began writing plays during my first year in the Theatre Academy and completed three while studying directing. I had a feeling that by writing my own texts I acquired a profound stepping stone onto the stage even before the directing process. My graduation directing work was also based on a text my own, a kind of paraphrase (but independent work) of Samuel Beckett's *Waiting For Godot*: *Elinkelvottomat* (*Unfit To Live*, 1992). My latest play *Muusa* (*The Muse*) is from 2020. My main profession is that of freelance theatre director. I worked full time as a lecturer on directing at the Theatre Academy in Helsinki from 2006-2011, and as a part-time teacher from 2014-2016 and in 2021. I have translated five plays, two from English and three from Swedish. I speak and read German.

The theatrical stage, however, is my focus point for depicting a human being and for my poetical thinking. In my innermost being, I am a theatre director.

2. A THEATRE DIRECTOR IS A SPECIALIST IN THE THEATRICAL PERFORMANCE AS A WHOLE

The theatre director is the person who gives meaning and direction to the process of planning and rehearsing a performance.

A director does this by pinpointing **the subject matter of the performance** and anticipating the potential (not the actual form) of each of the main ingredients that make a play work in theatrical form. She or he anticipates the potentiality of the whole and tries to ensure that the right people work on the performance. The director communicates with the group through a dialogue that enhances intuitions and plans.

In this essay, I discuss a director's work in relation to a written play, because that is the genre of directorial work that I know best. But I believe that subject-matter thinking, which I mainly concentrate on here, is applicable to most forms of performance and directing.

Arto af Hällström, a Finnish director with a long career behind him and now a pensioner, was the primus motor of Pete Q, a turning point in Finnish theatre in 1978. He said in an interview for a book on directing in 1986: "I think that a good director is the one who makes good productions. I don't think there is any other rule" (Hällström 1986: 76).

The entire work of a theatre director is to produce a meaningful performance. By meaningful, I do not mean something successful or acclaimed. (Although of course that might also be the case.) I mean a performance which beholds in its soul and form some deeply accessible meaning, ethos and truth, without which we would possibly not be so rich as beings who feel, think and sense. This means that an artist has to have 'something to say', perhaps not knowing thoroughly what it is at the beginning, but having a strong urge to get to know it. It is not a case of self-assertion, tendency or gaining reputation or wealth, but a case of giving a present. An artistical theatre piece is an unselfish present given to the audience.

When I make theatre, the most important thing for me is that the performance can communicate some significant hot issue and meaning, subject matter that I have striven to understand and depict throughout its making. The life and the form of the performance, the way of acting, the dramaturgy of the whole and the tension of the performance radiate this subject matter, which represents something important to me, something I feel has universal meaning at the moment. The intensity that a truthful theatre piece brings to life is for me the strongest experience of intensity there is.

To start with, I have condensed into five steps the path that the director follows to reach a meaningful performance. (Reflecting the special relationship between the director and the subject matter of the play or performance):

I. The reason for the performance

The director's initial reading of the play gives birth to enthusiasm and joy. Through the text and its form, the director sees attractive possibilities that capture the attention.

In this first phase, the ethical ground for making the performance is articulated in its preliminary and intuitive form, which is one of the reasons why this task really must be undertaken. Through planning, the ethical point becomes more and more crystallised, but only the finished performance tells what it really means. It is created in the making of the work of art and cannot be fully laid down at the beginning.

(The administrative aspects of putting the play into actual production are of no interest in this essay. I assume the director falls in love with the text and that the play is produced.)

The director has a strong urge to direct this play.

II. The director's relation to the play's subject matter

Using subject-matter thinking as 'a compass', the director creates meaning and direction for the process by communicating her or his thinking and feeling to the group. In the contact and planning phases, she or he communicates with the designers, and in the contact phase and at the beginning of rehearsals with the actors. "What seems to be the most important subject-matter focus of our work with the play?" "Why do I as a director feel that this is important and highly interesting for me?" "What issue, point of view or question does the play portray that has a strong relation to our times right at this moment?" In striving to see the essential or deep relation to subject matter, one must be open, subjective and frame the right questions. This turns the subject matter into a collective 'tool' for all the artists concerned as well as for the producents, marketing people and technicians. Everyone can begin to relate to it.

(Raila Leppäkoski, a prominent Finnish director, now an emeritus professor of directing and acting, has an interesting observation on communicating the director's relation with the subject matter to the artistic group: the director should lay bare something subjectively painful or fragile in herself or himself – something which has a striking relation to the essence of the play; the rest of the group will then be ready to do the same. Then we deal with the essentials – 'without coverings' (Leppäkoski 1990: 47). It is no use depicting shields, it is the essences behind them that must be grasped.).

Thinking of form goes hand in hand with the subject-matter thinking. "What kind of fascinating theatre does this have potential for?"

III. The creative state and rehearsals

The director aims to be always in a creative state when rehearsals begin, and by planning the day's work beforehand lays out the conditions for the group also to be in a creative state. The director strives to maintain meaning and direction in the process by laying out timetables and using 'the compass' when in doubt or while planning the day's work, without becoming entangled by it. Intuition and decisiveness take hold in rehearsals.

The director remains alert for new and unseen things!

IV. The subject-matter compass tightens up

'The compass' – the subject matter as a formulation of the real essence of the play – can be metamorphosed during the rehearsals or some other aspect may take on greater importance: how can we make the plain drama of this play work without thinking what it implies?

V. Meaningful performance

The life of the meaningful performance begins.

3. WHAT IS THE GENESIS OF THE DIRECTOR'S WORK?

I deal here with the ideal situation. What happens when one finds the text with which one falls in love or becomes infatuated? The right text. How does one discern this?

It is absolutely necessary that the director personally commits heart and mind to the text! There should also be something of current and universal interest in it. The theatrical form of the play should intrigue the director in an engaging way.

After feeling a strong urge to do the play after the initial reading, the most important next artistic step is to find the right actors for the text or roles. In this essay, I will not go further into exploring this very important phase.

Before communicating and planning with the designers, the director must personally carry out planning. Doing the homework – among other things getting to know the text as well as possible – gives meaning and direction to the process. It's about seeing the potentialities of the text as a performance beforehand, so that the actual working process with the group can be free and intuitive.

But let's get back to the inception phase:

The director's initial read-through of the play!

A good playwright has a wondrous possibility – and the craft - to build a map for the performance, create the basis of dramaturgy and the verbal character of the play, not to speak of giving the initial fictive birth to the characters. Dramaturgical wholeness is 'flesh', because the performance is an organic being.

The enthusiasm I gained from my first reading of the right play has provided the initial drive for me to direct the performance. The first reading of the play is a sacred moment.

One must reserve a time slot for the initial reading free from any disturbance so that the play can be read through without interruption. Otherwise, its organic flow doesn't show up. What happens in the ideal case? The subject of the play, some scene or a precise part of it, the way the dialogue works, the original rage, joy or serenity of sorrow in the play, its dramaturgical flow or the original way of its being a play touches and inspires me at that precise moment of my life. Enthusiasm and joy are the basis of my theatre making! The play makes me laugh or makes me stop at the spot and feel terrorised, or both. In my experience, the eagerness in me mostly arises somehow out of the original form of the play. When the play really 'hits' me, I am affected, sit still for a moment, then jump around with joy, walk to and fro in the room and shout aloud. Immediately after the reading is the time to write down the main points and associations. (Sometimes even during the reading nowadays.) I write down important observations, especially the points or moments in the play which particularly involved me. Which scene affected me the most. I write down everything that seems important at the moment. It can be more or it can be less, but it needs to be done quite soon after the reading. First impressions tend to fade or be forgotten in the midst of the process. These notes are life insurance for me as a director. (Andrei Tarkovski mused that the most difficult thing in directing a film - while filming it - is to remember why one initially wanted to make it.) After the glow of the initial reading, I begin to ruminate and formulate the first definitions of what my director's subject matter might be. The play has really opened a conduit to something that lies within my experience of life. There is something in the play that I seem to have a striking connection to. Or it may happen that the play opens up a whole new

world that in some way intrigues me. Or I may get a painful craving to understand something that's been bothering me. The evolving connection to the subject matter will be the energy point, the primus motor, a kind of libido, that will drive me forward, and my planning work and sometimes rehearsals are fuelled by it. This is where meaning and direction plus enthusiasm and joy mostly stem from. When the right text brings you to a halt, it is a case of inspiration, yes, *in spirare*, breathing in, which erupts in breathing out. When it's real, one knows it, the head 'explodes' and the stomach area suddenly burns. The nearest kin to theatre is poetry; theatrical thinking is always a condensation (of life). The scene of a play is Dichtung, a living, capricious and fleshy poem, a concentration of reality.

Intermezzo: about the craft of reading a play

A theatre director has to develop the craft of reading a play. It is partly a technical craft, although the duty of a director is to link personal experience of life and view of the world with the reading process. There are auxiliary means to sharpen the 'objective' reading: for example the ability to trace the turning point(s) of a scene and the main turning points of the whole; the first golden ratio point is 1/3 from the beginning of the play, and the second (the most important) is 2/3 from the beginning; these points usually show significant events. One learns to read plays by reading them. A director's craft of reading involves the ability to see the characters and scenes as entities on the stage. It is sharpened by making theatre and reading plays. The ability to read at a professional level is itself a craft and is related to the stage, but is also an accomplishment of its own even without any direct relation to the stage.

The Meal – a case

The Meal (orig. *Ateria*, 2018), a punktragedy by Finnish playwright Okko Leo, takes place in a hamburger restaurant. It's a real fast-food joint, but: "all the way through the play we hear a machine-produced sound, a very low and silently serene bumpy hum. It the sound of the machine of the universe" (a parenthesis at the beginning of scene 1.). The characters are two men, hamburger workers Meke and Koistinen (Meke is a man's nickname, Koistinen is a common Finnish surname). There is one scene in *The Meal* that touched and somewhat terrified me. (Although the initial reading of the play also produced strong laughter.) It really consists of two longer scenes in a row.

The hamburger workers find a woman's wallet lost by a customer. Koistinen seizes the money from it in his accustomed way, 270 euros, Meke gets nothing. Then they defile the photos of children and the memorial hairpiece of a baby (probably deceased) found in the wallet. Why do these men feel no empathy whatsoever for the seemingly wealthy person who owns these very personal things? Why do they celebrate by deep-frying the hair and *eating it*? This was the focus question and my starting point in the play *The Meal*. Later, I condensed my definition of the subject matter in one sentence: **The experience of social inequality is a bomb ready to explode.** The energy and rage that Meke and Koistinen bore inside them were packed finally into this sentence.

I had been living for a long while on labour-market funds as the father of a 15-year-old son. Constant lack of money and

being unemployed – actually a director is never unemployed: I planned and wrote – sometimes created a feeling of being totally outside society and generated rage against politicians and well-off people in general. I was about to explode mentally, my nerves strung out. The heroes of the play had a similar condition: Meke in a more introvert way, Koistinen more outwardly and having from time to time a rather violent connection with the audience. At times they both attacked the audience verbally and with attitude. The other side of the coin was their deep feeling of inferiority.

The hamburger restaurant as an universe of inequality.
KOM-teatteri, 2018. Scenography: Janne Vasama. Photo: Patrik Pesonius.

The Meal had its first premiere at KOM-teatteri, Helsinki, 30.10.2018. I had already prepared to produce *The Meal* with funding, but then they phoned from KOM-teatteri, and made me an offer I couldn't refuse.
I was struck by the language used by the characters, a mixture of young people's street slang and a kind of creative archaic use of the Finnish language. I fell in love with the play. The world of my teenage son also felt curiously mirrored in the world view of these characters that in our version were middle-aged but 'ageless' white outsiders. "Wallahi, I swear…"
The play consists of 37 scenes of shorter impressions and tableaux and of longer dialogue scenes. The playwright told me that he didn't strive to build a structure, and that no scene leads anywhere; this is the existential status of hamburger workers. Yet the text also revealed an organic structure while I planned the performance and analysed the text.

4. THE THREE QUESTIONS

Raila Leppäkoski defined three questions when she set out to be a professor of directing at the Theatre Academy Helsinki in 1989. The director must answer these questions before attempting to direct a play:

1. *What phenomenon of reality do I depict?*
2. *What is my own relation to this phenomenon?*
3. *What is the atmosphere of the performance?*

The answers to the first two questions constitute, in my interpretation, the director's relation to the subject matter of the performance. It could be shaped for example like this: "I depict the experience of social inequality, I have experienced how it feels and I recognise the rage it produces."
As regards my play *The Muse*, the initial answer to the first and the second questions could be: "I depict love that is

not fulfilled, I have personally experienced this, and I almost died because of it." This can be my starting point, and I could go on by asking: Why in fact is love not realised in this play? What is the relation between sex and love (there is a lot of copulation in the play)? Why does The Woman really not want to engage in the relationship, why does she just exploit the relationship with The Man? Where does the inability to feel empathy stem from? (Note! The same range of subject matter concerning lack of empathy as in *The Meal*, but in a wholly different context, in the romantic relation between two artists.) Moreover – and this is already a case of **higher-level subject matter**: Are there (neoliberal) tendencies in our society that channel their way into a love relationship? This journey has yet to be explored for me as a director and my viewpoint may change. Maybe I will see the energy of the play differently as I go on. The real questioning begins when the production is under way. (Or perhaps some other director will begin a journey with *The Muse*.) To be exact, I know nothing before knowing which actors will play the roles. I can only do pre-planning. It is only when the actors do the first read-through in rehearsal that I come to grips with the actualities and the real potential of our performance. I foresee black comedy in the play, a harsh and refined comedy of situations, but what is the balance between the tragic situations and possible black comedy? The play moves on abruptly, full of turning points; the atmosphere must be incalculable, and sometimes rather harsh. I cannot begin to think of a performance without music and laughter. Maybe *The Muse* is a tragicomedy. At the moment, the nucleus scene for me appears to be when The Man tells the audience (or himself) that during sex with The Woman he feels real love, in spite of feeling that the woman doesn't explicitly signal any real love to him.

Intermezzo: about the actor

The director should keep in mind that the actor is the most important factor in the performance. Without actors there is no theatre. Through the work of actors, the performance gets its lifeline (or deadline…); through the actors the performance exists. Theatre is magic, producing something that has never existed before out of thin air. The actor is the magician in charge. Night after night. The director must appreciate and recognise the magic of acting, striving together with the actors to sharpen and amplify what they are producing. The director may also induce the magic to happen but the primal trick is executed by the actor. Designers create worlds around this magic for it to thrive.

Thinking of subject matter and thinking of form go hand in hand in the art of the theatre. They cannot be separated, as the form always holds content and vice versa, just as ying and yang are intertwined and constantly feed each other but remain separate entities with outlines to get a grip on. The form: the way of acting, the tension and the dramaturgy of the performance, the set, the lighting, audio, costumes, make-up, their way of being in the performance. Form depicts!

For *The Meal* I defined the atmosphere (the third question of Leppäkoskis) inter alia as follows: In the depths of this performance there is a double blade of laughter and cruelty. We had to sense when the comedic atmosphere was at hand, and when the action is supposed to chill and terrify the audience. (Atmosphere is also rhythm, variations in the original tension of the performance, things which the director must direct and pinpoint.) The sound design received special attention

in *The Meal* because the playwright had conceived the idea of huge hamburger-machine that produces shit (sometimes literally!) and trash food, exterminating living objects that get in its way. The pulse of the machine inspired the sound dramaturgy. The effects of the machine also raised an environmental viewpoint with melting icebergs on the video reflecting the ice melting in a coca-cola cup on stage. The video design supported the constantly renewed attack of the intensity of light and sound. The video screens used in hamburger restaurants were the starting point for using the screens as a physical part of the set design. The aggression **(The experience of social inequality is a bomb ready to explode)** was channelled by the way of acting: as has been said, the characters were sometimes in direct and harsh contact (verbally) with the audience, especially at the end. The audience portrayed the customers they hated, mainly the wealthy who enraged them. The machine of capitalism grinds down the relations of workers as well as other human relations.

The hamburger workers Koistinen (Juho Milonoff, on the left) and Meke (Niko Saarela) driving one of the customers out of the restaurant. KOM-teatteri, 2018. Photo: Patrik Pesonius.

The Meal - a case of nucleus moment

At the nucleus moment of *The Meal*, there is a scene called The Divination of Doomsday (scene 28). It appears in the second golden ratio of the performance. Meke is now a shift supervisor. He has nurtured, fed and washed a rat with hygienic liquid in the closet of the restaurant. Why? He could express his unrestricted love only for the rat. At the same time, the pet rat is a means of vengeance and a vehicle in a holy war. Meke aims to let the rat into the drainpipes, the sewers which connect us to each other. He says that the rat and its offspring are to judge us; they will come out of the drainpipes and eat the faces of our babies, so that after our doom we can be companions in misfortune and finally face each other as brothers and sisters. This scene is 'without coverings' in its distress and bravado, firsthand in the potential rage and then in the actual rage of Meke and his demand to be taken into account. It is a cry from the depths that we don't want to hear, which is exactly why it must be heard so strongly.

5. SUBJECT-MATTER THINKING – NUCLEUS SUBJECT MATTER AND HIGHER-LEVEL SUBJECT MATTER

The wording 'subject-matter thinking' is my own conception. This should not be confused with the devising type of working (where the subject matter once defined produces the material of the performance). Leppäkoski designed her Three Questions under the influence of Leseart, the way of analysing a text originated by Bertolt Brecht and further

developed by the dramaturges of the DDR. However, Leppäkoskis' model has no marxist view. One can see Sartre's existential thinking in her scheme, the focus on freedom with the ensuing responsibility through having made a free choice.

Subject-matter thinking in a nutshell: What is the essentiality of the play (or scene) and how does one make it visible (in the performance)? Subject-matter thinking is in constant dialogue with the thinking of form (ying and yang). Content doesn't exist in theatre if it is not made visible in a tangible theatrical way. If I depict (or strive to depict) the experience of social inequality, then we have to have the wallet, the situation where it is found, the definite relationship that exists between the characters and the wallet and its contents, the relationship with its owner and possibly with the audience, and the momentum required to clear one's way out of the daily restrictions of hamburger workers. I could go on but, through subject-matter thinking, the central tone for rehearsing this scene has a point. Right now, something important seems to take place on the stage, we must listen to it and seek for the most satisfying version of the scene. (Of course, it might happen that later some other scene demonstrates the point even better. Some other moment in the fabric of the performance happily tells it all. That is why we rehearse, with the aid of intuition and decisiveness.)

Now I want to discuss some of my own viewpoints concerning Leppäkoskis' scheme, which I have developed while working as a director (and as a teacher of directing). These consist of the way the subject matter can be seen dynamically, and the idea of splitting the subject-matter viewpoint into **nucleus subject matter** and **higher-level subject matter**.

While studying to be a director, I personally felt that condensing the subject matter into one word, for example 'betrayal', did not allow me to get a grip on the whole of the play, not in a way that would feed my work properly. It felt like a duty to make the definition, but it didn't lead to constructive deeds on stage. Something was missing. The subject matter felt like an abstraction that didn't seem to physisise in the rehearsals. It was more of an obstacle. Of course, this was also due to my inexperience, as crafting subject matter is developed by making theatre, watching performances and reflecting on them (or films) in relation to their subject matter.

In 2006, when I was teaching a course on directing at Metropolia (the university of applied sciences in Helsinki) just before becoming a lecturer at the Theatre Academy, I ruminated about the dynamics of the definition of subject matter while watching students direct scenes from August Strindberg's play *The Pelican*. It is a representation of the anatomy of pathological family dynamics, the centre being a narcissistic mother and her adult children, son and daughter. The scenes are filled with the urge to talk straight and for good, the play full of direct, desperate or blaming speeches. Could one think of subject matter in a more energetic and situation-based way? I don't remember my 'definition', but it had to do with letting go, the craving to talk of the traumatic feelings. I *felt* that this dynamic viewpoint, or *point of feeling*, had something important in it. The craving to burst out was more dynamic than for example 'angst/trauma'.

Intermezzo: the director as an artist

Emeritus professor Raila Leppäkoski specified some of her thoughts concerning The Three Questions and the artistic identity of a theatre director when I had the

privilege of having her comment on the first Finnish version of this essay. In her thinking, the triangle of The Three Questions is an entity in which all three are an indivisible unity in the making of a director as an artist. She affirms that a director always - in the end - depicts the reality of her or his mind, and this manifests itself in the fabric of the performance. There is no other option. This is not a point of autofiction – it might be in autofictive cases – but the focus is on the process of choosing what finally happens on the stage - and how – which is always channelled through the viewpoint of the reality of the director's mind.

What shows up on the stage is filtered by the director, by trusting her or his signature, a way of looking at theatre – and life. If they say that a good writer has a personal sentence, so has a good director: the original 'sentence' or voice that can be recognised as such.

How does the director choose and pinpoint things in the rehearsals? With intuition and decisiveness. You can't think about the subject matter in rehearsals, you react, and you react subconsciously, but after having been prepared. Before and after the run-throughs or rehearsals you plan, whereas in the rehearsals you react and make decisions.

Under - a case

I directed the Lars Norén play *Under* (1998, the original Swedish word 'under' of the title means 'under' but also 'miracle') in Teatteri Takomo, an independent group theatre in Helsinki, in 2002. There are three characters outside society: two alcoholics and a young drug user, all striving to survive and have the legitimacy to exist. The performance lasted more than two hours without a pause. Right at the beginning of the rehearsals, I recognised that the excellent actors were depicting my father's alcoholism, his personal sense of humour (plus his language, I also translated the play) and his resilience not to give in. For this reason, the play felt peculiarly close to me. In my planning work, I determined that the subject matter was 'loss'. Every character had lost something crucial and life-giving. On the stage they have each other, which is their last resort. (A kind of Beckettian place – to exist only on this bare and downstage-slanting stage.) I am not sure how much this observation of 'loss' affected my work. We just worked on the scenes, surprisingly fluently from the beginning. There are over 30 scenes, some short and some longer (*The Meal* and *Under* seem to me to be kindred performances). We worked on them just to make them feel good as situations, concentrating on what happens between the characters and trying to make scenes sound and look good with the designers. I realised that it was more important to focus on the characters than on 'loss', which was my nucleus subject matter, and that it was even more important to see what happens on the larger dramaturgical scale. The plot of the play is as follows: **The characters are little by little erased permanently from society.** First one man loses his shoe, which is a big loss for him, and he makes us see this. Gradually other things are lost. Even at the beginning of the play they crave for alcohol which they don't possess at the time. What happens at the end of the performance? Backstage we had a convex steel form like the back of a skating ramp. When the Neil Young piece *Rocking In The Free World* blasts out in the dark (this piece was part

of the opening tableau too), this skating ramp is reeled invisibly downstage. This is to be their terminal, a tiny piece of downstage under the ramp. The light gleams an instant, then it's night once more.

Luca (Tuomas Rinta-Panttila, on the left), Keer (Tommi Korpela) and Kol (Rauno Ahonen) at the end of their journey in *Under.* TEATTERI TAKOMO, 2002. Photo: Patrik Pesonius.

This observation of the meaning of the larger dramaturgical movement within the play *Under* later gave me the idea of the nucleus subject matter and the higher-level subject matter pair. Between these two levels there exists a *tension* that seems finally to contain the entirety of the subject matter of the performance. The same is true for Okko Leo's *The Meal*. At the level of the nucleus subject matter, there is the experience of social inequality lying deep in the soul of the characters, which manifests in their relations to themselves, each other and the audience. But at the higher level, there is the metaphor of a machine that dictates everything, controlling all that happens on the premises, a source of sound and videos, but also inserting its way into the relations between the characters. It's an all-encompassing capitalistic machine spurting out hamburgers on the assembly line, at the end without even a human hand being involved. (This was the final tableau of the performance too.) Without the recognition of the higher-level subject matter, the nucleus subject matter, or the whole picture, would have been a torso, and there would have been no focused contextual clue for the sound, video and lighting.

The nucleus subject matter is subjective and concerns the depth of the performance; the higher-level subject matter reveals the encompassing dramaturgical viewpoint. It is the tension between these two levels that produces the whole relation to the subject matter.

Subject-matter thinking is an asset that helps to focus on what is essential. It is not a rule or technical tool, but an organic part of the artistic work of a director, stemming from the director's world view.

The spectators see 'the result' from the performance, but in a sensual and physised way, without having to be conscious of the levels the director has used when planning and working. The spectator watches the performance and hopefully is influenced by it.

At the beginning, the planning phase, subject-matter thinking is at its most active. In the middle of the rehearsal phase it more or less steps aside and influences subliminally as well as helping to understand why the good things we find in rehearsals are important. (Of course, in a case of a problem, subject-matter thinking serves in searching for

a solution.) In the last phase it helps to analyse the content of the run-throughs.

In the run-through phase, the things that have been striven for suddenly appear! And it is not a case of definition, but of theatre.

6. THE ETHICAL GROUND

Theatre is a way of looking life and the world straight in the eyes. It is a way to expand the view of reality and bring forth things that are hidden or repressed in our time. For this reason, theatre is always a kind of political gesture as well. However, I do think that an artist should try to avoid preliminary moral or political judgements. The performance is an organic thing; it tells you what it has to tell, we just have to listen and lure the essentials forth. The truth of the performance is its own.

Every performance is a moral position and one sees in it only the things that it reveals. In rehearsals, the director watches the performance from the auditorium and tries to remain objective while at the same time working on the scenes from subjectively defined artistic and ethical grounds. (Subject-matter thinking helps to concentrate on the essentials, on what is meaningful, which helps to identify or think about the ethical ground of the performance in relation to our times.) When choosing to work on a play, the director has to think about fundamental questions.

One doesn't need a ready-made moral code to start doing theatre but one must have an intuitive hint of the ethical grounds of the performance. I always question myself about the inner ethical meaning of what we are about to do and I try to formulate it better as we move ahead.

7. CONCLUSION

The theatre director is a specialist in the theatrical performance as a whole.

If in other modes of theatrical practice the specialist is not a director but, for example, a group with shared responsibility, I still think that there should be some carefully defined collective practice concerned with the whole. Even in this case, I believe that subject-matter thinking serves well. However, because a theatre director still exists who is willing to take overall responsibility for the performance, this also means that she or he benefits from artistic freedom in exchange. This freedom is deserved through responsible and dedicated work and is based on (subjective) engagement. I strongly believe in the art and craft of the theatre director, as I also believe in the art and craft of the playwright. Both of these professionals do their work before the rehearsals, and the director all the way through them, thus saving time for the group to concentrate on their own fields. The theatre director's work has intrinsic value of its own. The subject-matter thinking of a director is an independent artistic contribution, like the contributions of designers and actors. Every performance is in the end a product of collective work, but it is the director who must make the final decisions, because she or he has the preparation to do so.

If the profession of a theatre director didn't exist, somebody should create the craft and carry it out.

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IS THIS AN EMPTY PAGE?

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LOOKING AROUND

Community.
Culture.
Collaboration.

With the breakdown of many cultural metanarratives, how can a director select images that will communicate and have resonance?

Can theatre ever be non-participatory?

Can a theatre director be a catalyst for social change?

Has the idea of the master theatre director been really overthrown?

Are all artists taking part in the process empowered?

How can theatre be a space for democracy?

Is local context crucial for the creative process and the reception?

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As the holder of the "Herder Stipendium", she studied theatre science at the Fakultät für Sozial und Humanwissenschaften at the University of Vienna (2001-2002). Anja Suša was CEO and Artistic Director of the Little Theatre "Dusko Radović" in Belgrade (2002-2011) and Curator of the main selection for the Belgrade International Theatre Festival (BITEF) (2006-2016). She has directed around 50 performances in theatres in Serbia, Croatia, Slovenia, Denmark, Poland, and Sweden and written numerous articles and columns on the theatre for various publications in Serbia and internationally: ("Ludus", "Teatron", "Gest", "TKH", "Politika", and "Annual for Contemporary History"). She has been a member of the Editorial Board of the theatre magazine "Teatron" (2002-2010), a member of the European Cultural Parliament (2002-2006), and received many awards for her artistic work, primarily in theatre for children and young audiences.

DIRECTING *COMMUNITAS* Between Duty and 'Duty Free Art'*

* The notion of Duty Free Art is borrowed from the book *Duty Free Art - Art in the age of Planetary Civil War* by Hito Steyerl.

Anja Suša

1. INTRODUCTION

This essay is motivated by my experience as a theatre director but also as a curator who has often worked in different cultural contexts addressing different cultural codifications and norms and collective experiences, at the same time trying to understand them whilst translating them into performative strategies applicable and understandable to local communities of spectators.

Starting from the idea that theatre, ephemeral as it is, always reconstitutes itself with every new encounter between the performers and spectators under seemingly similar and yet always not quite determinable circumstances (even when the performance repeats itself over and over), I would like to explore the ideas related to the flexibility of cultural transitions between the performers on stage and those in the audience, who together (re)create the complex notion of Communitas.

I am inspired to explore what Jacques Rancierre defines as 'dissensual community' (Rancierre, *Emancipated Spectator*, p. 59) or the community which has a dual body that can be best described as the relationship between 'apart' and 'together' which is also a paradoxical relation between the present and the future, but also between art and the art-market.

I will try to observe more closely the somewhat confusing role of a contemporary theatre director who is often torn apart between filling in the gaps in the process of commodification of artistic labour and being an agent of possible emancipation within social and artistic paradigms.

2. JE PARTICIPE, TU PARTICIPES, IL PARTICIPE...[1]

Let me begin with what I trust should be a rhetorical question: "Is there a theatre which is not participatory? Is there really a theatre which is unaware of its audience - at least or foremost economically speaking?"

I truly believe that theatre doesn't exist at all without participation of some kind, regardless of how involuntary or unconscious it may be and regardless of whether we are talking about political, socially engaged theatre or just some box-office-driven entertainment. I also believe that there is always a director on both sides of the infamous 'fourth wall' (which has never been entirely demolished), hoping that the performance would reach out and meet someone - even if there is just that 'one person' who really understands. There are enough theatre directors who, at least secretly while claiming it impossible, still wish to make an impact on the world by addressing it from their frail and provisional stage universes. There is something melancholic about theatre directors. They are the least needed members of the community around the performance at the opening night, sitting in their dark corners dreaming about the next morning while never wanting the night to end. Listening to each and every breath, cough, or laughter occasionally followed by a yawn. When I was younger, I used to tell myself that the world wasn't going to collapse because I didn't make it with that particular show - but I never really believed that - because it always did collapse in a way - even if I was the only casualty.

I will now dedicate a few words to examining the particularity of the position of a theatre director in relation to the notions of participation and community at large.

1 Part of the famous slogan 'To be free in 1968 is to participate' which emerged during the 1968 Paris May student riots - see more in the book *Artificial Hells* by Claire Bishop, p. 83.

To begin with, the singular position of theatre director was officially established as late as the end of the nineteenth century, whereas it was really the twentieth century that actually gave birth to the theatre director as author in the modernistic context, so vibrant with different movements, 'isms' and provocations as well as with the megalomaniac search for novelty (novum) and surprises. It also gave birth to various toolboxes that have been, up to this day, considered the required skills of an educated theatre director. They have been systematically taught to theatre directing students for more than a century and are still widely considered to be the fundamental principles of the craft of theatre directing. So, in the several thousand-year-long history of theatre, the theatre director was finally given a century-long acceptance that has nevertheless always remained wobbly, unstable and prone to being questioned and criticised regarding too much power and authority vested in one person in the collective process of performance making. This argument has its roots in the early days of the theatre director's emancipation, embodied in the powerful theatre figures of the early twentieth century and a certain, sometimes dictatorial, rule of conduct characterising the working methodology of some of the 'masters' of theatre direction at that time, together with the general idea that directing certainly wasn't a female profession. This is one of the examples showing how the social norms and standards of a patriarchal society shaped the position of theatre director in the first half of the twentieth century. This period was largely dominated by patriarchal theatre codification with no female directors in the picture - except for modern dance, which epitomised femininity and was dominated by women, but we will put that aside for now. We are talking about the iconic male theatre directors of the early twentieth century, who have been canonised as important artistic, social and political figures, directors such as: Stanislavski, Brecht, Piscator, Max Reinhardt, Artaud, etc. As fast-changing major political and ideological landscapes and turbulences with a lot of dramatic potential were heavily represented in the twentieth century, the context inspired completely opposed theatre paradigms which came into being and continued to exist simultaneously, representing the variety of ideological and artistic standpoints. With that in mind, it is understandable how the 'fourth-wall' paradigm of the bourgeois repertory theatre with its well-rehearsed social ritual between performers and spectators, which had become predominant in repertory theatre at the end of the nineteenth century, was almost immediately challenged by the notion of a theatre stage situated outside the traditional theatre building. This happened as early as Evreinov's re-enactment of *The Storming of the Winter Palace* in 1920, which introduced theatre of the masses for the masses by staging the "staging of Revolution"[2]. At the same time, repertory theatres in the biggest part of the world - Europe in particular - were still largely playing in the comfort and safety of their closed theatre houses in front of a chosen auditorium divided from the stage by the 'fourth wall' that provided all the participants in a theatre event with the possibility of sustaining their well-rehearsed positions i.e., those who perform and those who watch. But was the fourth wall really a demarcation line or rather the signifier of a different social consensus, not the direct explosion of theatre into society but rather one that produced the implosion of society through theatre? This implosion or slow-burn has never been extinguished, even after the expansion of various immersive theatre endeavours such as those of the Dada (Dada's Grand Saison from 1920-21)[3] or Russian avant-garde, Surrealist attempts to engage the citizens of Paris through participatory

2 See *Artificial Hells* by Claire Bishop, p. 60.

3 See Claire Bishop. *Artificial Hells*, p. 66-67.

walking tours, followed by the 1960s *happenings* of Allan Kaprow, the *Anthropological Theatre* of Richard Schechner or Eugenio Barba, *The Invisible Theatre* by Augusto Boal, or more recently the site-specific and immersive theatre of Rimini Protokoll, Gob Squad, Chto Delat, or Milo Rau. Paradoxically, the paradigm of the 'fourth wall' which up to this day has been predominant in repertory theatres worldwide, was never really accepted by some of the influential and canonised directing figures of the very beginning of the twentieth century such as Brecht, Artaud, Piscator or Meyerhold[4] who, in his work proposed a very close and not fully determinable exchange between the performers and the audience. It is perhaps more interesting to approach the issue of the 'fourth wall' as a tool of class division represented through theatre rather than just as a mandatory spatial representation of repertory bourgeois theatre at the beginning of the twentieth century, which gave birth to theatre directing as a profession. The 'fourth wall' enhanced the passive position of the spectators, providing them with a sense of safety and assigning them the comfortable role of observers instead of the risky role of participants. In a way, it embodied the everlasting dichotomy between repertory subsidised theatre and out-of-theatre experiments, and enhanced the tension within the theatre as well as between theatre makers as carriers of state-run culture or independent agents of political and social awareness.

The twentieth century taught us that, regardless of the location of the stage or the size of the audience, it is possible for theatre not only to ritualise a community but also conceptualise the ritual.

The drive to affect the world, to plunge into different realities together with others, to connect, to coexist, is as old as the ritual origins of theatre. So, observing the community through the kaleidoscopic lenses of the twentieth-century theatre director, one may conclude that the basic drive of theatre was to affect society, to shake it, to make it not only watch but act in the ideologically fragmented world where theatre was still expected to be a catalyst of social change. It is, therefore, very interesting to reflect on this from today's post-ideological (or, as Hito Steyerl would put it, post-democratic) perspective: what is really left of the idea that theatre can change the world? Paradoxically, there have never been more attempts in theatre to exercise the principles of Western representative democracy and its legacy than nowadays, there have never been more performances taking into account topics such as diversity, human rights, ecology - pretty much everything that needs to be problematised - yet theatre and theatre directors in particular seem to be paralysed in an attempt to be critical without being too critical, and to be acknowledged but not consumed by the art market which commodifies criticism and rebellion. Theatre has definitely lost its twentieth-century edge and the sense of some ideological clarity it was driven by, which has been replaced with post-ideological dizziness. The audiences are getting older and older with little rejuvenation[5]. New forms of economic censorship have replaced traditional political censorship and the act of performing has moved from traditional stages to all spheres of life, from social networks to everyday jobs where, as Jon McKenzie suggests in *Perform or Else*, performing the work has become, in a way, more important than the work itself. For McKenzie, performance today has been transformed into an onto-historical category that marks contemporary capitalist society, which fundamentally questions the liminal and transformative social potential of the cultural-artistic performance, including its political effectiveness in a narrower sense.

4 In order to deal with a stage direction requiring a crowd, Meyerhold suggested involving the audience itself, which he presented as an educational mission, a way of training the populace to be actors. Even more successful than *The Dawn* was Meyerhold's collaboration with Vladimir Mayakovsky, *Mystery-Bouffe*, first performed in 1918 and rewritten in 1921 to increase its relevance to events after the Revolution. The play concerns a universal flood and the subsequent joyful triumph of the 'unclean' (the proletariat) over the 'clean' (the bourgeoisie) and combined folk drama and avant-garde experimentation in the service of a revolutionary message. Once again, Meyerhold dismantled the proscenium to reveal the scenery mechanisms; the stage was taken up by platforms on different levels, interconnected by steps, and a big ramp sloped down to the first row of seats. Throughout the performance, the audience were allowed to come and go as they liked, and to respond to the acting with interjections; in the last act, the performance spread into boxes in the auditorium and the audience were invited to mingle with actors on stage. From Claire Bishop. *Artificial Hells*, p. 53.

5 For a thorough analysis of the audience in contemporary theatre, see: *Resetting the Stage*, by Dragan Klaić.

So, with almost everyone becoming a performing expert in contemporary Western societies, and with the theatre stage being replaced by a variety of stages - what is left for today's theatre directors? How can a theatre director address a community when it is so hard to locate it?

3. NOUS PARTICIPONS, VOUS PARTICIPEZ...

What is required is a theatre without spectators, where those in attendance learn from, as opposed to being seduced by, images; where they become active participants as opposed to passive voyeurs.

Jacques Rancierre[6]

I would like now to move my focus from the traditional perception of a theatre director as a theatre maker to the contemporary idea of a theatre director who is more of a facilitator or a moderator in the collective process of theatre making. Contemporary theatre has recently become quite preoccupied with spectatorship politics, which has increased the level of interest of the new generation of theatre directors in their audience and the possible modalities of relating to it. There have been numerous examples of involving the audience on a smaller or larger scale. Most of them, however, remind me of some sort of flirtatious and fashionable attempt to be in tune with the *Zeitgeist*, because the audience is too often approached without any expectation of its being really responsive - it is rather addressed as what is defined by Rancierre as a 'monolithic group'. Rancierre is very critical of this approach, advocating instead that the audience should be perceived as a group of individuals which has to be addressed for who they are.[7]

Being a spectator for him is "not some passive condition that we should transform into activity. We also learn and teach, act and know, as spectators who all the time link what we see to what we have seen and said, done and dreamed".[8] Therefore, I would like to dedicate some attention to two examples of participatory theatre that I found very significant for myself as a spectator as well as a theatre director, bringing both experiences together while bringing me closer to rethinking the notion of the participatory in relation to the community at large.

Case No 1: On Trial - Together

Given the subject of this text, it would be impossible not to mention the performance that not only embodied the relation/tension between theatre and community - it staged it.

It is a performance, or rather a durational performing project that was ongoing between 2011-2016, permanently constituting itself over and over again for each and every new community it was presented to and with.[9]

I am referring to the performing project *Examining Communitas* created by Ana Vujanović and Saša Asentić, Serbian born and German based artists and artistic researchers in the field of performing arts and dance.

In their own words, the authors started the project with the idea of trying to understand their "recent social history and its actual state of affairs in terms of body images, behaviour in public, and relations between human being and social subjects".[10]

6 Rancierre, Jacques. *Emancipated Spectator*, p. 4.

7 See Rancierre, Jacques. *Emancipated Spectator*.

8 Ibid.

9 The project was presented in several international theatre contexts, in Germany, Slovenia, Serbia etc., which means it was tested in various socio-political contexts, receiving, according to Ana Vujanović, completely different responses - so the context of the performance as well as its dynamics always remained unpredictable.

10 Vita Performactiva, Web site of Ana Vujanovic, http://www.anavujanovic.net/2012/10/examining-communitas-20112012/

Examining Communitas was:
predicated on social, live action, and role-playing games and simulations, open for audience to take part in through the mediation of five moderators. Content-wise, the departure point was always grounded within a few fictional situations that referred to burning socio-political issues in a certain context, which were drafted prior to encountering the spectators who were then given a chance to transform the initial situation through the process of playing, at the same time narrating the stories of a possible social organization and relations.[11]

11 Ibid.

The performance was divided into several sections or 'sub-performances' and the spectators were allowed to pick their own group based on the dark and humorous introductory speech given by the authors, which was then followed by three narrative and game-based segments:

1. *Up and Down, Then Up and Again Down of the Worker's Self-Management* which examined class solidarity starting with the case of *Jugoremedija*, the last factory self-managed by workers in today's capitalist Serbia, employing a live-action role-playing (LARP) game, wherein the participants acted out their characters, collaborating with the others or acting against them.

2. The second segment entitled *The Others* was inspired by R.W. Fassbinder's play *Katzelmacher* and was performed through the BaFa BaFa simulation - dividing the participants into two groups which then constructed socio-cultural identities, and at the same time, through observing and interacting with one another, tried to understand and interpret the other group.

3. *Collective Intelligence Test* was a re-enactment of a political speech, which, in the group that I was part of during the performance in the frame of BITEF (Belgrade International Theatre Festival), was the speech of then Prime Minister and today's President of Serbia, Aleksandar Vučić, given in the context of the devastating floods that had hit most parts of Serbia a couple of months earlier. In his original speech, Vučić promised the inhabitants of the flooded areas that he would revisit them every 15 days but had never returned. Similarly, our moderator, dressed as a cook working in an empty kitchen, after giving an introduction on how to make bread supported by erratic motivational speeches consisting of extreme nationalist quotations from the official Serbian political rhetorical arsenal, said she needed to leave, but promised to keep returning and checking on us every 15 minutes - also never to return. That left us in the position of having to decide whether to continue with the show, and if so - how. In fact, the show did continue in a very exciting and quite unexpected way. After consulting with each other about what the next move should be, we decided to break out from the provisional walls of our space and see what was happening behind other walls of the compartmentalised space. While knowing that we were merely playing a social game orchestrated by the authors of the performance, we suddenly became strangely aggressive towards the participants in other groups, stealing flour and food from them in order to fill 'our' empty kitchen. We didn't really care about solidarity with the others, and the notion of 'us' (meaning the 'us' from the group) was suddenly more powerful than the notion of our individual ethical principles or any relation to the others from other groups. We became totally occupied with getting as much as possible from the others leaving them confused and utterly submissive to our aggression. We were still able to perceive this as politically incorrect but decided to push

ahead in order to see if we could be stopped. Even though it was a very funny and enjoyable experience, because it was completely opposite to our real set of values, we carried on with it like children playing a forbidden game against the basic ethical and democratic standards of society as well as our own. We felt free from any responsibility knowing it was just a theatre play. However, when the performance came to an inevitable end because our group had stolen all the resources from all the others, it became painfully clear that the ending we faced (by creating it) was, in fact, a very accurate image of Serbian society at the time - having no moral compass, with authoritarian rhetoric, a lack of civil empathy, strong individualism and no sense of community. I believe that if you simply removed the toponym of Serbia, pretty much the same could be said for most Western societies, even though the authors claimed that they had never experienced such a direct and uncensored response from any other previous audience they had met. It may possibly have had something to do with the fact that most of us were theatre people (given the fact that it was an international festival) and therefore used to provocations, easily embracing the challenge of participation, or possibly it was associated with our own political turbulent reality of Serbia over the previous 25 years which had left us utterly disillusioned by the many failed attempts to establish a human, civil society and get rid of the political oligarchy that had been running our lives for too long. In comparison, audiences in Berlin or New York were not burdened by the same experience and were therefore less responsive and far less revolutionary than the audience in Belgrade. We actually completely proved the authors' starting point when they said that *Examining Communitas* should function "as a kind of a deep play: a theatrical story we tell ourselves about ourselves, and a choreographic spectacle we create for no one's eyes".[12] The authors also expressed concern about the possibility of rethinking and reaffirming the collectivism within the neoliberal capitalist society that promotes individualism in every aspect of life - including art. After attending the Belgrade version of *Communitas*, one may conclude that there was no basis for their concern. Still, the question remains as to what kind of collectivism was reaffirmed by this performance, given the tendency of contemporary society to be constantly torn apart between individualism on the one hand and on the other some kind of populistic pseudo-collectivism such as that which was completely revealed during the Belgrade version of this performance. So, there is a definite need to rethink collectivism, but reaffirming it always comes with a certain risk that theatre should be mindful of. The reason *Communitas* succeeded in both lies in the concept that delegated responsibility for the performance to all its agents, thus turning the performance into a mirror image of the society and everybody's property. In other words, the performance was as good and as interesting as the society it was performed in, and the artists who created it should be the last to shoulder the blame.

12 Ibid.

Case No. 2: The Apathy of Being Together while Apart

The next performance I would like to reflect upon in relation to the topic under discussion is my own performance *Apati*, which opened in 2017 at the Teater Republique in Copenhagen.[13]

My dramaturge Tom Silkeberg and I started from the 1973 play *Request Concert* (*Wunsch Konzert*) by the German playwright Franz Xaver Kroetz. After being almost forgotten,

13 visit anjasusa.com for more information about the performance.

the play was suddenly rediscovered some years ago and staged in many theatres across Europe over a relatively short period of time. This play was written in the revolutionary spirit of the post-1968 disappointment and on the wave of intellectual and left-wing criticism of German capitalism that was responsible for social alienation at the time. As Kroetz explains, the play came out of his convictions as the passionate communist he was in the 1970s, which inspired him to describe the everyday life of exploited German workers such as the main character (Fraulein Rasch, which means 'rapid' or 'swift' in German, an employee at a stationery factory). This play was also unique at the time it was written, as it consists only of stage directions with no lines spoken by a performer, apart from a voice on the radio accompanying Fraulein Rasch in her meaningless daily routines after she has returned from work, such as cooking, smoking, washing dishes, using the toilet, while continuously listening to the popular radio broadcast *Request Concert* vaguely inspired by the imaginary *Wunschkonzert für die Wermacht* from a 1930s German propaganda film. The radio show satisfies the music wishes of listeners and, according to the original set up of the play, is the only sound that is heard. Through the very thorough description of physical actions on stage, the play describes one day in Fraulein Rasch's life. Her days are filled with meaningless tasks that Kroetz sees as reducing people to silence and obedience in the totalitarian and alienating capitalist society he was criticising. For him, people such as Fraulein Rasch are 'like animals', crushed by an emptiness they barely understand. After following the seemingly endless daily routines of a person with no dramatic potential in a story-line with no dramatic prospective, we are caught by surprise when she suddenly decides to commit suicide by swallowing sleeping pills, which Kroetz explains as being a polite gesture of 'small people' who involuntarily clean the society they condemn and by doing so quietly undermine or subvert the inhuman order in which we live.

APATI. Based on the play *The Request Concert* by Franz Xaver Kroetz. Teater Republique, Copenhagen, Denmark. Photo © Per Morten Abrahamsen, 2017.

We used the Kroetz text with the intention of making an immersive theatre experience tailor-made for the particular context of Copenhagen at the time. The project was a part of *The Seven Deadly Sins* large-scale project carried out by Teater Republique, and we decided to focus our attention on the 'sin of melancholy', one of the deadly sins listed in the Medieval period but deleted much later. We were interested in the melancholy that produces apathy in contemporary Western society, so the performance was soon renamed *Apati*. Considering the idea of a radio broadcast

that could be a re-conceptualised version of the *Request Concert*, we came up with the idea of making a three-channel audio installation accompanied by the live performance of one actress. The first channel presented a collection of interviews with citizens of Copenhagen who were asked to say what worried them most and were then invited to order their favourite song. The second channel was a collection of testimonies by immigrants in Denmark who were asked to describe an ordinary day in the country they came from. The third channel was a radio-play version of the original Kroetz play, produced in the fashion of the 'old-school' radio theatre. It is important to mention that the songs were performed by the provisional choir of Trampoline House - a non-profit refugee centre in Copenhagen which had a voluntary choir led by two wonderful young Danish activists. The choir was designed to bring people together through singing their favourite tunes. It had no fixed structure or hierarchy - and no stable membership. Each Wednesday choir session, which our entire team used to visit regularly, usually consisted of an entirely different choir (with us as fellow choir members) performing songs such as those by Eddie Vedder, Pink Floyd, Radiohead, etc. ordered by the Danish citizens interviewed.

The spectators were given headphones with a choice of three different channels to watch the staged part of the performance with the actress Xenia Nötzelmann. She was silently performing her mise en scène to the audio recording of another actress Marie-Louise Wille, which already at that level introduced alienation between the performer's body and voice. The spectators were invited to watch the stage performance accompanied by the channel of their choosing and were allowed to switch between channels throughout the performance. This resulted in everybody in the audience creating their own personalised version of the performance. The freedom to choose only one channel at a time was additionally burdened by the impossibility of going back to what was lost on the other channels - or, in other words, to have to live with the consequences of a choice once made. This was our way to enhance the paradox of the situation we created, a situation completely opposite to the idea of a community constituted around the same performance. In this case, instead of experiencing liminality together through a shared experience, as happens with every Communitas gathered around a performance, in the case of *Apati* that was impossible; there was no togetherness or shared experience since every spectator's experience was completely individualised by the meter of random choice.

APATI. Audience. Teater Republique, Copenhagen, Denmark.
Photo © Per Morten Abrahamsen, 2017.

If we consider the thesis of Jacques Rancierre that "the separation is the Alpha and Omega of the spectacle and the good theatre is one that uses its separated reality in order to abolish it"[14] we can think of this performance as a useful contribution to examining the idea of emancipated spectatorship. It is worth mentioning that there was at least one person at each performance who would refuse to use the headphones and watched the performance in silence.

Apati was our attempt to investigate the possibility of establishing a community not through the shared, but regardless of the fragmented experience of being together while being alone, exactly as in our society.

14 See Jacques Rancierre. *Emancipated Spectator.*

4. ILS PROFITENT...

I would like to take a moment to contemplate briefly the position of a contemporary theatre director in relation to contemporary society at large. The director lives in what Hito Steyerl describes as a post-democratic society[15], by which she means the kind of society which has lost the fundamental principles of democracy - representation - by transferring the role of representational democracy to a (non)representational economy. This has brought about an enormous shift in the ideological values of contemporary society, so that one cannot help but wonder about the position of art and artists in such a context.

In her famous book *Duty Free Art - Art in the Age of Planetary Civil War*, Steyerl has widely discussed the way in which art markets have corrupted art by co-opting and commodifying most of the traditionally democratic and civil values of representational democracy, thus creating art which can be regarded as a contemporary currency - similar to that of bitcoin:

15 Hito Steyerl. *Duty Free Art*, p. 307.

> *Rather than money issued by a nation and administrated by central banks, art is a networked, decentralized, widespread system of value. It gains stability because it calibrates credit or disgrace across competing institutions or cliques. There are markets, collectors, museums, publications, and the academy asynchronously registering (or mostly failing to do so) exhibitions, scandals, likes, and prices. As with cryptocurrencies, there is no central institution to guarantee value; instead there is a jumble of sponsors, censors, bloggers, developers, producers, hipsters, handlers, patrons, privateers, collectors, and way more confusing characters. Value arises from gossip-cum-spin and insider information. Fraudsters and con artists mix helter-skelter with pontificating professors, anxious gallerists, and couch-surfing students.*[16]

16 Ibid, p. 325.

In spite of this gloomy and quite dystopian idea of contemporary art as a quantifiable (non)value, Steyerl isn't really quite so pessimistic because she still sees the art space with its complex encryption potential as a place for possible mobilisation of the community by creating some kind of exchange:

> *Art is encryption as such, regardless of the existence of a message with a multitude of conflicting and often useless keys. Its reputational economy is randomly quantified, ranked by bullshit algorithms that convert artists and academics into ranked positions, but it also includes more traditionally clannish social hierarchies.*[17]

17 Ibid, p. 327.

She further proposes that art be understood not through a finalised product, but rather as a means of social exchange: “the value is not in the product but in the network; not in gaming or predicting the market but in creating exchange. Most importantly, art is one of the few exchanges that derivative fascists don’t control–yet”.So, what orientation can a contemporary director take in this seemingly impossible equation between surviving in neoliberal ‘networks’ while at the same time trying to string new ones and mobilise them in a purposeful way that can, to paraphrase Rancierre, put “bodies in motion in front of living bodies that are to be mobilised”?[18]

I believe this to be a lifelong question for many artists living in today’s world, particularly theatre artists, because of the inherent and inevitably direct relation between theatre and daily life that other arts can sometimes find a way to surpass. Theatre happens in the moment, in the present, in the shared space within a community, and its ephemeral existence often doesn’t live up to late recognition as is the case in literature or visual arts. Theatre remains: “the only place where the audience confronts itself as a collective”.[19] How does a theatre director succeed in becoming an emancipator of that collective, rather than being yet another skilful middleman achieving momentary pleasure within the status quo of a capitalist art market? Making theatre today often reminds me of walking through a minefield, where every step can produce an explosion with collateral damage of losing the sense of self or even worse of losing the sense of self within the community, and therefore the sense of purpose.

And yet, I know I have to keep walking...

18 See Jacques Rancierre. *Emancipated Spectator.*

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Rodolfo García Vázquez (1962) is one of the founders of the SP Escola de Teatro (Brazil), where he is the coordinator of the Directing Department. As founder of the Os Satyros Theatre Company, he has directed 140 theatre productions, and received several national and international awards. In 2014, he began studying for a PhD at the Universidade de São Paulo, focusing his research on augmented theatre and the impact of new technologies on the development of theatre in the 21st century. Among his main works as director are *Philosophy in the Boudoir* (adapted from the Marquis de Sade, 1990), *A Vida na Praça Roosevelt* (Dea Loher, 2005), *Roberto Zucco* (Bernard-Marie Koltès, 2009), *Pessoas Perfeitas* (Ivam Cabral and Rodolfo García Vázquez, 2014) and *The Art of Facing Fear* (Ivam Cabral and Rodolfo García Vázquez, 2020), a live digital production involving actresses and actors from 12 countries. He directed the feature films *Hypothesis for Love and Truth* (2015) and *Philosophy in the Boudoir* (2017).

THE DECOLONIAL DIRECTING APPROACH

Rodolfo García Vázquez

The year was 2018 and the play *Cabaret Transperipatetico*. They were eight transgender artists with diverse identities: three transgender men, two transgender women, one agender, one intersex, one genderfluid actor and one travesti[1]. Some of them had never had any theatrical experience or training before and at least one had worked with prostitution. Others had long careers in theatre, as actors, producers and playwrights. For the first time in my 30-year-old career, I was directing a production with a full-transgender cast.

I have always searched to work in different environments. Bursting the theatrical bubble is a principle for our company. The actor Ivam Cabral and I founded Os Satyros in 1989. From the beginning, besides working in our small venue in downtown São Paulo, we have performed in big theatres and international festivals, as well as in favelas or community venues, with skilled and trained artists or amateurs from under-represented groups (transgenders, prostitutes, drug dealers, ex-prisoners, adolescents from favelas, refugees, etc.). In each environment, I could learn different things about life and theatre. However, this would be my very first time with a full team of trans activist actors. There was a high risk involved, as I was a cisgender director leading a full-transgender cast. Despite my long experience with the trans community, I was a foreigner trying to learn and make the trans community visible to the public debate in our country.

It was an ordinary rehearsal evening. We were improvising the first scene of a devised work, a choreography with the soundtrack from Antony and the Johnsons[2]. The choreography was ready, and the actors knew exactly how they should perform it. However, I missed some conflict in the dramaturgical structure and wished to add other dramaturgical layers to it. Then I asked them to restart the scene from the beginning. I had an idea that I would like to try out. I asked them to perform the choreography from the beginning, and eventually I would add a new sound layer to the scene, and they would continue performing it. At the end, we could discuss my idea and how they felt about it.

We restarted the scene. They were dancing the melodic song from Antony's band and everything went very well. In the middle of it, I added a soundtrack with public statements using the actual voices of Brazilian transphobic politicians and religious leaders. My original idea was to contrast the beauty of the movements against the violence and inhumanity of the intolerant conservative leaders. I found it powerful and touching. It showed the absurdity of these leaders' hate speeches. How could a Christian be so anti-Christian? – this would be my question to the audience at the end of the scene.

Unfortunately, it didn't have the expected effect. All the actors suddenly stopped dancing in shock and some started crying. They were devastated. The situation of the trans community in Brazil is extremely fragile and the country is the shameful leader of transsexual killings per year in the world. Listening to those transphobic voices felt like an aggression to them, something they hardly could cope with in everyday life. I tried to make my statement and persuade them of my concept. However, they were absolutely convinced they didn't want to give any voice to their oppressors in a show in which their bodies were supposed to be vulnerable on stage. I was frustrated and insisted a little more. They refused to continue performing. Some said they would rather leave the production if I insisted on the idea.

I was the director as well as the producer of the play, which means the power and money to set the conflict was

1 According to the glossary of terms from https://rainbow-center.uconn.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/2262/2019/01/LGBTQIA-Dictionary-FINAL-Spring-18.pdf, the vocable 'trans' refers to "an umbrella term to describe people whose gender identity and/or gender expression differs from what is typically associated with the sex they were assigned at birth", 'agender' refers to a "person who identifies as not having a gender", 'genderfluid' refers to "someone who experiences gender in different ways at different times", 'intersex' refers to "a person whose combination of primary and secondary sex characteristics, hormones and chromosomes differs from one of the binary expectations". The term 'travesti' is used by many trans-activists in Brazil to refer to a trans person who "not necessarily can go through a gender reassignment surgery, as they are not uncomfortable about their genital organs" (https://thepride.com.br/trans-genero-transexual-travesti).

2 The soundtrack of the play was fully based on trans musicians and singers. Antony Hegarthy, the founder of the band Antony and the Johnsons, and considered to be "one of pop's most distinctive singers, possessor of a voluptuous, baroque voice that blurs boundaries between male and female" (https://www.ft.com/content/93c586c4-178e-11e6-b197-a4af20d5575e). After her gender transition process, she became the trans activist singer Anohni.

in the hands of a cisgender person, as it has always been throughout theatre history. As the Brazilian trans activists say, the situation could be seen as "a opressão cistêmica" ("the 'cistemic' oppression"). I, a cisgender man, had to take a stand concerning the alternatives to the imbroglio. I could give up my 'genius' idea pretending nothing had happened. I could also accept their leaving the project and bring in new cast members. I could also try to establish a dialogue and learn from the situation in order to overcome it and find a new solution to the scene.

In that critical moment in the project, I remembered the beginning of my career, in which I had seen the most distinguished among the Brazilian theatre directors recognised as the absolute masters and owners of the theatrical truth of their performances. They were the 'genius' to be praised and never contradicted by their followers/actors. It was very difficult for my younger self to believe in this mythology and since then I have constantly fought against it. I have always been more open to listening to all the artists and sharing common ground with everyone in the project. Since the foundation of Os Satyros, one of our main assumptions has been to de-alienate the artists involved in any project, empower them and lever their creativity and art. Hence, I was definitely not inclined to give up this path after following these principles throughout the long journey of my career.

When we decided to produce *Cabaret Transperipatético* with a full transgender cast, our goal was exactly to bring visibility to all the violence and challenges faced by the trans community and empower their points of view (which are not monolithic and have many nuances). It would have been a brutal contradiction to ignore their voices in the creative process, call on other performers who agreed with my idea and pretend the conflict had never happened. The imposition of a cisgender male director's opinion on transgender artists who were bringing their bodies, creativity, dedication and personal testimonies to the project would be an oppressive attitude, replicating models of oppression present in the White Western Cisheteronormative Colonialist Patriarchy that we were supposed to be criticising.

In the end, the show was performed by the original cast and the performers danced the choreography to the song of Antony and the Johnsons. The voices of the transphobic politicians and religious leaders were not included. I had accepted the wishes of the other creative voices in the project and built up a new understanding of my political stand and the responsibility I had in that case. The devising process happened with the full respect of all members involved in it. The director was still responsible for the play's outcome but with a different approach, taking into account the questions of representativeness brought by the empowered artists. I was the leader of a creative team with a common ground and different expectations and standpoints. I, as a cis director working with a trans ensemble, had to regulate the delicate balance of the performance. The cisgender audience would have the opportunity to learn about how their own cisgender condition was a construct. The trans audiences related themselves to the performance and felt the strong power that would enhance their social visibility. I learned about my own cis privileges and how bound I was in understanding their trans complex reality. During the process, I was taught about myself, about my cisgender condition. What I had always believed to be natural in me was, in fact, a social construct in my body.

1. MODERN DIRECTING

The Enlightenment ideals of science, freedom, reason, democracy and egalitarianism brought by the ascension of the bourgeoisie have been shaping Western culture since the French Revolution. The basic principles of the modern European theatre were drawn on these epistemological principles. Directors became the centre of the theatrical event, being responsible for the whole organisation of the theatrical elements. They were taken as demiurges, the holy artisans who shaped the Universe on stage.

During the second half of the twentieth century, with the inclusion of new participants/agents/consumers in the capitalist system as well as in the cultural dynamics, new social movements stepped into the public debate, bringing their voices with them. Modernity's contradictions became more evident. It was no longer the quintessence of humanism. It had been built upon the silence of many oppressed groups who were explored by its structures in the process that Modernity had once called 'human freedom'. Decolonial writers such as Anibal Quijano and Walter Mignolo would describe Modernity as a European narrative about freedom and egalitarianism that hides a dark side, its oppressive coloniality.

In recent years, the identitarian movements and culture wars turned the cultural debate into a space of perpetual conflict in which oppression could be observed in uncountable social instances. The oppressive pillars of Western Patriarchy were exposed. Internet made this process happen in a faster and more eloquent way, giving the under-represented groups the opportunity to express themselves in non-traditional media. This social media empowering process brought to light realities neglected by traditional media. The public debate was enriched with the demands of new social agents. Boal's theatre of the oppressed is more important than ever, but it can work only if it looks at the world with new eyes.

Contemporary societal dynamics demand new political awareness of directors. The enemies of Humanism are not only located in economic structures, but also within theatre praxis itself. In this new era, any director can eventually be accused of sexism, racism, LGBTQIAP phobia, colonialism, ableism, animal abuse, ageism, fatphobia, aporophobia, xenophobia etc. We can see right now that even respected directors, with a long and celebrated career, raised in the liberal tradition, can be challenged by their choices. Rustom Bharucha's pioneer criticism of the colonialism present in Peter Brook's *Mahabharata* was the first important decolonial criticism of the European concept of universalism in theatre. More recently, we can mention the questions raised about Arianne Mnouchkiene and Robert Lepage's controversial *Kanata*, accused of colonialism and eurocentrism. In this case, first-nation leaders demanded that the Canadian government withdraw funding for the lavish production. There is no longer any comfort zone for directors. Their choices can eventually come under public scrutiny, and they have to be prepared to face it.

2. MILO RAU AND THE GHENT MANIFESTO

Milo Rau's Ghent Manifesto is a remarkable effort to change some practices in the European state theatre system. It is a statement about the need for change in the system. It also brings a new approach to the function of directing. Furthermore, it is a paradoxical symptom of the difficulties

in overcoming the crisis in the European state theatre institution. Some of the Manifesto's topics are outstanding propositions towards a new way of thinking about such a systemic hold-up funding system. Rau took advantage of the stable theatrical structures he was given and tried to establish new paradigms to overthrow the vicious framework of the past.

The authorship shift, from genius director to collective of creative participants is a radical statement, requiring all the artists involved in the process to be empowered. No humanist directing would be possible without accepting that all the members of the ensemble should be respected as individual artists. They should not be used as parts of a machine, but rather as fully empowered creators in a collective process. Nonetheless, this change to collective creation cannot be fully executed if no account is taken of the need to deal with the conflicts arising from the differences among the artists.

Bringing non-professional actors into the project (and considering they are fully empowered active participants in the creative process) is also a powerful way of bursting the theatrical bubble and bringing new aesthetic and thematic possibilities to a project. This paradigm raises some difficult questions for the theatre of the future. Is theatre supposed to be made only by trained artists? How can you share a stage with under-represented social groups? How can theatre be more democratic and less self-centred? However, there is another important aspect to be discussed. State theatre should also engage in bringing non-normative audiences into the state theatre. If the idea is to make state theatre a more democratic space, bringing in non-professional actors is not enough, because if they are simply playing to a normative audience, there will be a tokenisation process that will inevitably lead to deceit. Non-normative audiences should be invited into the space. In Brazil, for example, it is very difficult for black audiences to go to normative white-cast productions in traditional theatres. They don't feel they belong in those spaces. Some initiatives in the country are trying to make traditional spaces more democratic for black audiences, which implies more black actors on stage. In Os Satyros' venue, we have had trans prostitutes in the audience since we arrived in Roosevelt Square. Most of them had never been in a theatre before and their presence had a strong influence on our work. Non-normative audiences bring the artists new references and show them other social and cultural realities that can establish a dialogical relation inevitably affecting their work in the future.

Other topics in the Manifesto have an interesting starting point but can also fail if not accompanied by other essential procedures. For example, rehearsing somewhere outside a theatre can be a positive initiative for making theatre more interactive geographically. However, it has no real effectiveness if it is not followed by procedures to engage the artists in connecting to this new space and its social life. The same question can be raised about research, castings, rehearsals and related debates being publicly accessible. If the theatre ensemble is not prepared to interact with the geographical space they occupy, this move will be meaningless.

Avoiding classics is a way of avoiding the museography of many city theatre productions, bringing fresh air into the institution. However, if the playwrights' background diversity is not observed, systemic exclusion patterns will inevitably continue to happen. If all the playwrights follow the normative identity of Western dramatic history (white, male, heterosexual, Western), the standpoint of these productions will always display the same homogeneity.

Going to a conflict or war zone can be an adventure for the artists involved in the creative process. Nevertheless, this huge and risky effort would have meaning only if there was some kind of real dialogue in the initiative. The war victims should have an active voice in the project, otherwise it could be seen as a 'white saviour' attitude, like the Hollywoodian celebrities who go to Africa to take pictures and publicise them in their social media. In this case, the main beneficiary of this attitude is the artist's public image. Wouldn't it be more effective politically to bring artists from conflict zones to a European state theatre and give them a voice?

Finally, the Manifesto's lack of references to the representativeness of gender, religious and ethnic diversity, disability inclusion and alike show the immense variety of challenges that state theatres are supposed to handle over the next few years in order to answer some of the most important social demands. Although to some extent change can be seen, this lack of representativeness is evident on state theatre stages as well as in their audiences, as if one were the narcissistic reflection of the other. In order to have a truly democratic theatre, connected to the contradictions and debates of contemporary society, decolonial directing has to overcome the limits of the current state theatre condition.

3. THEATRE IN SÃO PAULO CITY

The Brazilian theatre funding system, especially in São Paulo City with the Lei do Fomento, is basically structured around support for theatre groups. This system has its roots in the theatre movement of the 1960s. Groups like Teatro de Arena (founded by Augusto Boal and Gianfrancesco Guarnieri) and Teatro Oficina (founded by José Celso Martinez Correa and Renato Borghi) were an essential part of the cultural resistance against the military dictatorship and inspired Brazilian contemporary theatre. At the beginning of the 1990s, a theatre movement in São Paulo proposed a legal system for funding theatre groups. This law, called Lei de Fomento ao Teatro, was drawn up by theatre artists together with cultural policy makers during the 1990s and came into force in 2001. It fostered an even stronger theatre movement with hundreds of groups organising themselves in the city. The funds were supposed to be controlled by collectives of artists, and not by a director or an 'intendant'.

My theatre company, Os Satyros, has been a beneficiary of this law since it was launched in the 2000s. The Lei do Fomento focuses on supporting the continuity of theatre groups. It allows ensembles to research their theatrical aesthetics for months before presenting any performance to an audience. Compared to the European city state-theatre structures, it is much less hierarchical. Directors and playwrights from São Paulo are members of the ensembles and are as responsible for the work as the other artists. This system differs from European praxis, in which directors and playwrights are the soul of the creative process in the performance. For this reason, the European theatre epistemology does not suit the Brazilian phenomenon. There is an enormous discrepancy between the Brazilian praxis and the European academic texts used in traditional theatre schools in Brazil. The colonial mindset in the Brazilian theatre pedagogical system has been a huge challenge for creating our own identity since the arrival of the first European directors during World War II.

In order to establish a decolonial mindset in São Paulo's theatre pedagogy, Os Satyros and other independent groups

devised the SP Escola de Teatro in 2009. Financed by the government of the State of Sao Paulo, it is the largest stage arts educational institution in Latin America, with over 2.000 students annually. The school's pedagogy was not built upon the European tradition, but rather on the Paulista praxis of theatre groups. The Brazilian pedagogue Paulo Freire (Pedagogy of Autonomy), the Brazilian black geographer Milton Santos (the concept of Territory) and the Austrian American systems theorist and ecologist Fritoj Capra (the concept of the ecological system) were the main references for the project. The regular courses count with 500 students, distributed in 8 different study specialities: acting, mime, dramaturgy, directing, scenography and costume design, light design, sound design, and stage management. The system is based on non-hierarchical creative processes, in which all the artists-educands are autonomous and active creators. They learn by and from the experiences they have in the school, through interaction with educators and other educands, as stated in the Pedagogy of Autonomy. The historical development of the school emphasised a decolonial praxis rooted in the Brazilian theatre group experience.

São Paulo's funding system and theatre practice (both in schools and on stage) reinforce a non-European epistemology of theatre itself. The Paulista way of teaching and creating theatre is quite recent, and like any system has lots of contradictions and shortages. However, its mistakes are the consequence of an autonomous movement and don't reinforce a relationship of oppression. Most of all, the system rejects the epistemicide that the Brazilian theatre had suffered since colonial times.

4. DECOLONIAL DIRECTING

The concept of decolonial directing is based on my theatrical praxis and theory during decades as director of the Os Satyros theatre company. Os Satyros was founded in 1989 by an actor (Ivam Cabral) and a director (myself) and instituted a more collaborative approach to theatre making. As we were very aware of the importance of respecting all artists involved in the creative process, Os Satyros' basic assumption has always been the empowerment of all members of the ensemble. The first programme for our method was called Speed Theatre. Conceived around 1994, it had a manifesto with ten topics explaining our approach to theatre making. One of its most important aspects was the de-alienation of the actors who were not supposed to be puppets but full creative participants in the process. The performance should be a product of their personal labour in collaboration with the director and the other artists in the project.

Working in different conditions and with different groups of artists (trained and non-trained), I directed theatre productions in many non-hegemonic theatrical productions, with prostitutes, teen-agers, refugees, slum inhabitants and different nationalities. Through these experiences, I had the opportunity to add other references and studies to my own theatre making, which also transformed my personal comprehension of the role of the theatre director, in a dialectical process.

The chart below summarises some of the main guidelines of my approach to directing. By contrasting the modern directing style with the decolonial style, I intend to highlight the changes necessary for a contemporary directing artist:

	MODERN DIRECTING	DECOLONIAL DIRECTING
Basic approach	Universalism	Decolonialism
Standpoint	Western white cis heteronormativity	Multiple standpoints
Territory (relation to space and community)	Neutral	Engaged
Semiotic system (artists and audience)	Hegemonic	Openness to subaltern systems
Other artists in the creative process	Alienated	Empowered
Funding and institutional structures	Neutral approach	Critical approach
Politics of the body (artists and audience)	Unaware	Awakened
Technology and body	Offline	Onlife (offline and online)
Agency	Own single perspective	Agreement beyond dissensus

This chart is not supposed to be a formula for approaching every form of directing but rather a provocation, so that contemporary directors can face the challenges of their art in these troublesome times. The following examples of experiences I have gathered during my career may to some extent explain the points set out above and how they can be relevant to a decolonial directing approach. I myself would criticise some of the choices I made at the time in the situations I describe. My objective is not to provide formulas for directors, but to bring awareness of the many ethical and political questions our work has to deal with in the daily creative process.

5. THEATRE IN TERRITORY

In 2000, Os Satyros arrived at Praça Roosevelt, returning to its hometown after years in Europe and Curitiba, a city in the southern region of Brazil. The square, located in downtown São Paulo, was dominated by the prostitution of trans women and young boys, high criminality and drug trafficking. Os Satyros' experience with this community would play a fundamental role in the development of its aesthetics and the comprehension of the theatre's potential as an urbanistic agent. That specific territory and its agents changed our perception of the power of theatre in the urban dynamics and in the theatre making process itself. According to the Brazilian geographer Milton Santos, territory is the geographical space in which social relations happen. Theatre and its dialogue with the territory became fundamental aspects of our first years in the square.

Our venue in Praça Roosevelt was very small, only 120 square metres. The historical Teatro de Arena, founded by Augusto Boal and his group at the end of the 1950s, was just 200 metres from our site. At the beginning of the 2000s, Teatro de Arena was not as hectic as it used to be in the 1960s. Behind us was the Teatro Cultura Artística, the largest and most famous private theatre in São Paulo at that time, with over 1300 seats. It was a mainstream theatre, with TV celebrities on stage and highly expensive tickets. Its main dressing room was about the size of our tiny venue. As its audiences and actors were afraid of the area, the theatre's strategy was to provide a private security guard to accompany them from the parking lots around the square to the theatre itself. Around 70 guards protected the fashionable audience on their way to the theatre. They were in a safe bubble pretending not to see what was happening around them.

When Os Satyros arrived at the square, we could not have any special protection. We had a tiny venue, no public funding, and a dream of making theatre possible in the area. We had to face the reality of that square and all its dangers from the moment we arrived, starting with the trans prostitutes, criminals and drug dealers. Whilst the actors and audience of Teatro Cultura Artística had an exclusive privileged protection bubble, we had to interact with the local community every single day.

This interaction was a turning point in our career and our understanding of theatre as an important agent in social life. Ivam Cabral had the idea. We should put some tables on the sidewalk, turn on the lights and invite the local community to sit at the tables and talk. He used to say that the best way to connect with the community was to forget prejudice and fears and start talking to them. The conversation should start with a simple question: What is your name? "The name is what makes you visible, it is your identity to the world", he used to say.

We had to create procedures to establish this connection with them. We could not pretend to be in the same bubble as Teatro Cultura Artística, otherwise they would ban us immediately. We were in the midst of criminality and violence, but we believed we could overcome all the barriers. The most important step was our decision to invite our neighbour Phedra de Córdoba, an old Cuban trans actress, to join the company. Her integration into our way of doing theatre was extremely difficult at the beginning. She had been living as a pariah for over 40 years and her experience with revue in the 1960s was just a lost memory. In 1969, during the military regime, she decided to make her transition and from that time the theatre became a distant world for her. After the 1970s, she worked for thirty years as a performer in gay night clubs, and eventually also had to work in prostitution in order to survive. Her adaptation to an experimental theatre ensemble was therefore not easy. Step by step, we built up trust and she began to act in several of our productions, finally becoming recognised as an extremely powerful performer. Although in fact Phedra did not have the profile to be invited into a traditional professional theatre company, I, as a director, observed and understood the artistic potential behind the aggressiveness of her behaviour. She was not only an outstanding performer, but also established a link between the group and the local community. She introduced us to the trans prostitutes and some of them eventually became actresses in our group in other projects. She also taught us the rules for dealing with drug dealers and criminals. After a few years, she became well known to the theatre makers in São Paulo, as well as to the press and traditional theatre audiences, as the diva of Praça Roosevelt. This process, from being a marginalised artist to becoming the symbol of a theatre movement, had a huge impact at different levels. Her contribution to the visibility of the trans community was extraordinary. She carried in her body the tension and the beauty of the connection between the artists and the underworld of Praça Roosevelt.

Once Phedra had given us access to the trans prostitution community, we discovered the complex relationships between the criminal world and the well-established middle class of São Paulo. Expensive cars driven by elegant executives stopped in the area every single night. They did not go to the fancy Teatro Cultura Artística. In fact, they were clients of drug dealers and trans prostitutes. They were mostly white men with good salaries and traditional families, living in fancy suburban houses and coming to the

darkness of Roosevelt Square to satisfy their hidden secrets. That was the reason the criminals did not like our presence in the area. The theatre lights and public enjoyment were making visible an area that social hypocrisy wished to keep invisible. The customers started leaving the area, afraid of being exposed by the theatre lights, which resulted in our receiving death threats.

Due to our work with the local community and the consequent visibility in the media, other theatre groups came to the area. Bars and nightclubs followed. It became the Off Broadway scene of São Paulo. As a result of this process, the area went through a swift process of gentrification. The square's apartments and commercial spaces became much more expensive, and the prostitutes and other minor criminals left the area.

Public opinion constrained the city council to reurbanise and revitalise the square, after four decades of complete decadence since the military regime. Os Satyros and other theatre groups in the area had an ecological plan for its reurbanisation, in which there would be space for more green areas and open spaces for artistic performances. Green areas would mingle with art spaces, making it a unique space in the heart of the city. Unfortunately, despite the undisputable importance of the theatre movement in the area's revitalisation, the city urbanists ignored our propositions and planned a concrete square with no space for trees or performance spaces.

Even though we failed in the ecological renovation of the square, the territory taught us a lot. The old Cuban trans artist Phedra also played a fundamental role in my trajectory as an artist and social activist, and a tiny theatre proved that art can also change the life of a city.

6. LEARNING FROM SUBALTERN THEATRICAL EXPRESSIONS

São Paulo is a mix of different peoples and Brazilian migrants from different regions. I myself am of mixed descent, with ancestors who were European (Spanish, Italian), Black enslaved Africans, and Brazilian indigenous. Despite this cultural melting pot, São Paulo's theatre is absolutely colonised, influenced by the European and American contemporary theatre.

In 2006, I was invited to work with one of the oldest and most respectful theatre companies in the Brazilian Northeast, Imbuaça. Their work is based on ancient theatricalities from their region, mixing theatre, storytelling, music, poetry, traditional dancing and aesthetics. They invited me to direct the production *Os desvalidos*, based on the work of one of their most famous writers, Francisco J. C. Dantas.

When I arrived in Aracaju (Imbuaça's home town), I realised I knew nothing about the Brazilian Northeast popular culture. I had only some superficial information about traditional popular manifestations like bumba-meu-boi, congada, maracatu, cordel. All these ancient traditions and theatralities, orally transmitted for centuries since the Brazilian colonial period, had many theatrical elements based on the indigenous, Portuguese and African roots of our colonial period. In Brazil, hegemonic normative theatre ignores completely the ancient traditional popular theatre. Ironically, as a consequence of the European theatre coloniality, I knew more about Peter Brook or Frank Castorff than my own country's theatricality. Imbuaça made me jump into a completely new semiotic system (new for me) and consider my European conceptual background as relative. Semiotics means power.

Popular culture is part of lower-class traditions, which puts it in a subaltern position. Educated colonised theatre is made by and belongs to the upper classes. Incorporating Imbuaça's aesthetics in the project, their signs in costumes, set design, music and acting style meant bringing other layers of signification to the hegemonic theatre world I was trained in. As a decolonial director, I had to challenge myself to leave the sign system I used to work with and learn new possibilities for my expression. At the same time, I had to establish a bridge between their semiotic system and the traditional Southern audiences' system.

7. LEARNING FROM THE SLUM

In 2008, Os Satyros was invited to present a project at the Festival de Curitiba, the main theatre event in the country. We proposed a project in a slum (or comunidade, as they call it). This community was called Vila Verde and we worked with twenty of the local residents and a few of our professional actors. The project was called *A Fauna*. It aimed to research the possibilities for exchange between professional artists and a very poor community, labelled as the home of criminals. We wanted to overcome prejudice and reveal the complex humanity of this under-represented community.

We spent a month in the community, 6 rehearsal days per week. Three professional actors from Os Satyros shared the experience with 20 local residents, from 8 to 80 years old.

The process started with improvisations in which they approached stories of their daily lives and expectations, shedding light on the tough reality of their lives. Presented in the social media as a spectacle, as Guy Debord defines it, full of violence and crime, the improvisations had the goal of humanising their experiences. Being among them and getting in touch with that reality directly made things much more difficult and inspirational at once. It was not a media phenomenon, it was real life, lived by real people engaged in the project and sharing their homes, streets, fears and lives with us. The violence of Brazilian society would be seen not through a car window or on a TV, but right inside the project itself.

Their improvisations were about sex abuse in childhood, drug trafficking control of the area, lynching in the streets, slaughtering due to breaking the laws of the criminal world, teenager pregnancy, children carrying guns for criminals, and so much more. At the same time, there were improvisations about the importance of religion as a way to escape the terrible conditions of the slum, the shame of looking for a job and faking addresses in order to get it, the huge effort made by the local dressmaking cooperative to meet their families' needs.

Working as the director, I was not supposed to impose an acting technique or a classical text to be performed by the group. This would simply have been a repetition of the vicious models of hegemonic theatre that give no opportunity for underrepresented groups to express themselves. Moreover, the traditional media always had a single-minded approach to their lives, full of stereotypes and prejudice. They needed their own narrative to be visible, to be told by themselves from their own standpoint, beyond all the clichés about slums.

In one rehearsal, for instance, I asked the cast if they knew anything about the use of guns by the local population. Most of the performers had already carried a gun for drug dealers, and some teenagers even said they had a gun. A gun was a synonym of protection in the community, they said.

Then one 16-year-old girl, pregnant with her second child, told her story. She said she had done many things that were "bad" when she was 14. She didn't say exactly what she meant, but later I came to know she had been married to a criminal. Then she told us she carried a gun in the streets of Vila Verde for her husband.

I didn't judge her or say what I thought she should do with her life. I didn't ask about her problems with the law. I just listened, asked questions, made her think, and made the group think about it. Then, from all the insights I got, I transformed it into a theatre scene with a young actress carrying a gun during a walk by the audience through the community. Theatre did not judge her.

We devised the presentation as a walking performance in the streets of the community. The audience would visit different houses, squares, streets and spaces. Each would form a stage for a different scene. After we defined the route for the performance, in one of the last rehearsals, the oldest actor in the group, an 80-year-old grandmother, showed us all the places where someone had been killed. One of the spots was the place where her own son was killed in a gang dispute. We drew her son's body on the asphalt. Then, I suggested an improvisation. I asked her if she could pray on that spot for the soul of her dead son. She improvised it, in the name of her son. Then I asked her to pray in all the places on the route where there had been killings, for the souls of those who died. However, what was reasonable and fair for the local actors was not necessarily so for the professional actors in the project. Some of them argued that we should not do that as it could be seen as a eulogy for criminals. Two antagonistic visions of justice, coming from two different social, cultural and economic backgrounds. The director should decide if this action was morally justifiable. In the end, I respected the wish of the local actors, and the scene was kept in the performance.

The audience was also a very important aspect of the production. We had two different audience groups. Two groups from two worlds. The first was the community residents. Most of them had never seen a theatre performance before. They were friends, relatives and neighbours of the community actors. The second group was formed by the traditional festival audience, composed of well-educated audience members, journalists and critics. This group is a traditional cultivated middle-class audience, whom I call the normative audience. They know a great deal about normative theatre and see the best of national and international productions. The local audience would come on foot and could join the performance at any point along the route. The festival audience would be driven to the spot by bus.

In order to make the project possible, the festival instructed us to ask for police protection. However, the local actors told us not to speak to the police who could not help us. We should speak to the militia. The Brazilian militias are illegal organisations formed by ex-criminals or police officers who make money by offering protection in poor communities of big cities where they form a kind of parallel government. One of the actresses was a sister of the main local militia leader in Vila Verde. As the director, I should meet him and explain the project. When I went to his place respecting the rules, she introduced me to her brother, who had been shot some weeks before the meeting and could not walk yet. He was sitting in a chair looking like a king. When we talked, he spoke about his fears. Would our performance criticise the local residents or speak out against the militias'

influence in their lives? I explained we would approach many topics, but we would not touch on any theme that the residents would not approve. It was their choice. We had to choose between letting them remain voiceless, as they had always been, or start opening a space for their under-represented reality in traditional media. He accepted to protect the show. This meeting made everything possible and safe for all of us. The audience and the cast were absolutely secure during the three-week run.

One of the scenes took place in a cooperative of local female seamstresses. In the middle of the route, the audience was invited to enter their space where they could see about 15 seamstresses sewing while a video showed interviews with them. The scene made the local cooperative well known. Newspapers and TV stations gave them visibility, and they received many offers of work after the run. The performative power of theatre made it possible.

These two audience groups had different semiotic systems. The local residents knew the reality of the slum, and even the criminal past of some of the performers. They knew the killing and lynching spots. They knew the efforts of the cooperative, formed by their sisters, cousins, mothers and aunts. They were quite well aware of the reality of Brazilian slums, of the importance of religiosity in a territory defined by "uma igreja e um bar do lado" ("a church and a bar next to it"). However, the cultivated festival audience had no reference for this reality. They knew about contemporary theatre, trends, aesthetic possibilities and had a critical approach to politics and religiosity. As the director, I had to make the performance communicative effectively for audiences from different worlds, with values, semiotics and beliefs that differed in every aspect.

8. THEATRE AND CHANGING TIMES

Our beginning in Praça Roosevelt (2000 until 2005) was a challenging time, with death threats from drug dealers and no funding. Some of our professional actors gave up working with us at that time and some critics refused to go to the square and see Os Satyros' work. In 2003, Dea Loher was invited to come to Brazil to write a play about the city as a co-production among Thalia Theatre, Goethe Institute and the Bienal of São Paulo. Due to some unusual circumstances, she became our friend. From September 2003 until January 2004 she shared some experiences with our group during those troublesome times and witnessed the turmoil. Meanwhile, I was writing about the experiences we had been living in the area. Without knowing about each other's work, we wrote two texts, both of which had as a leading character a trans woman, inspired by Phedra de Córdoba. Dea Loher's text was *Das Leben auf der Praça Roosevelt* and I wrote *Transex*.

In the following years, 2004 and 2005, Os Satyros decided to produce both texts. Even though trans representativeness was not a political theme in Brazilian theatre at the time, Phedra was part of the cast of both productions. However, we didn't think of this question with any specific political awareness. It was just natural for us to recognise Phedra's talent and her importance in our process of acceptance by the local community.

We had trans actresses in the cast of both productions, something absolutely unusual for that time. Phedra de Córdoba was coming back to the stage after years of isolation and humiliating life conditions. The trans actress Savanah

Meirelles made her theatrical début in *Transex*, simultaneously keeping her activities as a prostitute during the run.

In 2018, we put forward the idea of a new production of *Transex*. However, the world had changed so much in such a short period of time that we had to revise our work before we could even start the production. Social awareness of the trans community questions was a controversial theme both in social and traditional media. The complexity of the gender question brought different language definitions and the trans community started questioning specific linguistic demands. Two main aspects of the remake completely changed our perception of the work itself: representativeness and language.

Representativeness became a fundamental question in the casting process. Who can play which character? – this was the main problematic for the performance. The leading romantic couple was a transgender man who fell in love with his art student, Thereza, a trans prostitute woman. In the original production, this couple was played by two cis actors, Ivam and Alberto. Despite the presence of trans performers in the original show, the question of representativeness was not fully considered. However, in 2018, it became the core issue. These roles could no longer be played by cisgender actors. The trans movement had already presented demands for job opportunities and inclusion in the theatre world for trans artists, and this had become the new standard for theatre making. We needed actual transgender performers to play the romantic couple. We understood that trans persons need to occupy normative spaces in society as well as on the stage. The traditional saying that actors can play any role was over. Minority groups don't want to be represented by normative privileged actors. They question the systemic under-representation their groups have experienced in the traditional theatre world and demand their space in the normative theatre.

During the first years of our presence in Praça Roosevelt, the trans prostitution community had a strong impact on Os Satyros's aesthetics. Music, colours, furniture, costumes, vocabulary, everything in their world became part of the group's aesthetical identity. This was not cultural appropriation, as many trans prostitutes were active creators in our devising processes. It also had a strong political purpose. We were stating that the good taste of the middle-class was cynical as they secretly used the bodies of marginalised prostitutes to satisfy their lust but maintained their social status and norms. We wanted to establish a dialogue and bring the trans prostitute's concept of taste to the stage. The semiotics of our mise en scène changed radically, abolishing normative theatrical semiotics. This meant a radical aesthetic change in our work, which was also deeply connected to a profound change in our understanding of theatre as a political act. IŒhe remake, after more than a decade, all those references changed as a consequence of the new trans activism of the 2010s. Many trans persons came from different backgrounds, in terms of education, social class and citizenship. Although the under-representation of the trans community remained a problem, awareness of their agenda became stronger.

As a result, I had to change the general directing approach to the performance, especially to the language. As the playwright and director of *Transex*, I had to review much of the vocabulary used in the original text, looking for a trans-inclusive vocabulary. Neutral language and the gender-inclusive language revolution is a direct consequence of

the identitarian movements and their search for inclusion and equality. For gendered languages like Portuguese, this process is even more complex and difficult. Linguistic changes are happening in such a fast and radical way that language itself becomes a critical aspect nowadays in any directing process for attuned directors. Now we know that even the name of the play, *Transex*, raises many questions in English speaking trans communities. Should we change the name of the show if we perform it in England in the future, for example?

Contemporary directors must be aware of this linguistic process when they are directing. The reshaping of language is part of the culture wars. As a playwright, I had to rewrite many words and sentences, especially pronouns. But directors must also be aware of oppressive linguistic structures, which may be considered violent towards transgender persons or other under-represented groups. Decolonial directors have to observe the linguistic changes we are going through every day as a political attitude. Language can also be a dimension of systemic oppression, and decolonial directing should always be inclusive and concerned with improving the human condition of all artists involved in the creative process of a production.

9. THEATRE, TECHNOLOGY AND TEENAGERS

Some years ago, Os Satyros launched two important projects. One was researching the relationship between technology and theatre. Technology had always been present in the art of theatre and fascinated us as a core aspect of theatrical language. It was present in the ancient Greek theatre, as well as in the Egyptian Ramesseum Dramatic Papirus, the Indian Natya Shastra and in many other theatre traditions. No culture denied the possibilities of techonology on stage and its development has always made a great impact on the theatre's aesthetics, as in the example of the advent of electric light on stage.

Carolina Pierre Louis and Maria Casadevall in a scene of *Haiti somos nós* (2016). Photo by André Stefano.

In 2009, our basic idea was to start investigating how the extraordinary development of technology over the last 30 years had been affecting humanity and how it could create new possibilities for the theatre itself. The discussion was about the importance of social interactions happening via technological devices. We called any human manifestation via electronic devices, drugs or other resources as 'cyborg'. The cyborg theatre would thus be a theatre going beyond the bodies of the actors and the audiences, through devices, computers, cell phones, social media, etc. At the beginning,

our research was marked by anxiety and fear. The investigation of new technological possibilities for theatre would be a turning point for our aesthetics.

Simultaneously, we were launching a project with teenagers from poor communities. They were trained in the voice and acting techniques used by the group. After three months of training, they would develop a short play to be presented in public schools throughout the city of São Paulo. The text would be devised from the questions and improvisations they brought to the process, empowering their own voices on stage. Our main reference was Elizabeth Young-Bruhel's study of childism. We wanted to empower these teenagers and hear what they had to say to the world, avoiding the stereotypes in which adults tell youngsters how they should behave in the world.

The basic idea of the project was to empower them in a creative theatrical process. From their own standpoint, they would speak about the important themes of their lives, their dreams and fears. We wanted them to feel autonomous and respected in their creative process. As a decolonial director, I would listen to those voices and use my skills as a director to shape them into a theatrically effective performance.

The experience was mesmerising. First, I had to ensure their trust. Teenagers usually don't trust older people as they always feel judged and controlled. It takes time to show them they can open themselves to adults who will not tell them what is right or wrong. After this first step, I understood how ignorant I was of their reality, just knowing the stereotypes that we, as adults, have about their world. I also diagnosed the huge technological gap between generations and how much I could learn from them. One day, during rehearsal, I asked them to make an improvisation about drugs in public schools in São Paulo. Brazil is on the route for international trafficking and it is quite common for vulnerable teenagers to be offered drugs in public schools for consumption or illegal commerce. This was an important aspect of their lives as some had already told us that they used drugs for the first time when they were twelve years old.

After they had time to discuss the subject, they came back and improvised. Before the improvisation started, they turned the lights off. Everything was in darkness. Suddenly, flashlights started dancing in the dark space. They came from cell phones. Then, another cell phone played a soundtrack for the scene. Everything was devised by those poor teenagers who had never played in a theatre or seen professional theatre before. For them, using cell phones on stage in order to create lights or play a soundtrack was organic. Those devices were part of their bodies, as cyborgs. They were born in a digital world, as much as I came from a distant time, an analogical world.

The technology that demanded so much effort from the professional actors of Os Satyros in our developing research on the cyborg theatre was just everyday reality for those teenagers. They proved that we were behind the times in our research. Technology had already changed the world, and we, as older theatre people, were not in tune with this huge revolution. The teenagers taught us there was something powerful beyond offline theatre. As much as our contemporary lifestyle, theatre should be onlife, as well defined by the philosopher Luciano Floridi.

The unexpected challenge provided by those teenagers brought us to speed up our investigation. We had to keep on researching and creating in the cyborg theatre. It was the only way to understand the future of humanity and the possibilities for theatre itself. Since 2009, we have done 10 productions in cyborg theatre. When the pandemic started, we were already

equipped for it. Os Satyros was ready to create in digital theatre. In less than one year, I had already directed 12 different productions with artists from 30 different countries and audiences from every continent, much larger than those we had in our small venue in Praça Roosevelt. The technological revolution is unstoppable and exponential. Nowadays, holography is already on its way to the masses and in a few years holographic theatre will be for real. Future generations will be ready to experience theatre in new forms.

Phedra d. Córdoba and Ivam Cabral in a scene of *A vida na Praça Roosevelt* (2005). Photo by André Stefano.

10. THE SILENCE OF THE DIRECTOR

In 2017, Os Satyros developed a project with a cast formed by Brazilian actors and a group of Haitian refugees in Brazil. The group was formed by untrained actors from different generations who were forced to leave Haiti after the hideous earthquake that destroyed the country in less than 30 seconds on January 12, 2010. Their tragedy was the main theme of the devising process. At a certain point in the rehearsal process, I asked them about their religiosity, especially the unique relationship they had with Christianity and Voodoo, their Afro religion. To a certain extent, their syncretic religious experience was similar to the complex Brazilian religiosity. In Brazil, religious beliefs are also syncretic, and Catholic saints and Candomblé's orixás share our religious imaginary. However, at one particular moment in the rehearsal process the huge differences between us became evident. I asked them if they believed in zombies, the undead corporeal revenant. Before their appropriation by Hollywood horror movies in the 1970s, zombies were part of the Haitian imaginary and related to the difficult times on slavery plantations.

All the Haitians in the project really believed in zombies, regardless of whether they were Christian or Vodou followers. Some could even describe in detail the moment they saw zombies themselves. Despite the fact that the term 'zombie' originated from the Brazilian black anti-slavery leader Zumbi dos Palmares, the Brazilian actors do not believe in zombies. They were in shock when they were told the stories. Reality for Haitian actors included supernatural beings that Brazilian actors could not acknowledge.

As a decolonial director, I was not supposed to check the zombie phenomenon scientifically or even call into doubt the reality of zombies for the actors. I asked them to improvise scenes based on zombie stories as an organic step in the creative process. Without any judgement or critical comments. The process should respect their belief and acknowledge zombies to be part of it.

It is also fundamental for leadership in the context of decolonial direction that the director be empathetic with the dynamics of the group. One day, I arrived at the rehearsal room and noticed a weird atmosphere. The Brazilian actors were on one side and the Haitian actors were apart, in a darker corner. They were whispering something I could not understand, looking at the Brazilians in a suspicious way. Something was going on, but I could not recognise what it really was.

One of the Haitians, an actress called Carolina, had been a 'restavek' in her childhood. A restavek is a child who is sent by their parents to work and be raised as a domestic servant in some privileged upper-class family. International organisations consider it a modern-day form of slavery. Carolina, like any restavek in Haiti, had suffered a lot of prejudice all her life and had left Haiti to find a better life in Brazil. I noticed she was the focus in the group of Haitians as she was crying out. I asked her what happened, and she answered that she had been attacked in social media by Brazilian white supremacists who compared her picture to a gorilla. The Haitians were all full of tears of shame, anger and sadness. On the other side of the rehearsal room, the Brazilians, most of whom were white, felt embarrassed, terrified and ashamed. I had to deal with something far deeper and more complex than a simple rehearsal. 300 years of slavery and oppression burst out in that rehearsal room and no directing book could teach me how to deal with it. This was not the time for the director to speak up and start talking about colonial critic theory or political revolution through theatre. It was a moment for the director to be silent. We sat down together, and the only thing I could imagine to do was to listen to them all. One by one, the Haitian black actors spoke about their feelings. The Brazilian black actors also related to them. Carolina told what it meant to be a restavek in a country like Haiti and all the Haitians embraced her in tears. Then the Brazilians came closer and embraced them all. I was in my corner, overwhelmed by the most beautiful hugging I ever saw. This was more powerful than any rehearsal could possibly be at that moment. My silence was necessary. It helped that evening become an essential part of the process.

Alex de Jesus in *Vida Bruta* (2016). Photo by Edson Degaki.

11. THE CHALLENGES OF DECOLONIAL DIRECTING

A contemporary director is supposed to solve conflicts that, until a few years ago, were unknown to theatre makers. The changing social dynamics and global climate, technological and scientific development and culture wars all demand new approaches for a living theatre. The director, as leader of the creative process, must be conscious of their stand in this new world. Decolonial directing is one possible form of facing these challenges.

Theatre has always found its way out of crisis and reinvented itself. The co-presence of bodies is a human need. With the coming of the film industry, many prophets announced the death of theatre, but then theatre reshaped itself and assumed a myriad of forms and contents. Humanity now faces new challenges brought by the technological revolution and the challenges of the post-pandemic world. The new generations are already born in an 'onlife' condition. This will be the dominant structure for socialisation in which hybrid interactions will happen with our physical bodies and their technological extensions. Physical presence will no longer be necessary for many social activities, but the technological revolution will also offer theatre new forms of presence (telepresence such as digital presence, holographic presence). These will be the new dimension of theatre. Theatre directors must be aware of the risks and choose their own strategies to create their art. The technological revolution will open new doors to the future of theatre and it is up to the directors to accept these underlying forces and discover how they can make theatre more accessible and democratic for new audiences; otherwise, the theatre of the future will have to abandon the old directors and find other agents for its own technoblossoming.

A decolonial director is a contemporary leader for the ensemble of multiple empowered artists. In this complex orchestration, the director must provide a delicate balance of personal artistic expression and the empowerment and expression of all the other artists and audiences involved in the project. It is a unique living process to be devised according to the particularities of both the ensemble and the audiences. The full empowerment of a collective of artists and the understanding of the audience's dynamics can lead to changing individual, social, and territorial realities.

During the creative process, decolonial directors have to use all their skills to explore their artistic expression with other empowered artists who have their own singularities with different values, languages and skills. They must take into account in the process the knowledge they have acquired about the ensemble's and the audience's realities, aims and fears, including their semiotic systems. This complex weaving of the creative web will be at the core of the directors' work. Their art will be manifested throughout the weaving, but eventually, in some processes, is diffused to the point where it can no longer be clearly identified, melting into the creative web itself.

One might think that the art of a decolonial director is less visible in the result of a production than used to be that of a modern director. What does a decolonial director do besides being the agent of the individual demands and talents of the artists in the ensemble? How can one recognise the singular expression of the director's art if it is subject to different circumstances (actors, themes, territories) in each project?

In reality, the decolonial director's craft is far more complex and perturbing than that of a modern director, who uses his craft to create a work of art from personal universalism. Modern directors are not confronted by their idiosyncrasies and possible failures. On the other hand, the decolonial director will use the same craft to devise works facing many new conflicts arising either from unexpected claims by underrepresented groups or from contradictions and questions enhanced by the rehearsal process or contact with the audiences.

The artistic truth of the project will always be a shared process to which the director, the cast and the audience will always contribute. The final result of the play will be an agreement among all members of the ensemble, going beyond their differences. The director will face these challenges and assume final responsibility for the political, moral and aesthetic solutions to the disputes raised in the rehearsal process through dialogue and respect for the fully empowered ensemble. When the production ensemble feels empowered and represented in the final result, the director will have acquired legitimacy in their eyes and given a sense of wholeness to the oeuvre. The performance will be the result of an ensemble of artists and not the fruit of a solitary genius' mind. The stage will have more voices, bodies, colours, accents, languages, religions, smells and points of view about life, society and environment. In order to keep theatre as the art of the global polis, decolonial directors need to be conscious of the important role they can play in this journey. The only way to invent the future of theatre is to forget the disintegrating logic of the past, keeping the best of our predecessors and accepting the risk of the unknown with an open heart.

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In the classes of Thomas Ostermeier and Robert Schuster his interest for actor-director communication was evoked. Parallel to his third year of education (2008), Schmit also worked as a collaborator and assistant to Laurent Chétouane, who at the time was crossing over from the field of directing to choreography. The practices of dance and dance-theatre have since been of major influence on Schmit´s own work.

Today, Schmit works in various formats, ranging from social intervention to feature film to teaching; institutionally commissioned as well as independant, he works both in the German-speaking and Scandinavian contexts.

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CYBERNETIC PROMISES The Director as a *machine à gouverner*

Johannes Maria Schmit

In this article, I try to unpack the implications of an earlier shift in the jargon of directorial practices - from 'Kritik machen' (giving notes) to 'Feedback geben' (giving feedback) - and its effects on the actor-director interaction today. By tracking the metaphor of *feedback* to its first transdisciplinary application, I propose a cross reading of our field with so-called cybernetic epistemology. In doing so, I hope to project a vision of the future director that invites our critical attention.[1]

From the perspective of my professional autobiography, I can still recall 'the moment' when, in the German-speaking context, I started giving the actors 'Feedback', instead of subjugating them to 'Kritik' (the convention I had formerly learned at my place of education: Ernst Busch, Berlin). Without my awareness at the time, this shift of vocabulary repositioned me as a director in relation to the ensemble in a radical way: I had become one step closer to being a *cybernetic director*, that is to say: to considering myself part of a communicative system, which I wasn´t going to steer through authoritarian power (or intellectual superiority, or charismatic seduction), but through control.

'Kritik machen' is probably best translated into English by the term 'giving notes'. But while you '*give* notes' *to* the actors 'Kritik' is something you '*make with*' the actors. ("Kritik machen *mit* den Schauspieler_innen"/Giving notes to the actors.). The participatory ring of the preposition 'with' in German is misleading, insofar as the case is instrumental: 'Kritik' is by tradition given out frontally, i.e., the director walks through the notes and the only conventional way for the actors to respond is by asking questions of the pragmatic kind: in attempts to clarify the directions received. (Usually, the director will be seated at the head of the table, so as to be seen by everyone in a more or less central perspective – a kind of psychological reversal of rehearsals *on the floor*.)

Kritik as review

'Kritik machen', the act of making 'Kritik' thus implies a normative review of the actor's operations on stage. ("Do this. Don't do this.") The goal usually defines the criteria for such a review: in our practice, the intended mise-en-scène will thus inform the 'rights and wrongs' addressed in the actors' work.

(Note that in the specific case of *Regie-Theater*, a theatre tradition where the genius/*auteur*-function sits with the director, these criteria may be idiosyncratic and don't necessarily have to be accounted for during the process. The 'rights and wrongs' are simply informed by the *vision*, an operational tool the director is administrating as his or her property – and that might not be transparent to the ensemble until after the premiere.)

Despite its pragmatic aspects, 'Kritik' - at least in the German-speaking context of a director's theatre - can also activate an undercurrent notion of 'critical theory' as associated foremost with the Frankfurt School. In this very space of resonance, the actor's operations on stage can also be reviewed, 'criticised' from an 'ideology-critical' position, thereby creating criteria that transcend those of the mise-en-scène at hand.

Kritik as critique

This specific directorial access point of 'Kritik' naturally doesn't stop at the limits of what could be argued to be the actor's most intimate sphere: his or her acting techniques. In the paradigm of *'Kritik' as ideology critique*, these are also under suspicion of being mere products or tools of a 'cultural industry' and scrutinised as such. The actor's default tools for

1 The thoughts put forth in this text spring foremost from my conversations with Susanne Heinrich, Sebastian Kirsch, Jon Refsdal Moe, Juliette Mapp, Inga Gerner Nielsen, Lucie Tuma, and Christoph Wirth. Thank you all.

representation will thus naturally be interfered with – and his or her re-programmed technique can even turn into the site of the director's genuine artistic expression, as was the case in Grotowski's stagings.

I believe that some of the most productive performing artworks in the second half of the twentieth century spring from turning ideology-critical readings of acting techniques into aesthetics. A great example would be Peter Handke's forceful *Offending the Audience* (Handke 1966) in which the modes of psychological acting are highjacked by the performative effects of one long sequence of speech acts. Obviously, the 'interfering in the actor's techniques' the original staging demonstrates would never have succeeded without the agreement, contribution and investment of a generation of actors, who themselves wanted to be emancipated from acting styles associated with Nazi-German melodrama.

From what we have said so far, it is clear that within the metaphor of 'Kritik machen' the actor's work can be looked at as 'an embodiment of ideology' that needs to be scrutinised by an intellectually superior character (the director) who will split 'false' from 'right' consciousness throughout the process of rehearsals. In this politically charged approach – the *Regie-Theater* I'm referring to is very much a lovechild of 68 (with all its unresolved authoritarianism) – classical, normative notions of (asymmetric) enlightenment are maintained, seemingly untouched by postmodern deconstruction or the feminist critique of power[2].

2 Also, in so far as the historical reality of Regie-Theater is almost completely male dominated, the director of that paradigm could be seen as the *patroniser per se.*

After *Kritik*

So how did *feedback* – a concept originating from electronic circuit theory – find its way to the centre of our directorial practice, challenging, if not replacing an 'old school' paradigm of *Kritik*? When did it arrive, by what channel and, above all, what did its circular logics do to the scrutinising frontal set-up just described?

The fact that the German language has, unlike Swedish with 'återkoppling', preserved the term as a neologism - and that despite the option of an existing word ('Rückkopplung') - hints to the Anglo-Saxon axis by which the concept was introduced: *Feedback* as part of cybernetic theory is thus yet another of the many post-WW2-theory-imports within what could be called a 'North Atlantic Theory Organisation' (- with the U.S. as the strong arm, of course.)

Putting it this way, I am most likely channelling the cold war resentment this term must have produced among some of my older East-German theatre teachers due to its arrival in the 90s when it entered the language of an education that, only yesterday, could pride itself in having shaped a theatre of highest societal relevance and handcraft standards[3].

Nevertheless, most of the time it is worth retracing the stream of transatlantic theory-imports to its source. As concepts tend to be genuine while they are still breaking ground, we can expect some strong (political) promises when searching the broader field of knowledge in which the term *feedback* was first applied.

The following sections will thus offer a brief overview of the history as well as the epistemology of cybernetics. The scope is condensed to focus on the anthropological implications resonating within our field of work. (At this point, I am consciously holding back examples from my own practice that would make this connection explicit but leave it to the professional readers to mirror their specific approaches within.)

These implications will lead us to discussing the ideal of governance in cybernetics, which I believe informs

3 In the perspective of pedagogical power as well, *feedback* and its circular logics certainly did what they set out to do: complicating one-way master-student relations by setting up a communication model that requires the learner to 'talk back'.

the interaction between actor-director, and director-ensemble in rehearsals today.

Feedback and its implications

Feedback is one of the central metaphors within cybernetics, a term (re-)introduced by US-American mathematician Norbert Wiener in 1948 (Wiener 2013: 11). The word 'cybernetics' itself is derived from Greek κυβερνητική (kybernētikḗ), meaning 'governance', with κυβερνήτης (kybernḗtēs) being the governor or 'steersman' of a 'ship'. In Wiener's take, cybernetics is conceptualised as the science of steering systems.

As he describes in his autobiography (Wiener 2017: 389), Wiener's interest in circular causal and feedback mechanisms arose out of historical urgency. Throughout WW2, he invested his capacities as a researcher into devising an anti-aircraft gun that would anticipate the moves of fascist attackers over British territory. This became necessary, as the new warfare brought speeds that complicated the equation between target and shooter significantly: the airplanes of the 'Luftwaffe' were no longer to be hit where the gunners saw them, but the shot would hit precisely where they would appear in the future. ('The future' being: 'some split seconds later') Wiener worked on creating a computing machine that would control the anti-aircraft gun based on the data that was fed back to it. The input being the flying pattern of the German pilots and the output the position of the gun barrel in anticipation. Ultimately the project couldn't be finished before the war ended, but it can be asserted that one of the first digital 'real time systems with appropriate feedback mechanisms' (Pias 2003: 21) was to be installed between fascist aircraft and the machine guns of the free world.

The 'steering systems' analysed in post-war cybernetics – presented and discussed foremost at the so-called Macy Conferences between 1946 and 1953[4] – cover an enormous range of seemingly disparate phenomena, aligning them in a somewhat horizontal manner. As the subtitle of Wiener's first publication on the topic suggests – 'Control and Communication in the Animal and the Machine' - even the line formerly drawn between the organic/inorganic is destabilised in this transdisciplinary endeavour.

In her book *Zeros and Ones*, Sadie Plant lists the elements connecting the steersman and the ship that make for a feedback-loop underlying the metaphor in the etymology: "eyes, hands, skin, bones, decks, rails, wheels, rudders, maps, stars, currents, winds, and tides" (Plant 1997: 164) - all form a cybernetic organism interconnecting 'living' and 'dead' material.

In return, any machine equipped with a sensory apparatus (sensor) that, through a feedback process, administrates its own activity can be analysed as a self-regulating, cybernetic system, i.e., a system that, while running with a certain degree of autonomy, can prevent its destruction.

An often-used historical example is James Watt's steam engine, a machine maintaining self-control with the help of an energetic feedback loop: "if it starts to run wild, the bars of the governor fly upward from centrifugal action, and in their upward flight they move a lever which partly cuts off the admission of steam. Thus, the tendency to speed up produces a partly compensatory tendency to slow down" Otto Mayr quoted in Plant 1997: 157).

A more everyday life example of a cybernetic system is that installing a feedback loop between heating and the outer temperature, i.e., the *thermostat*, preventing a room from freezing or overheating.

4 The Macy Conferences are documented in what the editors rightly call a "somewhat unusual document" (Pias 2003: 533); given its volume and transdisciplinary range.

The ultimate cybernetic machine is certainly W.R. Ashby's *homeostat*: an electrical apparatus that does not produce anything except adaptations to random disturbances introduced into its proper circular set up – thereby stabilising itself in an eternal feedbacking activity.

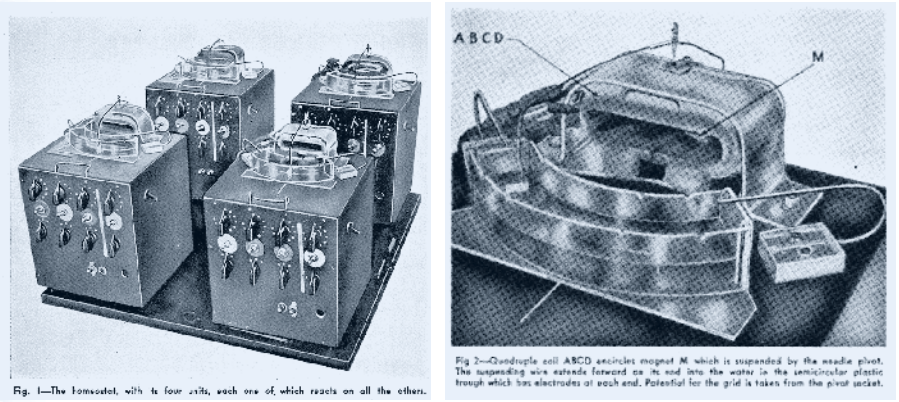

Fig. 1—The homeostat, with its four units, each one of which reacts on all the others.

Fig 2—Quadruple coil ABCD encircles magnet M which is suspended by the needle pivot. The suspending wire extends forward as its end into the water in the semicircular plastic trough which has electrodes at each end. Potential for the grid is taken from the pivot socket.

The first published account of the homeostat appeared under the title of 'Design for a Brain' in the December 1948 issue of 'Electronic Engineering'.

Homeostasis itself is probably the most potent metaphor for both the present capitalist system as well as the endeavours of many of the performing arts within it. The *adaptive, ultrastable system* is certainly an aesthetic ideal held by many choreographers who refrain from micro-managing the movements of their dancers but suggest *scores* or *systems* instead. Here the shift from 'giving notes' (*Kritik*) to 'giving feedback' – or in a contemporary spin: to 'giving *notions*'[5] – can be witnessed in its productive potential: thanks to an outer gaze merely 'mirroring' the performer's operations on stage within a circular system that is transparent to everyone involved, his or her choices reach another level of informed-ness, thereby providing for what is often experienced as the performer's *stability* on stage[6].

5 I owe the observation of this latest shift in discourse to choreographer and curator Erik Valentin Berg.

6 As opposed to a certain fragility within the *mise-en-scène* of *Kritik*, where everything collapses once random outer disturbances permeate into the theatre space, 'homeostatic' works can have amazing precision, whilst at the same time remaining somewhat 'unthreatened' by mundane 'noise'.

I will personally never forget the fantastically focused staging of *Lenz* by Laurent Chétouane (former engineer and theatre director and nowadays choreographer) that played out on a summer evening 2006 in the middle of Berlin - with the windows open and the sounds of the city weaving themselves into the actor Fabian Hinrich's synthesising presence.

Neural computation and information theory

From the selection of 'sensitive machines' above, it becomes clear how the human body, in turn, can be described as a cybernetic system in its own right. Interestingly enough, one of the first theoretical 'transplantations' of the term *feedback* is made - from its original application in electronic circuit research - to our nervous system.

The nerve cells are a thankful recipient of the new theory as their activity can be described in binary terms: either they transmit information, i.e., send signals or they don't. In Wiener's language they either 'fire' or 'repose' (Wiener 2013: 120), which in turn can be translated into zeros and ones; thereby complying with the kind of algebra the newly emerging computing machines operate by.

> *The common precondition of the three foundational concepts of cybernetics - switching (Boolean) algebra, information theory, and feedback - is digitality. It is thus only* when humans and machines operate on the same digital basis, *[…] that the epistemology of cybernetics is itself able to be productive.* Pias 2003: 16 : my emphasis

In the light of this epistemology, the human subject turns into "a special sort of information machine" (Pias 2003: 16) both in terms of internal, physiological processes - we wouldn't be able to keep our balance if not for an elaborate feedback loop between nerves, muscles and perception - but also in interaction with other systems.

The precondition for exchange is that the so-called *bits* - the smallest units of communication within a given system – are so narrowed down, that the coordinate axis of

their measurement can be exactly defined. We can speak of 'good communication' in the cybernetic value system when the bits are unambiguous[7].

The universalisation of cybernetic epistemology

By installing this functional analogy, that can be expanded into other fields, cybernetic logics has given new life to classical scholarly disciplines such as biology, sociology, ecology, economics, linguistics, and last but not least, theatre studies[8].

Interestingly enough, this epistemology is rarely referred back to as a basis. The hype around systems theory and actor-network-theory seems to have erased all trace of the various waves of cybernetic renewal in the second half of the twentieth century. (In fact, many of my friends in academia or the performing arts did not really know what to make of the term, when I shared the excitement about my recent 'discovery'[9]– nor did my cousin, who is an engineer constructing state-of-the-art 'sensitive machines' for Tesla.) Instead, the prefix 'cyber' lives on as a more or less hollow, cut off signifier (a discursive ghost ship in the realm of the internet); meanwhile the idea of the cybernetic organism (cyb-org) inspires both the mass cultural imaginary as well as a specific branch of post-Marxist feminism.

In fact, after some golden years of wild transdisciplinary exploration, cybernetic research had to eventually stick closely to its instrumental applicability in the military and industrial fields, and was never 'freed' to go into the universities as a knowledge producer in its own right[10].

At the same time, cybernetic logics rules almost everything around us, as a structure so integrated that we only notice it with some historical distance (TIQQUN 2007).

7 In an exciting discussion after the presentation of a psychoanalyst at the Macy Conference of 1952 (*The Place Of Emotions in the Feedback Concept*, Lawrence Kubie) computer engineer Julian Bigelow insists: "Measurements which are useful can only be taken when the thing is so narrowed down that it can be said precisely what the coordinate axis is: exactly where is the evidence of anger in this man or that man; exactly what is it that is to be measured? It must be done only in very simple systems. It is never done in anything as complicated as I understand psychotherapy to be." (Pias 2003: p.588)

8 The 'global' success of Erika Fischer-Lichte's conceptualisation of the theatre performance as 'a real-time system' in which audience and performers are self-organising in an 'auto-poetic FEEDBACK loop' (*auto-poetische Feedback-Schleife*; see Fischer-Lichte: 2004: 59) was probably due to yet another transdisciplinary application of cybernetic's central metaphor.

9 Thanks to Sadie Plant's *Zeros And Ones* (Plant 1997) and the algorithm that in turn recommended me to 'also buy' Hans-Christian Dany's *Morgen werde ich Idiot – Kybernetik und Kontrollgesellschaft* (Dany 2013).

10 As the 'science of steering systems' never turned into an academic discipline, it is easier for us today to think of an 'object oriented ontologist' than of a 'cyberneticist'. (Albeit pronounce the word.)

It is easy for us to agree that the refiguration of our state apparatuses by the end of the twentieth century - what has become known as New Public Management - was based on cybernetic notions of 'communication and control'; and that our subjectification as citizens/users of the state is nowadays achieved through a proliferation of feedback loops in all directions. (In 2016, I myself became a father through a mouse click within the Danish citizen administration software, borger.dk)

Regie/rung / director/governor

If it is true that today's overall models of governance are shaped by a theory of steering self-organising systems laid out in the 1950s - what effects does that have for our day-to-day practices as process leaders in theatres (processors of texts, actors, space etc.)? In other words: how is a director modelled after the ideal of a governor in a cybernetic system?

In order to gain an approximate answer, it is necessary to take a closer look at the ideal of governance implied in cybernetic theory. To do this more attentively, we shall strip away the (ugly) backdrop of neoliberalism and return to the antifascist ambitions of its early protagonist. As Claus Pias writes in the foreword to his edition of the *Macy Conferences*:

> *In real time systems with appropriate feedback mechanisms, Norbert Wiener himself believed to have recognized what had been missing from typical critiques of society. A society without feedback is, simply enough, "an ideal held by many Fascists, Strong Men in Business, and Government." The future task of cybernetics would thus be to install such* machines à gouverner *in the realm of politics and to model them according to state-of-the-art technical systems.* Pias 2003:29

We can recognise in this passage the strong democratic promise inscribed in the political aspiration to design a *governing machine* and possibly already sense the distant emerging of the transition from the theatre of the *auteur* (and his or her possible *terreur* on rehearsals) to devising models of directing.

Cybernetics of the left

To give even more shape to the political promise of cybernetics, it is helpful to flip sides (diagonally) within the cold war set-up: from capitalist global north to socialist global south, where - under the reign of Salvador Allende - the first attempt was made to manage an entire national economy using the strategies formerly applied only to companies on the free market.

In an unlikely collaboration between the socialist Chilean ministry of economy and the British business consultant Stafford Beer, project CyberSyn (Cybernetic Synergies) was developed. It was a prototype institution intended to become a *machine à gouverner* by which wealth, health services and goods were to be redistributed equally.

This is a picture of the so-called operations room, where the Chilean officials were being fed economic data in real time. Note the circular arrangement of the feedback round – together with the ashtrays that Stafford Beer insisted on. A gentlemen's club for a digital planned economy.

As we know, the Chilean (cybernetic) take on socialism did not last more than three years before the U.S. put a violent end to it in 1973. The destruction of this attempt is painful insofar as we will never know how the socialist version would have differed from the neoliberal forms of cybernetic government we face today. (What we do know about the efficiency of the project is that a transportation strike induced to overthrow Allende and his political allies prior to the military coup was successfully 'managed' with the help of CyberSyn.)

There would be a great deal more to say about the astonishing fit of Chilean socialism with the cybernetic promise[11] but for now we shall just use the *Verfremdungseffekt* of this exquisite montage to identify some basic traits of how power is modelled or dissolved in the leftist *machine à gouverner* suggested:

> *Equity*: the circular feedback systems identify lack and excess and carry out redistribution on equal terms. The Marxian motto "From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs." can be programmed as the default setting.
>
> *Access, Recognition, and Mediation*: everything that operates within the span of intelligible information will be heard by the *machine à gouverner*. It doesn´t discriminate between input senders, but simply computes everything into a singular output/course of action.
>
> *Accountability, Transparency*: as soon as the *machine à gouverner* is equipped with memory, the processes

11 I take most of my information from this amazing radio feature: Funk, Jannis, and Jakob Schmidt 2020. *Projekt Cybersyn – Chiles kybernetischer Traum von Gerechtigkeit*. Köln, Berlin: Deutschlandfunk/ WDR. Reading in English is to be found in Morozov 2014.

leading up to a specific output can be traced back. Every decision has its binary branch that can be ac-*count*ed for.

Real Time: brought up to a certain speed, the *machine à gouverner* can even account for its own decisions in what is perceived as real time by human beings

The director as *a machine à gouverner*

So much for the political promise of cybernetics in its leftist formulation. But how can these historical attempts to create a type of governance that will *systematically* shake off the fascist shadow inform our quest for the cybernetic director?

My underlying thesis is the following: after the fall/take-down of the director-as-*auteur*-figure (the ideologically 'superior' art genius of the *Kritik*-paradigm), another type of governance is urgently required. With some historical delay, but with a clear analogy in the historical transition to post-fascist forms of government, the process of theatre making is finally being integrated into a 'real time system with appropriate feedback mechanisms'. Halfway into the future's full realisation of this project, the director is currently assigned the position of *machine à gouverner*.

So how does this claim hold up when we apply it to the set of cybernetic political promises deduced above?

Equity - The cybernetic director (from here on referred to as: c.d.) prevents rehearsals from turning into a competition 'of the fittest'. Rejecting classical drama with its default hierarchisation within the cast, the c.d. prevents inequalities (for instance found in the concept of the protagonist) from perpetuating in the ensemble. As an alternative, the c.d. devises theatre pieces from scratch, where everybody can contribute according to their capacities, receiving more or less an equal space of attention in the final output. (Roughly speaking, a piece with 6 actors/performers amounts to 6 solos.)

Access, Recognition and Mediation - The cybernetic director has worked on his or her preconceptions to the point where they are free from social preferences, libidinal obsessions or racist bias. By being familiar with the norms underlying his or her own location as a speaker, the director can let the final piece be shaped and influenced to the maximum by the input from the ensemble .

Therefore, the c.d. listens, hears, and synthesises. In the output generated, the voices and the accounts (the inputs) of the actors are not pitted against each other or dialectically juxtaposed but aligned as events in a sequence in time.

Accountability, Transparency - The cybernetic director works in a space equipped with memory. Artistic decisions, also from older works, can be traced and explained.

Spontaneous intuitions (visions) have to be, and can be, argued for by the c.d.

The overall concept is always laid out as a map beforehand so as to guarantee that the ensemble can participate and have control. If turns are taken during the process, the binary option is openly discussed.

The c.d. strives to be unambiguous. For the sake of intelligibility, the signal is cleared of all subconscious *noise*. Under all circumstances, the c.d. avoids communicating *with the help* of subconscious noise.

Real Time - The cybernetic director can answer questions concerning process-based choices at any time. There is no 'lag' between unconscious intentions and formulable ambitions: the director's *want* and *need* are identical[12].

State of the arts

The above considerations strike me as an adequate description of status quo *progressive* directorial practices; they form an ideal I myself have been oriented by throughout the last 10-15 years and reflect my unconscious entanglement with the cybernetic hypothesis and its political promise.

As with everything that is more or less pure contemporaneity, it is hard to see the ideological inscriptions in the 'values' at hand. Fully unpacking the delineations of a directorial identity such as the one presented here would thus require an extensive critique of neoliberal governance as such – to which I can in this framework only refer further[13].

As if to complicate the issue even more, the Chilean example problematises claims that *technocratic politics* are synonymous only with neoliberalism. Knowing that equal (re) distribution of wealth and access might ultimately be a matter of numbers, a materialist left will necessarily have to find its own take on the precondition of digitality in cybernetic logics.

But whilst I understand the political ambition of bringing theatre institutions up to speed with fair, transparent, and reactive modern-day administrations (especially the German *Stadttheater* with its origins in small-territory feudalism) I still have reservations concerning the full integration of the actor-director relation into similar cycles of monitoring management.

Ways out / Alternative orthodoxies?

Despite the lack of public debate concerning the cybernetic contribution to our present-day neoliberal order, various authors – taking up the exact genealogy presented here – have made exciting suggestions for forms of resistance, be it through radicalised levels of withdrawal or the active disturbance of feedback-based communication: amplifying the 'noise' present in every signal[14].

I also believe that many artistic strategies – at least up until the social turn[15] in the performing arts – spring from a genuine resistance to the notion of cybernetic equalisation (*homeostasis*). In the final period of the *Regie-Theater* era, Christoph Schlingensief and Jonathan Meese for instance complicated signals by their sheer proliferation. Overstraining the governor in the steam-engine of theatre, their works are letting the centrifugal energy of the *autopoetic feedback loop* run out of control, thereby consciously steering the system of any given performance into turbulence. (Compare for instance Jonathan Meese's various performances of DE FRAU (*Volksbühne*, Berlin 2007) to the 'pathology of feedback' (Wiener 2017: 409) diagnosed in Norbert Wiener's grandchild)

At the present time, however, the question remains as to whether resistance of that kind is a viable option when applied to the actor-director relation. Unfortunately (at least for the case against the full integration of feedback logics I am making here) the recent calls for controlling the agency of the director have often been met by dismissals of the

12 To explain the scriptwriting terminology: whilst the want would be the conscious aspects of a person's actions, the *need* would be what they are *actually* trying to make happen; respectively their subconscious agency. In the psychoanalytic matrix classical characterisation operates by, *want* and *need* are often divided by a seemingly unbridgeable gap. Rehearsal processes can also be analysed by how the *want* and *need* are interwoven in the work, and which of the two is given the priority.

13 See for instance Stegemann, Bernd 2013 and Boltanski, Luc, and Eve Chiapello 2017.

14 See for instance Dany 2013.

15 The *social turn* is a phenomenon conceptualised by Claire Bishop (Bishop: 2012), describing the premises and effects of relational aesthetics throughout the last 3 decades. In a further spin it could be updated to what nowadays strikes me as a *sustainable turn*, i.e., a set of sensibilities problematising excess in the arts on various levels.

cybernetic epistemology as a whole. A common strategy of 'resistance', mostly used by directors who simultaneously manage a theatre/company, has thus been *mystification*[16]. The responses problematising 'communication' as defined by 'information theory' usually regress to a somewhat updated version of the *cult of the genius*.

Given the gravity of the abuses of power and the general cultural point of no return, the question of resisting control systems therefore has to be nuanced, foremost by bearing in mind the difficulty of dismissing the cybernetic paradigm altogether. Once we fully accept that the power differential between actor and director is *artistically valuable* but has to be *checked and balanced*, we can finally ask the urgent question: are there ways in which the director can be held accountable that are not based on cybernetic epistemology?

For the further pursuit of my research,[17] I hold the hypothesis that the 'old horse' of psychoanalysis, with its concepts of transference and countertransference, offers a timing and a model for artistic interaction that escapes the false promise of real-time accountability. In the tempo of active transference emerging between actor and director lies a pace that allows for rehearsal processes to unfold outside the realm of incessant assessment on the one hand, and that can still be documented and analysed in what Luce Irigaray has called a "restaging [of] *both* transferences" on the other[18]; thereby possibly allowing for response-ability on the director's as well as the actor's part, without in turn inscribing rehearsals into the circular logics of conscious management.

Looking into the 'feedback loop metaphor' of psychoanalysis – transference – is, of course, only one possibility for an alternative orthodoxy of accountability. In fact, any systemic suggestion that favours articulation and interest over *monitoring* might show ways out of the cybernetic loop.

I have tried in this essay to point out the trajectory cybernetic epistemology has taken through our field so far. In line with the logics of computational anticipation of the closest future (see Wiener's anti-aircraft weapon) I hope to have given enough 'data' for a critical perspective on what is to come. A scenario in which feedback-logics lose the dialectical tension of emancipation (from the regime of *Kritik*) and become systemic on their own terms strikes me as unfavourable for the artistic aspects of our profession. The circle is not the answer to every one of our problems.

16 The Belgian choreographer Jan Fabre can serve as an exemplary case here. In the interview that triggered the public response of 20 former dancers accusing him of sexism and sexual harassment – thereby pointing to what is very likely a systematic structure of power abuse in Fabre's company – he warns against the threat a certain sensitivity entails for the "s*acred* bond between choreographer and dancer." (Ómarsdóttir et al., 2018; my emphasis)

17 This article is part of my ongoing PhD-project at Stockholm University of the Arts: "The Deconstructed Genius – situating the director in a theater of the future" (Working title), 2019-2023.

18 "If I wrote up a case history ... I would not do it as it has always been done: by the 'report', the dissection, the interpretation of only the analysand's transference, but by restaging *both* transferences." (Irigaray 1977: 144) As Jane Gallop suggests, Irigaray calls for a new sort of psychoanalytic writing, one in which the analyst's mastery is undercut by the recognition that the analyst too has an unconscious which traverses the analytic scene. (Gallop 1982: 102)

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Yana Ross (1973) is a cultural nomad— from the age of five, she has been travelling through a vast variety of countries and cultures, absorbing experiences and adapting to various conditions of life and work. Her artistic passion is digging deep into a foreign culture to unveil a taboo subject which often is invisible to the locals. She then explores the themes in collaborative and improvisational methods often based on classical texts but ascued to transmit the main subject of research. Her Swedish *Uncle Vanya* took on ideas of 'forced' inheritance and gender equalities, *Our Class* in Vilnius with local history of genocide and Icelandic *Salka Valka* with a subject of incest and overwhelming sexual child abuse in a local society. All of her international productions since 2013 have been awarded Best Director award in respective countries. Ross is the first female director to work on legendary Volksbuehne stage in Berlin (Macbeth 2008) and the first and still the only female director who won the Golden Cross for best performance in Lithuania (2014, 2019). She now is part of the artistic team at Schauspielhaus Zurich where during her three-year tenure she has been shaping and navigating a state institution together with seven other artists: Trajal Harrel, Wu Tsang, Leoni Boehm, Nicolas Stemann, Alexander Giesche, Suna Geurler and Christopher Rüping.

INTERNATIONAL COLLABORATION
Grounding classics in local contexts

Yana Ross

How can one create a direct visceral connection with an audience? Find a subject grounded in a local landscape that is then framed by questions of culture and identity. This recipe – which often ignites, polarises and delights my viewers – leads to sharp social critique. I find this working method invigorating and fulfilling, and the actors who participate often become conscious of hidden issues in their societies. So why does one need an 'outsider' to unearth something unspoken and repressed? Precisely because our own emotionally charged and coded histories make us partial, sentimental and often blind-sighted to the obvious. I tend to bring scientific zeal and curiosity, the passion of a researcher and explorer crossing the tumultuous seas of collective memories. There are several components which must come to fruition to formalise this method. The foundation of this collaborative exploration is often a classical play. Chekhov and Ibsen are my best co-conspirators. They offer enormous scope for creating a new context and at the same time shape a rigorous structure and pose ethical and existential dilemmas that can be hijacked and adapted in a local constellation. Then, a big part of this recipe is an 'activation' key, a new engine to drive this classic model. The active key is a new optic, new lenses through which we, as an ensemble, will examine the text. This new framing, paradoxically, demands very scrupulous understanding of the original context: when and why the play was written. In the case of *The Seagull*, Chekhov cruelly makes use of his own personal relationships: the suicide of his best friend's son, the miscarriage of his lover, the list goes on… and the struggle between commercial success and the need to experiment, the essence of artistic calling and the sheer terror of becoming an 'established' artist– all this has to be deeply questioned from our own historical moment. How might we feel ourselves in the same grip of artistic terror? As Sue-Ellen Case argues:

> *The constitution of a performance text, separate but equal to the written one, implies a new dimension in the co-production of the text. The importance of the author's intent gives way to the conditions of production and the composition of the audience in determining the meaning of the theatrical event. This implies that there is no closure around the text, separating it from the conditions of its production.*[1]

1 Sue-Ellen Case, *Feminism and Theatre*. p. 117.

What we might then call the 'open-end' for creating a performative text has adaptation at its core. Freedom arises from staying true to the meaning and intention of the source text but allows us to invent a new language and to recreate the public sphere where the performance takes place. And now, to practical examples of how this works in rehearsals in different culture sites.

1. SWEDEN

Uncle Vanya, Uppsala Stadsteater 2014

My own first staging of Anton Chekhov took place in Sweden's Uppsala Stadsteater in 2014. I love and crave to work with big ensembles on big stages; the first impulse to create this work came from a need for a polyphonic play that could reflect a big community. When I started exploring *Uncle Vanya*, there was a 'eureka' moment; I asked myself: why is it called that? Why is the play not called *Voynitzki* (like Ivanov)

or *A Family* (like Three Sisters)? Who in this household uses this term? There is only one person, the niece, Sonya, who can utter this particular combination. This became one of the most important building blocks of the performance. To look at the play through Sonya's eyes. This is her uncle; this is her play. The second stone of the foundation was looking for parallels in contemporary Swedish society concerning financial entanglements relating to the spectres of the nobility. Despite substantial inheritances and economic and cultural privilege, some Swedish elites have claimed bankruptcy due to poor financial planning and irresponsibility. The new generation is stuck between responsibility and a need to establish their own identity outside family genealogies.

Exploration and collaborative steps started with a group of actors in the form of a workshop– I take the pressure out of the room by not being officially in an active state of rehearsal or production, which allows the group to think associatively, to let their minds wander, looking for personal and societal connections to the material. We brainstormed, read, played and cooked together. I was feverishly absorbing the 'Swedish', the peculiarities of the language, the fast and sharp sense of humour, the etiquette and intelligence the group was offering. We started counting how many shots of vodka the Doctor takes in Act 1 scene 1, and then continued exploring alcohol consumption throughout the play, coming to the conclusion that no one would be able to stand up if this amount was really consumed. We decided to embrace this extreme mode of presence. The weather is also extreme, the heat and alcohol gave us a precise atmosphere. Sonya's birthday– a great excuse to get totally smashed. When the curtain opened, the audience was faced with a comatose, wasted, stupefied group of characters. They were so inebriated they literally could not move. We pushed this further, nothing was supposedly happening for a good seven minutes of valuable stage time. The air was muggy and heavy, the audience… surprised! Slowly, excruciatingly slowly, the group decides to play a birthday song for Sonya, and they take what feels like an eternity to collect their instruments and plug in an electric guitar. Then, a slow number by The Doors develops into an explosive nervous shivery dance by Sonya– an expressionistic trip into her head perhaps, the vibrating pulse of her desire for Astrov. Once the song is over, all is back to the comatose hot summer day and Vanya is the most wasted of them all. In his state of inebriation, Vanya can offend anyone and everyone, spout insults at the Professor and make a real fool of himself.

Uncle Vanya, Uppsala Stadsteater, 2014. Photo by Micke Sandström.

Alcoholism and suicide are a dark taboo in Swedish society. The extreme visual and physical language that shaped this issue on stage no doubt strongly resonated with the audience. The actors connected viscerally with personal histories and their families' past.

Another decisive positive challenge in this production was that our Elena was pregnant. The actress Linda Kulle told me when I did the casting that she was pregnant and was worried how it might affect the process and playing the show. This immediately gave me the impetus to work through the idea of our Professor Serebrjakov being a possible father for this child and it also offered a new dynamic: Astrov falling in love with a very pregnant Elena. We wanted to empower the sexuality and voraciousness of a pregnant woman, not hide her desires. Their relationship was glowing and oozing sex. She does have sex with Astrov in this production, her big round belly pushing against the glass bathroom window in the seconds before saying good-bye. Perhaps a beautiful side note– we played this performance at the Scenkonst biennale festival after the baby was born, and Elena appears in the post-scriptum scene with a baby in her arms…

In order to give Linda space and safety to work professionally through such a late pregnancy, I decided to invite one more actress, Moa Silén, to develop the role of Elena at the same time. It was very important for us that two actors took equal responsibility at the same time, as opposed to one leading and the other 'jumping' in to take over. The result was a beautiful duet, both actresses developing their own characters, language and world to play Elena. And the theatre magic worked wonders. Moa Silén became pregnant and also managed to shed the fake belly and perform with her own real one!

The local Swedish world for this production developed from endless research and improvisations where we constructed our own family model. The setting became an old villa converted into a failing bed and breakfast with an air of claustrophobic co-dependency, addiction and casual cruelty. Swedish actors are all also excellent musicians. As children they go through mandatory instrument training and, as a result, can form a professional band on stage at any time! Live music became a major component of the commentary, irony and atmosphere in this performance.

Gothenburg Stadsteater, *A Doll's House* 2018

Another example of digging deep into Swedish taboos was my collaboration with Gothenburg Stadsteater on Ibsen's *A Doll's House*. This time, I was interested in the subject of identity politics, with Sweden becoming increasingly conscious of a strong post-migrant generation coming of age.

In terms of adaptation, this production also took a step further. I was taking responsibility for writing a new text. The writing sessions began with a series of workshops where we explored the subjects of racism, discrimination, national identity and sexism. Even though Swedish society is miles ahead of the rest of Europe in gender equality (all young fathers in the group had taken almost a year of paid leave to look after their new-born babies!), the place of a woman (and post-migrant) in Swedish society is still precarious. For this purpose, the adaptation called for turning Nora's friend (a female) into a sibling (male) thus surrounding a single female actress with four male partners. Nora functions in a patriarchal structure. We used a lot of humour and irony to poke fun at 'progress' in Swedish society as well. For example, when

Nora confronts her husband in the last scene (in our version, all four men multiply into her husband and the scene doubles and triples like a broken mirror). When they are called out on their sexism, they are genuinely surprised ("but Nora, I'm Swedish, all Swedish men are feminists at birth!"[2]). In this adaptation, Nora is played by Gizem Erdogan (Swedish with Turkish roots) and this Nora aggressively erases her cultural heritage, allowing herself to speak Turkish only to reprimand the migrant nanny. But when the marriage finally falls apart, Torvald snaps in a racist tirade: "Go back to where you came from, you dirty Turk!"

This dark side of a progressive and open-minded society becomes the focus in this production, the social trappings of the well-to-do middle class, young professionals caught in an overachieving and over-consuming capitalist hamster-wheel; women, in a double-bind of child-raising and pursuing careers. Nora's maturation in this performance is also radical. Her final words reveal a pregnancy she wants to terminate because "there is a chance that this child will be a boy". Her unwillingness to give birth to more males to perpetuate the patriarchy is a radical choice. Fairy tales need to be corrected, "a princess doesn't need a prince to be awake…"[3]; she breaks through the invisible glass window of the house only to be entrapped again by multiplied shiny princes who whisk her away to a Disney fantasy, also written by men. This Disney finale – with all male characters dressing her as Snow White and putting her to sleep – is a dark inversion of her desire to take control of the male narrative, which unfortunately we are very far from correcting.

2 Yana Ross, *A Doll's House* based on Henrik Ibsen.

3 Yana Ross, *A Doll's House* based on H. Ibsen.

2. ICELAND

Salka Valka 2017

Even though Chekhov's *Seagull*, heavily adapted with a group of Icelandic actors at the City Theatre (2015), has received many awards and travelled the world from Poland to Macao, I will focus on another adaptation of the Icelandic classic *Salka Valka* by the Nobel laureate Haldor Laxness. This production really polarised audiences and critics alike and has possibly made me persona-non-grata in the Icelandic theatre landscape for the next few years. The main reason for such a tumultuous response is the heavy revisionist position we took as a group looking at the primary themes of the novel. Universally admired as an uncontested feminist novel, the story traces the fate of a young girl (from age 11 to 26), her perseverance in the face of adversity and her relation to

Salka Valka, 2017. Photo courtesy of Reykjavik City Theater.

a business owner. It is celebrated not only as a coming-of-age story but as portraying a strong spirit of independence. We decided to focus on a rather sensational trope in the novel of a burgeoning romance between the 11-year-old and her 40-year-old stepfather.... A clear call to examine this 'love story' through the lens of pedophilia and also to question the canon of literary tricks that harvest a Nobel prize. To stage a critical narrative, we framed this performance through the meta-layer of a film crew with a female director at the helm. Long untouched passages of the original functioned as a film voiceover recorded in a visible studio; the 'live filming' was frequently broken by the crew arguing over the artistic value of the writing. Parallel love triangles between the artistic team on stage and the characters they performed created a tense and humorous atmosphere. Labour unions, family unions, child abuse and welfare, Icelandic national identity and the treatment of their elderly: no stone was left unturned in the rehearsal process. As a result, a three-hour journey through major taboos of child abuse in Iceland surfaced as one of the main subjects. It has to be mentioned that nine out of ten actors in our team disclosed personal cases of sexual abuse in their past. That is a truly disturbing fact. No doubt, the hardest Truth a local audience is forced to reckon with.

3. LITHUANIA

Our Class, National Theatre 2013

Although this chapter is about adapting classics, I'd like to take a moment to share some thoughts and experiences about the contemporary Polish play *Our Class* by Tadeusz Słobodzianek, which relies heavily on the epic history of the twentieth century and focuses on Polish collusion in a local pogrom during the Second World War, described in Jan Gross' book *Neighbours*. Since Lithuania has its own tumultuous Holocaust history, this production adapted Polish events to a local Lithuanian context. With a group of actors from the National Theatre, we decided to implicitly play this as Lithuanian epic theatre.

The most important research and preparation for the work took place in late spring of 2013. We had travelled to visit the sites where Lithuanian Jews were executed en masse (up to 5000 shot daily during the German occupation). It was the fastest genocide in Europe; 250,000 Jewish people were killed in six months at the start of the German invasion. Local citizens were often coerced into participating in these murders. We met and listened to survivors of Jewish ghettos in Vilnius and Kaunas, we took time to watch historical documentaries, visit synagogues and to let the horrors sink in. Actors had to face their own family histories. Some live now in apartments which became available after the owners were shot. Some remember their grandparents who rescued and hid Jewish neighbours and some heard that their uncles were those doing the shooting. The collective responsibility for the country's traumatic past has taken place as part of the process and gave a powerful result. This performance is still playing to a 700-seat sold-out audience at the National Theatre in Vilnius; after 9 years, a new generation of Lithuanians are being challenged with their local history.

Three Sisters, National Theatre 2017

And here's my favourite writer Chekhov again. Every time I picked up *Three Sisters*, I couldn't understand how servicemen in the army (which is so important to the play) can be made topical again, can function similarly to what Chekhov intended. Until 2014 that is, when Russia invaded Ukraine and suddenly I found myself in the middle of a very tense European military theatre. NATO fighter planes were constantly heard in the air over Vilnius. I saw men in uniform in local bars and on the trains. Suddenly, the army entered our daily civilian peripheral vision. I could consider a NATO base in Lithuania full of foreign troops such as Americans, Dutch and Polish, but what to do with the sisters? I realised that Lithuania, after breaking away from the Soviet Union, inherited a small Russian population, only five percent, a real minority, but they were very much part of my daily encounters on the streets and in the shops. What would happen to this play if the action took place in Lithuania, but the sisters were Russians, daughters of a Russian general who was stationed here during Soviet times, always and forever remembering a mythological Moscow, the capital of the Soviet Union, a country one can never go back to. Hence, 'to Moscow' gains a different layer once uttered from such a stage.

Processing these big building blocks with actors, we once again immersed ourselves in fieldwork. We travelled to a NATO base in Lithuania and spent some time with American, Polish and Lithuanian soldiers; their stories became precious cargo for the actors. We used many references to Russian history; the sisters, whom we deliberately contextualised as older women in their late 40s-early 50s, had been stranded in Lithuania after their father died. The play started to gain powerful urgency. We experimented with different languages on stage and decided that in order to authentically represent the NATO barracks we needed to speak more than just Lithuanian. Tuzenbach spoke German, Rode - American English, Vershynin became Verszynski (Polish) and so on. Andrej and the sisters often broke into speaking Russian among themselves. Quite a challenge for Lithuanian audiences to catch up with this polyphony in Act I.

Three Sisters, Lithuanian National Drama Theatre, 2017. Photo by Dmitrij Matvejev.

4. SWITZERLAND

Cherry Orchard 2019

The current focus of my work is concentrated on new cultural territory for me– Zurich, Switzerland. From 2019, I have been a member of the artistic leadership team and one of eight directors shaping and staging productions at

Schauspielhaus Zurich. This theatre has a special history as a refuge for progressive artists during both world wars and as a place for international voices. A strange cultural oasis in the middle of a hyper-rich conservative society. For someone like me, a perfect place to look 'under the rug', to dig around in the murky history of this 'neutral' country.

Cherry Orchard, 2019. Photo by Zoé Aubry.

Turning to my favourite classic, Chekhov– this time, to his last play, *Cherry Orchard*, we decided to look back at the ghosts in Switzerland's post-war closet. Since Ranevskaya would be played by the legendary Polish actress Danuta Stenka (who accepted my invitation to work in the German language without speaking it), we thought there was a strong need not to hide her identity but rather to embrace it, to integrate it into the fabric of the performance. Heavy adaptation work ensued. We went back to tracing the flow of Jewish refugees to Switzerland during WWII and found a peculiar story of a border guard rescuing a woman by marrying her and then losing his job and his status in the community. We uncovered an appalling history of *verdingskinder*– a Swiss phenomenon of abandoned/orphaned child slaves, those whose mothers became widows and (since women didn't have voting rights until 1971) were not allowed to raise their own children. These children were sold or given away for free at Sunday markets along with cows or sheep (our Lopakhin, a son of a slave in the play, took on this parallel). The complexity of mixed cultures/countries/ethnicities and languages was all absorbed deeply into this production, and as one of the most important layers – a psychic trauma (child drowning) came to the foreground. Ranevskaya returns in the source text to the place of her son's drowning, which triggers her unstable and vulnerable state. We used this as a foundation for researching numerous psychiatric and rehabilitation facilities surrounding Lake Zurich. There are 19 (!) sanatoriums where the upper-middle classes can repair their psyche while enjoying spectacular views of the lake and working closely with world's best mental health specialists. Here, as well, we did field research and travelled to these places, talked with doctors and patients and ate at the cafeteria… Then, we started improvising. A group therapy session (for our Ranevskaya, who checked into rehab convinced she was at home, delusional) became a grounding scene for the whole performance. The actors, speaking a mixture of German, Swiss and Polish, dug deep into the histories and cultural traumas of post-war generations. Many improvisations were based on free space given to a chance encounter of family members in a therapy session, opening up the history of the family. It was sometimes quite uncanny how

precise actors were with creating new text. Material, history, research, improvisations– all of it came together and gave them clarity to speak on behalf of these characters. Swiss audiences received it warmly. It was also invited to the Swiss Theatre Treffen festival, recognising the deep connection to local history. And a Polish community living in Zurich has also made an effort to see this performance.

5. CONCLUSION

Whatever location might summon me, curiosity to learn about people and culture, traditions and taboos, desires and traumas, is the driving force in my work. Engaging deeply and personally with a local team of actors, learning from and through them, shapes the concrete world of a new performance. But the strange feeling of always and forever being an outsider remains. A nostalgic longing for a permanent place of belonging is perhaps a feeling I cannot satisfy in such a professional landscape. The need to discover new places prevails, the terror of a new language, and the thrill at the same time. I'm often asked why I don't bring a group of my favourite actors together from all over Europe and create a performance in English. But through all this extensive international work, and precisely because of working in local cultures and local languages, I don't dare to take away the most essential tools from my collaborators– their own language, their own culture. Theatre can be universal only when it is first and foremost grounded in the local. Made for and by people for their local communities. Then the rest of us can translate, transform, learn and gain inspiration from the common themes and ideas in such artworks.

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LOOKING FORWARD

Pedagogies of Directing.

How has directing education evolved historically?

How does one find a pedagogical balance between the need to teach skills and the need to examine questions of contextualisation and interpretation while encouraging creative freedom?

How does a teacher create and maintain a socially responsible learning environment without unduly limiting a student's ability to take creative risks and depict the extremes of human behaviour?

How does one make students aware of the wide range of elements that are variables and are 'In play' when directing?

How does one help students understand the benefit of learning how a play has been constructed prior to attempting to deconstruct it?

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THE MURKY (HI)STORY OF EARLY DIRECTING EDUCATION and what we can learn from it

Pauliina Hulkko

1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

How are theatre directors educated in the Western context? Where are directors educated, and what are they educated for? Are there some necessary, even universal, skills that a person who instigates and leads a performance process requires? How should we perceive the relationship between craft, technique/methods and 'art' when teaching directing? Is there something that could be called 'pedagogy of directing'?

We will discuss the questions above against a historical backdrop, i.e., in the light of the history of modern directors' art and directing education. As we will see, even in its historical forms, directing can be perceived as a spectrum of similar but divergent practices taking place in the theatre. These practices, to put it simply, extend from staging dramatic plays through devising theatre to engaging in alternative dramaturgies – all including their respective spatial, textual, material, spectator-related, etc. features and choices. Today's directors might, rather than to the *auteur* of *Regietheater* or a *metteur en scène*, relate themselves to a facilitator, choreographer, dramaturge, musician, composer, orchestrator, or an "aesthete of theatrical forms" (Pavis 2020: 504). Instead of listing the pedagogical needs of a specific way of directing, or speaking of one pedagogy of directing, this article aims to outline a more generally applicable historical landscape on which we may begin to build our education.

The text has two points of departure. First, it stems from my experience of artist education. After 20 years of teaching mostly directors and dramaturges, eight years ago I was appointed as professor in charge of actor education at Tampere University (Finland). My time educating actors has verified that, contrary to what I had thought in the early years of my teaching career, higher education artist pedagogy is an area of expertise which cannot lean on artistic practice alone. No matter how motivated by and linked to the pedagogue's artistic experience (and likes) it may be, the education of artists requires proficiency and experience different from those learnt through mere practice. Similarly, no matter how much great directors may be superlative role models and sources of inspiration, they may not always make the best pedagogues of directing.

Nonetheless, the second starting point for this text is my own work as a director. This includes artistic research which I have carried out during the past twenty years through, and by means of, directing. In my own practice, apart from the *mise en scène*, directing includes dramaturging, scriptwriting, and also performing, to a varying degree. Originally educated as a dramaturge, I have spent most of my professional life as a freelance director making what I call 'material theatre', which refers to performances inspired by and rehearsed out of physical materials (the performer being one of them) and combining various forms of expression. I am drawn to the materiality of things, their *sensations* (Graver 1997: 231) and *affects* (e.g., Blackman 2012). This way of directing does not rest upon dramatic text, nor on human figure and interaction, and furthermore aims at something like 'deferred significance'; it is carried out by means of what I have come to call 'dramaturgical directing' (Hulkko 2013, 151), a notion referring to a process where meaning-making and form emerge from and amongst things and materials, as their *intra-action* (Barad 2007).

Bearing in mind the above-mentioned starting points and ideas, this article suggests viewpoints for critical director pedagogy. While attempting to recognise the professional,

artistic, and societal challenges that confront contemporary director education, the discussion is far from comprehensive either geographically or culturally. Its scope is limited to European and/or Western contexts, and the author's perspective is necessarily that of a Northern European theatre maker. Hence, a lot remains to be researched!

The article is divided into two parts. The first comprises a review of the historical development of director education. The emergence of the education of directing is observed in relation to acting, and through the evolution of the director's art and profession. The second part of the text is dedicated to reflections on what the education of directing could learn from its past. The article hopes to aid artist-pedagogues in building their own directing pedagogies and theories for the future.

2. THE BIRTH OF THE MODERN DIRECTOR'S ART AND ITS DEVELOPMENT IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

Adam J. Ledger (2019) recognises four strands through which the director emerged as an artistic force: a stage manager, a figure distinct from the author, the one who controls the new stage technologies, and a "theatre theoretician or pedagogue of her/his own right" (Ledger 2019: 4). Before there was formal education, directors arose from the 'business'. At its early stage, responsibilities that today belong to the director's duties had been, since ancient Greece, mostly carried out by choreographers, playwrights/poets or actors who took on the organisation, leadership and production of their performances and companies (Innes and Shevtsova 2013: 7–33). It was as late as the nineteenth century that the radically evolving theatrical environment demanded something like the modern director, a person who knows "about all areas of theatre in order to synthesise the elements of the production into an aesthetic whole" (Fliotsos 2010: 65). As Anne L. Fliotsos notes, the modern director who "coordinates the artistic and managerial functions of theatrical production" (ibid.) is both a craftsman and artist. Already Edward Gordon Craig from his own experience described a director as both a 'master craftsman' (Craig 1983: 57) and an artist. Craft is also appreciated in the contemporary theatre. British director Katie Mitchell (2008), among others, recognises a certain set of practical skills that can be used in every production. Mitchell writes that we should "think about directing as a craft, with skills that can be learnt and built up over time" (Mitchell 2008).

The tension between craft and art, together with their relative proportion in the curriculum, has remained a contested topic of directing and director education until today. What is noteworthy about Craig's definition, which was also shared by his contemporaries, is the way in which it seeks to substitute the director for the author. Craig writes that the moment the director becomes an artist "we shall no longer need the assistance of the playwright – for our art will then be self-reliant" (Craig 1983: 57). The birth of the director's art entails, if not the death of the author, at least a strong aspiration to overcome his authority over the stage.[1]

While the age of Enlightenment saw the star actor "directing the interpretation of a play and the acting of his troupe as well as scenic effects" (Innes and Shevtsova 2013: 33), the introduction of realistic and illusionistic scenery paved the way for the *designer-manager/director*, and the techniques

1 In her book *Theatre-Making: Interplay Between Text and Performance in the 21st Century*, Duška Radosavljevic describes the same phenomenon. She quotes Martin Puchner: "In order for [...] directors to attain the status of artists, they felt they had to fight for recognition at the expense of the dramatic text: theater was able to become art only by downgrading drama" (Puchner 2011: 293, cited in Radosavljevic 2013: 7).

of the modern director. One early example of this type of director is Lucia Elisabeth Vestris, or Madame Vestris, who was influential in England. Before turning into a progressive manager-director in 1830, Vestris had a prominent career as an opera singer and actress. She was particularly famous for her breeches roles, i.e., for playing male characters. Madame Vestris is considered the first director in England who co-ordinated "the acting, decor, sound effects, and lighting of a production without also performing in it" (Directing. *Encyclopædia Britannica*). She is also famous for introducing the 'box set' – a staging that featured a room – characteristic of the realistic stage (Appleton 1974: 74). During her director's career, Madame Vestris managed such theatres as the Olympic Theatre, the Lyceum, and Covent Garden Theatres in London (ibid.: 51).

As the nineteenth century advanced, both the directors' duties and their professional profiles multiplied. Alongside the still-existing *actor-manager*, several alternative structures emerged towards the end of the century: the German *bureaucrat-manager*, the Wagnerian *artist-manager*, as well as the *commercial-manager* or *impresario* typical of America but also prevalent in the United Kingdom as witnessed above. Each of these models established a prototype for the director we know today (Innes and Shevtsova 2013: 33.). The question of the professional profile and how the student is assisted in developing it, is also fundamentally important to contemporary directing pedagogy. Considering the multiplicity and diversity of the potential paths, professional mentoring and counselling forms an essential part of the directing curriculum.

Roxane Martin (2011) opens yet a new viewpoint in the discussion on the director's art and its history. She argues that directing became an art form only when the theatre director as an artist emerged. Martin writes that the "director assumes his artist's status at the very moment […] he creates an interpretation of a dramatic work on the basis of a scenic language of which he is the sole designer" (Martin 2011). According to Martin, we can thus speak of mise en scène as a veritable art form only from the 1880s onwards.

The emergence of theatrical naturalism is widely seen as the one sole "key factor in determining the emergence of the modern director" (Ledger 2019: 4). Naturalism called for scenic and psychological detail, "objectivity in presentation and individualised characterisation, as well as placing significant emphasis on social context" (Innes and Shevtsova 2013: 30). As Patrice Pavis notes, in the naturalistic theatre "the milieu determines the identity and the movement of the actor, and […] the materiality of the performance is thus subject to the interpretation of the work by the director" (Pavis 2013: 6, 7, cited in Ledger 2019: 4). Theatrical naturalism demanded a wide range of expertise. The person in charge of a production had to interpret novel dramatic texts, master the diversified stage techniques, and usher the actors to a new, naturalistic style of acting. This kind of theatre entailed meticulous preparation and longer rehearsal periods than before. We could argue that its contents – drama, stage technology, acting – have remained key components of most theatre director programmes up to the present. Just as modern directing emerged from, and was connected to, the changes in the 'theatrical conditions' (Innes and Shevtsova 2013: 33) of the late nineteenth century, so was its education.

3. THE MURKY HISTORY AND SOME EXAMPLES OF EARLY DIRECTING EDUCATION

Alas, how poorly documented and studied is the history of (Western) directing education.[2] Fliotsos laments the insufficiency of the data on the history of directing education in the USA. She writes that while the history of theatre education in general is well known, historians have paid "little attention […] to the education of directors" (Fliotsos 2010: 65). This is something we found out when delving into it. It seems that today, we can only guess how the early teaching was organised and what it was like. We do know, however, that the pedagogy of directing did not turn up out of the blue. Even if not a systematic process, it resulted from several developments that took place in various theatrical cultures. At the very beginning, teaching arose from and amid artistic endeavours, as a by-product of the emergent modern directing practices. Transmission of skills occurred through professional practice, without a formal setting, as an implicit part of artistic work. Here, the early directors played a fundamental role. It is easy to imagine that, at the time of its emergence, directing was not even recognised as a form of expression requiring formal, let alone institutional, education.[3]

On the basis of the fragmented documentation, some common tendencies in the progress of director education can be recognised. Several sources attest to the importance of acting for the pedagogy of directing (e.g., Innes and Shevtsova 2013: 2–3). As an individual field of education, directing is closely connected to, and even dependant on, the development of the practice and theory of acting. Interestingly however, as Lisa Peck (2021) notes, it is also vice versa, and "[m]ost formative acting training approaches have come from directors" (Peck 2021: 162). The interdependence of these two areas is noteworthy when discussing the history and the future of director education.

Two threads in particular link acting with the education of directing. First, it was in acting courses that directing classes were first introduced. Second, many of the early directors – who later influenced the education of directors – began as actors: André Antoine in France; Konstantin Stanislavski, Vsevolod Meyerhold, and Michael Chekhov in Russia and the Soviet Union; Gordon Craig in the UK; and Max Reinhardt in Austria and Germany, to name but a few.[4] Antoine, Stanislavski, and Chekhov also continued to play leading roles in their stagings. Interestingly, many of the above-mentioned directors were involved in the development of director education. Craig's idea of a potential director as "someone who had gained stage experience as an actor and who had moved on to explore the different elements of theatre" (Innes 1983: 209), demonstrates the interconnectedness of these two professions and forms of expression. This model of the 'actor-who-becomes-director' has, however, also survived to this day alongside the formal education of directing.

According to oftentimes contradictory sources, formal director education began to take shape in the first decades of the twentieth century. When studying the examples of education found in Russia/Soviet Union, Germany, Austria, Poland, and the United States, we can see how each of these educational constructs has its unique foundation, focus, and structure representing the distinct institutional, historical, cultural, political etc. context out of which it emerges. In addition, their curricula seem to differ according to their pedagogical

2 I wish to express my gratitude to Docent, Dr. Liisa Byckling and Professor Nikolai Pesochinsky for their invaluable assistance in finding literature on Russian theatre education.

3 The gradual beginning might be one reason for the sporadic and unsystematic documentation on the early director training.

4 As well-known, they were preceded by George II, Duke of Saxe-Meiningen, whose elaborate stagings for Meininger Hoftheatertruppe with their carefully planned, lengthy rehearsals and well-orchestrated crowd scenes paved the way for modern directing. (Innes and Shevtsova 2013: 37.)

approach, even if in many cases they are impossible to judge due to lack of evidence. Many of our examples also have a lot in common, most importantly an understanding of the director's work as a significant and independent art form, and they all arise from, and in tandem with, the newly born art of modern directing.

In Russia, from the 1870s onwards, theatre schools were founded with "divisions of ballet, drama, directing, and opera" (Theatrical Education. *The Great Soviet Encyclopedia*).[5] It appears however, that director education proper began much later. The leading theatrical figures who revolutionised the art of acting – Stanislavski at the Moscow Art Theatre, and Meyerhold in his directions and acting workshops in Petrograd (as St. Petersburg was called in 1914–1924) – seem to have acknowledged the significance of the director's art from very early on.[6] Meyerhold was also the one to initiate the teaching of directing in Russia. This took place in 1918–19 when he organised "Courses of Skills in Stage Production" in Petrograd (Pesochinsky 2018: 50). These courses with a structured study plan, "were held under the auspices of the newly established Theatre Department of the Commissariat of Enlightenment" (Braun 2013: 154). They aimed to educate "theatre directors together with set designers on a platform of traditionalism and futurism" (Pesochinsky 2018: 50). Meyerhold acted as the deputy head of education. Edward Braun writes that the first course which ran from June to August 1918 was attended by nearly a hundred students, and it "consisted of evening lectures designed to give a 'polytechnical education in the theatre arts'" (Braun 2013: 154). The courses had some resemblance to Meyerhold's earlier acting Studio. In addition, "considerable stress was laid on the need for cooperation between the stage-director and the designer" (ibid.). Being the first of their kind, Meyerhold's courses can be considered the beginning of directing education in Russia.

From this beginning, the education of directing in the Soviet Union developed swiftly. In Leningrad (as Petrograd was renamed in 1924), a special degree programme in theatre directing started at the State Institute of Performing Arts in 1925, which makes it "the first institution of higher learning in the world to teach the directing profession" (Russian State Institute of Performing Arts website). Moscow was five years behind, gaining its directing department in 1930. The Leningrad programme was led by Vladimir Solovyov, a long-time associate of Meyerhold. According to Nikolai Pesochinsky, its instruction reflected new ideas within theatre, such as "the independence of theatre nature and form, the refusal of illustrating literature on stage in favor of creating a new form of material from a combination of imagination, observations and literature" (Pesochinsky 2019: 50). In addition, special attention was paid to "oriental traditions of symbolic theatricality" (ibid.), which clearly reflected the artistic interests of Meyerhold and his colleagues.

Meyerhold's influence on the evolution of director education did not stop there. After relocating to Moscow, he continued teaching. Even if he taught mainly biomechanics to the actors, it is more than probable that directing classes were also included in his teaching, which from 1921 took place under the State Director's Workshop (GVYRM) and from January 1922 onwards under GVYTM, the State Theatre Workshop – which later merged with other theatre schools to form GITIS, the State Institute of Theatrical Art. (Pitches 2003: 38.) In 1930, the faculty of directing and pedagogy was established at GITIS, which is known today

5 The first theatrical school in Russia had been founded as early as in 1673.

6 In its programme for 1916–17, Vsevolod Meyerhold's actor training studio in St. Petersburg lists "The roles of the stage director and designer in the theatre" as one of the "subjects of discussion". The programme of the studio called "The Love of Three Oranges" says that all 13 "subjects for discussion serve a clear purpose: to demonstrate the value of the essentially *theatrical* elements in the art of the theatre". (Braun 2016: 186–187.) This proves how important scenic thinking was seen in the early actor training.

as the Russian Institute of Theatre Arts (Russian Institute of Theatre Arts Wikipedia website).

Max Reinhardt founded an acting school at the Deutsches Theater, Berlin in 1905. The school, which in 1981 was renamed Hochschule für Schauspielkunst Ernst Busch, added directing to its curriculum in 1931. (Hochschule für Schauspielkunst Ernst Busch website.) Reinhardt fled Berlin and founded his own director education in Austria. This took place in Vienna, with the establishment of the Schauspiel-und Regieseminar, a national higher education institution which opened in 1929 at the Schlosstheater Schönbrunn.[7] At the beginning, the seminar had a two-year curriculum aiming at a balance between theoretical studies and practical theatre work. Theatre director and intendant Emil Geyer (executed in 1942 at Mauthausen concentration camp) was appointed as its first director. The seminar website reads that "[g]roup teaching, scene work, student performances, interaction with well-known theatre people belonged to the school's essential features" (Reinhardt Seminar website) and distinguished it from common theatre education. Diverse interaction with the professional field and the surrounding society is one of the qualities this early education shares with much of contemporary director education.

In Poland, the first directing department was opened in 1933 at the newly established National Institute of Theatre Arts in Warsaw (→ 1946–96 State Higher School of Theatre PWST → Aleksander Zelwerowicz National Academy of Dramatic Art). According to Kazimierz Braun (2001), this was the first academic-level directing department in the world. The instruction at the department lasted three years. Both the directing and acting education programmes were structured similarly, instruction being divided into 'practical' and 'theoretical' blocks. The difference between the two programmes was that in acting, practice comprised about two thirds of the schedule, whereas in directing, theory was "emphasised, in order to provide future directors with a good general liberal arts education" (Braun 2001: 15) – a feature characteristic also of many contemporary directing programmes.

The theoretical block of the directing curriculum consisted of a wide range of subjects: the history of theatre, drama, literature, and stage design, as well as the history of music, opera, and ballet. Directing students were also to learn cultural history, the theory of literature, drama, and poetry, aesthetics, philosophy, sociology, and psychology, all taught by university professors. Hence, the theoretical content resembled an academic curriculum. (Ibid.) The practical block of directing had two subject groups. The first included directing seminars taught by "professors who were masters in their field" (ibid.) and lasted through the three years of studies. The so-called technical subjects – stage movement, choreography, acting exercises for directors, music appreciation, voice technique, set and costume design – formed the other part of the practical classes. Each year of the programme was structured differently. During the first year, "students focused on theory and took some preparatory technical subjects" (ibid.), whereas the second year was spent outside the academy in a professional theatre assisting a professor-director. In the final year, while still attending classes, the student had to direct a play on their own under the supervision of a professor. After three years, the graduates received a professional certificate qualifying them to work in professional theatres. As Braun notes, directing students were usually professional actors, which is

7 Today, Reinhardt Seminar Department of Drama (Institut für Schauspiel und Schauspielregie) forms part of The University of Music and Performing Arts Vienna. Its website reads that Max Reinhardt explored the possibilities of the stage from chamber plays to large space stagings, from intimate scenes to mass spectacles, from contemporary dramas to non-verbal performances, developing the actor's art and creating new scenic spaces and representing the very idea of modern theatre directing. (Reinhardt Seminar website.)

further evidence of directing and acting being intertwined, as they still are today.

In the United States, the first directing classes were organised in 1912. Basing herself on Clifford Hamar's *The rise of drama and theatre in the American college curriculum, 1900–1920* – a rare historical account of early directing education in the USA from 1952 – Fliotsos (2010) writes that the classes were aimed at teachers who directed school plays. Between 1912 and 1920, as many as 28 institutions "offered courses in play production, which included technical aspects of staging a play" (Fliotsos 2010: 65). It is not clear how these courses evolved over the following decades. In the USA, theatre courses in general gained popularity after the Second World War. In the 1950s and 1960s, the number of academic directing courses increased remarkably with the growth in the number of M.FA. programmes in higher education. (Ibid.)

One interesting example of early directing education in the United States is the Dramatic Workshop which the German director Erwin Piscator established at the New School for Social Research in New York after immigrating from Europe in 1939. Education at the Dramatic Workshop began in January 1940 with twenty students attending evening classes. The first full academic year 1940–1941 saw a rise in the number of students and the range of main subjects. Even if "[i]nitially the emphasis of the courses was […] on playwriting" (Willett 1978: 6), twenty directing students, also attended the workshops in the first semester (Dramatic Workshop of the New School for Social Research catalogue 1940 - 1941). John Willett writes that the method was to "involve the student in every aspect of the theatre, over and above his own field of study" (Willett 1978: 6). Piscator himself took charge of the directing students and worked them hardest of all – after all "the would-be directors should have some knowledge of every field" (ibid.). One key feature of the workshop was to make "a school that is a theatre and a theatre that is a school" (ibid.). Besides the repertoire itself, Piscator also wanted the audience to attend lectures, play readings, and rehearsals in connection with the plays (ibid.: 7.). This reflects how important were a lively repertoire and close audience relation for directing education, with the 'theatre machine' they entail, as they still are.

As a politically aware leftist theatre artist, Piscator wanted to strengthen non-commercial theatre in the USA. He wanted to "train students for the various branches of theatre and by building up a working ensemble 'to stimulate the development of the repertory theatre as a non-commercial institution of artistic expression'" (ibid.). Piscator aspired to non-commercial theatre which was not "limited by the box office" (Piscator 1939: 2). He finishes his prologue to the first course catalogue as follows:

> *Whoever really feels the call in a genuine quest for the content of air, in the search for truth, in the will toward perfection of the individual and of society, in freedom of thought and of expression, may enter the theatre without hesitation or fear. By his talent, his industry, his profound respect for human dignity and worth, he alone gives to art its eternal life.*
>
> (Ibid.)

These words not only speak of Piscator's political convictions but also of how art pedagogy in general is informed by ideologies. This holds particularly true for the education of directors whose art essentially conveys and is

founded on their world view – regardless of their practice or style of directing.

4. TOWARDS AN INDEPENDENT DIRECTING PEDAGOGY

In many directing programmes, the content and methodology of the pedagogy of directing are still defined by the artist-pedagogue's pre-existing career. Moreover, many directors still enter the industry without formal education. Richard Trousdell (1992) and Tom Mitchell (1992) note that in 1992, the majority of American directors learnt their profession through practice. Mitchell writes: "Most directors learn their craft through some kind of apprenticeship, either as assistants to senior directors, or as actors, designers, or stage managers who absorb ideas about directing by working with a variety of good or bad role models" (Mitchell 1992: 52, quoted in Cole 2008: 191.). Mitchell notices that even if this can be an effective way of learning a craft – and the same holds true for all learning based on imitation – it "perpetuates idiosyncrasy in directing practice as one director mimics the personality traits of a mentor" (ibid.). Harmful identification may still occur in director education, especially if it lacks proper teaching methods, and is based on the example given by the artist-teacher without any other pedagogic ground but professional experience.[8]

The lack of knowledge described above concerns not only the history but also the present state of directing pedagogy. Peter Benjamin Welch remarks that "[t]he question of what happens in the contemporary undergraduate directing classroom – what is taught, how it's taught, and why – is one that has yet to be deeply explored" (Welch 2010: 3–4). Welch calls for scholarship "on the actual teaching of directing" (ibid.: 5). Research on directing education is necessary for many reasons. Besides consolidating pedagogical thought and practice, it would help us contextualise the director's art in its varying aesthetic, historical, political, and technological contexts and afford it justified argumentation in the changing cultural and societal conditions.

Yet, the list of historical omissions that impact on the present state of directing education is even longer. Trousdell complains of the lack of scholarship and theory in the director's art and profession writing: "Unlike acting, where we have many theories and methods to guide us, directing offers few schools of thought about its nature, preparation, or technique" (Trousdell 1992: 25). He continues by saying that even in formal classes, directing is taught with "methods borrowed from the visual arts, acting, or literary criticism" (ibid.). Katie Mitchell, who has not gone through formal directing education states that "I find it strange that most actors, at least in the UK, undergo a structured training, whilst directors do not" (Mitchell 2008). Jonathan Cole (2008) also notices "a general lack in the codes and structures of teaching directing, but also the difficulty of communicating pedagogically the function of the director" (Cole 2008: 191).

Cole's acute remark speaks of the multimodality of the director's art, and the complexity of the director's function. In a situation where both the art of directing and its education lack scholarship and theory, critical enquiry is urgently needed. Above, we lamented the insufficient research on the history of directing education emphasising the bond between directing and acting. Pavis argues that even though many contemporary directors still concentrate on the directing

8 In Finland, the majority of professional theatre directors have a higher academic degree in directing, some also in dramaturgy or in acting. The link between the field and academia is, however, complex, and often the "exigencies" of practice – such as repertoire, style, and the necessity of employment – affect pedagogical choices without them being questioned.

of actors, "the *metteur en scène* cannot be reduced to the role of director of actors" (Pavis 2020: 503). We could even claim that directing as an independent artform can attain its sovereignty only by breaking away from its historical correlations, especially the authority of acting. Acting, with its inherent anthropocentrism and commitment to the human form and interaction, carries bourgeois values and their embedded mindset. To question these values, directing should examine and hopefully reinvent its relationship with the performer.

To conclude, we maintain that directing and its education are in urgent need of a methodology and theory of their own, and of their historical genealogies. When outlining contemporary education, we should keep in mind that each historical, cultural, and political context defines the art of directing in its peculiar manner and concepts. As Peter Boenisch points out: "terms such as directing, producing, *mise en scène* and *Regie* are not simply mere 'translations' in different languages for one and the same general theatrical principle of 'directing' *as such*" (Boenisch 2013: 7). Therefore, we should not speak of a pedagogy of directing, but rather of *pedagogies of directing*. As argued above, director education at the level of higher education cannot rely on practice alone, but should be examined and elaborated at the intersection of 1) **the art of directing**, 2) **the pedagogy of directing**, and 3) **artistic or artist-pedagogic research on directing**. Only then can the education of directing become a legitimate discipline with its own body of knowledge, and only then can the director's art meet the demands of future performing arts, and justify itself in a world of tortuous challenges.

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WIDENING THE FRAME
Some thoughts on a contemporary, inclusive approach for training young directors

Kevin Kuhlke

The meaning of the term *inclusive education* has widened considerably since I was introduced to it in the early 1980s when I was studying Special Education. At that time, it referred almost exclusively to the practice of mainstreaming primary school students with special physical or intellectual needs into standard classrooms. Today the term refers to the educational imperative of ensuring that every student's life experience will be honoured and respected regardless of their socio-economic, religious, racial, or ethnic backgrounds, physical, neurological or cognitive abilities, sexual orientation or gender identity. I would add aesthetic preference to that list.

This chapter describes some ways I have widened the frame of my introductory directing class to ensure that the fundamental skills of script analysis, staging, composition and conceptualisation be taught in ways that are inclusive and respectful of the students' diverse identities without sacrificing pedagogical rigour. These have included expanding the range of dramatic, scholarly and conceptual material and allowing students much more agency in selecting and interpreting play scripts. It has also, and in some ways more importantly, included my willingness to actively recognise, interrogate and work to loosen the influence of my own assumptions and aesthetic preferences.

When I first began teaching directing, I thought my job was to help students learn how to use analytical tools and dramaturgical research to dig beneath the surface of a text, discover *universal* truths and then use the rehearsal process to excavate, activate and reveal those truths through inventive and dynamic staging. Over the years, I came to realise how deeply my concept of the universal was heavily influenced by my assumptions about the world based on my life experiences and my specific location in the American social context. During decades of watching hundreds of student-created autobiographical theatre pieces based on deeply personal life experiences, time and again I witnessed how profoundly unique each student is. Many had grown up in situations totally foreign to my life experience. Some had experienced life events that were profoundly disturbing and left me wondering how they had managed to survive. Several held points of view toward the American cultural landscape and the world at large that were very different from mine. But they all created compelling work that I, as a theatre artist, recognised as authentic and a key to ensuring continued relevance for the theatre and the future of the field. It was clear to me that I had no right to assume anything about any of my students, ever, and so should always question the assumptions that I knew, being human, I would inevitably make about them. It also became clear that in order to maintain an inclusive learning environment I needed to periodically re-examine and redesign my syllabus and approach to teaching in order to widen the frame of the class.

What follows is a summary of the current iteration of the Introductory Fundamentals of Directing class I teach to beginning undergraduate directing students. A primary pedagogical goal of this class, in addition to teaching fundamental skills and encouraging students to create work from their perspective, is to broaden their exposure to dramatic material, narrative content, forms of dramaturgical research and theatrical practice. My hope is to help them widen their aesthetic and cultural frames in order to expand their understanding of a director's role in the creative process and their own perceptions of human behaviour.

1. UNDERSTANDING THE FRAME

Before getting into the nuts and bolts of play analysis and theatrical composition, I begin my class with a series of short lectures designed to familiarise students with the role and responsibilities of the director, gain an understanding of what is *in play* when directing a production and appreciate the importance of conscious contextualisation.

What does a director do?

The first lecture frames the role of the director as the person primarily responsible for creating *meaning* and *resonance* on stage. I state that a director does that through interfacing the *real* (staging, design and action), and the *imaginary* (the narrative world of the play) by using discursive and presentational symbols. Discursive symbols being those whose meaning is achieved through accumulation, like language and narrative, and presentational symbols, such as staging and visual design elements, whose meaning is received immediately. I suggest that the selection of symbols and the assessment of the meanings an audience may ascribe to them has become more complicated in the past thirty years for various reasons and that a young director needs to understand and learn to embrace the contemporary social landscape; a landscape in which there are fewer universal cultural agreements that can be taken for granted. One of the first things to examine as a means towards understanding the fluidity of the current cultural moment is the concept of the *relativity of meaning*. I address that in the second lecture.

Relativity of meaning

In this lecture, I define the word *meaning* as the *significance* of the elements on stage and emphasise how crucial it is for a young director to understand that nothing on stage has one irreducible meaning outside the theatrical and dramatic context in which it exists. I suggest that just because something has deep meaning for a director does not mean that an audience will automatically share a similar appreciation of that meaning. I further suggest that the meaning or significance of every element depends on how it has been arranged in relationship to the other elements. I will often reference the linguist Claude Levi-Strauss who argued that the error of early linguistics was in focusing too exclusively on the terms instead of the relationship between the terms, his point being that a term's significance depends on its location in the context. In an attempt to get students to understand and identify all of the elements that are *in play* in a work of live theatre, I explain that, in theatre, context includes, among other things, the dramatic action, the text, emotional points of view, staging, all design elements, the time period in which the production is set, the time it is performed, which part of the country it is being performed in, as well as the director's interpretation of all these elements. I emphasise the importance of carefully and consciously considering where, when and how an element is located in the context of the production. I explain that the deliberate arrangement of elements enables an audience to assess the production with a more informed understanding, which stimulates their willingness to more fully project meaning onto what they are watching.

For example, a student director needs to consider that a character engaged in full and openhearted weeping may evoke sympathy, revulsion, confusion or curiosity from an

audience depending on what the character is weeping about, when in the narrative they are weeping, where the character is located on the stage, the cultural identity of the character and the social context in which they are living. Is the character weeping over a spouse murdered by a police officer or over being found guilty of a heinous crime? Are they downstage centre or upstage left facing away from the audience? Are they on screen and is the image fully saturated or pixilated? It almost goes without saying that the same event in a play may have very different emotional meanings for different characters in the play. A beginning director also needs to understand that the events in a production can have very different meanings for different members of the audience. There are any number of obvious contemporary examples of different people having very different points of view towards the same personal or national or international event and how those points of view may change over time. I refer to my experience witnessing several very heated arguments in the theatre after seeing Mamet's original production of *Oleanna* in New York. The recent Broadway production of Jeremy O. Harris' *Slave Play* stimulated a similar level of post-show arguments. I suggest that a contemporary audience in New York would receive Griffith's *Birth of a Nation* very differently from an audience in the early twentieth century. I may ask students to consider a situation in which something as devastating as the death of child might not be considered exclusively a tragedy as, for instance, when the death of one child may give life to another through an organ transplant.

I also talk about a dilemma facing contemporary directors. Efficient dramatic narrative storytelling requires a director to select and lean on elements whose meanings they assume will be understood and resonate with the majority of the audience without laborious explanations. But, unless a director is careful and mindful, that kind of necessary theatrical and dramatic shorthand can unwittingly perpetuate the representation of injurious cultural stereotypes. The complicated nature of the selection process is something I address in a subsequent lecture. At this point I simply make a suggestion: a young director needs to understand that an audience will assume that everything they are seeing has been selected and arranged intentionally. Subsequently, a director must accept that every production they mount presents a point of view toward the events in the play and by extension a point of view towards the world at large. Whether that point of view has been consciously considered or not, it will be ascribed to the director. Which is why I think the questions around interpretation and contextualisation have become central to the training of young directors, especially when considering issues of inclusion.

Contextualisation

In this lecture I describe contextualisation as how a director manages the relativity of meaning in the arrangement of all the production elements. I illustrate the importance of contextualisation by citing the following example from my own work.

When I was starting my career thirty years ago, I directed a workshop production of *The Changeling* with a group of students, primarily to understand the different ways iambic pentameter and imagery were handled in Jacobean tragedy and the works of William Shakespeare. Since it was a workshop, I thought I could simply 'do the play' without any contextualising interpretation. But once I saw the production in front of a downtown New York audience I realised the

profound mistake I had made. The absence of a contextualising frame resulted in heightened awareness that the inherent misogyny in the play had been left unexamined and unquestioned. This made it very difficult for the audience to receive the production. Although the students had done an exceptional job, I realised that I had created something I could not fully stand behind. After having my teeth soundly and rightfully kicked in by various colleagues, I understood in my gut the absolute need for interpretation and contextualisation.

I share this experience with students as an example of how it is no longer possible for a director to naively assume they can simply 'do the play' without some consideration being given to addressing often unexamined cultural assumptions embedded in the text. This does not mean directors have to delete or sanitise content. It simply means they have to become conscious of it and make a decision with regard to how they want to address it or consciously *not* address it. Since staging *The Changeling*, I have seen other Jacobean tragedies that have very consciously embraced and foregrounded the misogyny that is at the heart of many of those plays. This was done as a way, I think, of ensuring the audience would fully grasp its brutality and possibly question the cultural context enabling that behaviour. How a director chooses to contextualise material is an outgrowth, and living embodiment, of their interpretation of the material. In the following lecture I suggest that a director's interpretation of the material is what guides the process of contextualisation.

Interpretation

As a young theatre maker in the 1970s, I was very influenced by Susan Sontag's article *Against Interpretation*. At that time, I thought that if a theatre artist paid too much attention to presenting interpretations of narrative content, it limited their creative freedom. I viewed theatre as a means to escape the confines of the social status quo embedded in all narrative content, no matter how controversial that content might be. I aspired to make art that transcended all the social trappings of the status quo. However, it seems to me now that the artistic expansiveness of that time, when the mission of the artist seemed to be to transgress all social and aesthetic boundaries, was ironically dependent upon the assumed stability of those very boundaries. It tacitly banked on the resilience of the status quo to bend but not break in the face of those acts of artistic transgression. I think we have moved fully into a different cultural moment in which the resilience of the status quo has been profoundly destabilised. Depending on one's perspective, the cultural structures that supported that assumed resilience have been either unmasked or irreparably damaged. In either case, any attempt to escape or transcend the restrictive social context and live fully in a world of 'pure' artistic creation when working with narrative art no longer appears to be a feasible or desirable option for many of my students. At present, many of them view the rejection of interpretation as simply an unconscious, irresponsible and somewhat privileged act. Maintaining an inclusive environment in the classroom requires conscious interrogation and interpretation of material in order to make choices regarding contextualisation. In short, a young director needs to understand very quickly that every production, like the evening news, is presenting an interpretation of events. Part of a director's job and responsibility is to decide what story they are choosing to tell with the story they are telling and then strive to tell it effectively. They do that by selecting and arranging all the

elements in the production. In my next lecture I refer to that process of selection as the search for the concrete detail.

The concrete detail

I am borrowing the term 'concrete detail' from the French philosopher, author and playwright, Helene Cixous. She and I corresponded when I was directing her play *Drums on the Dam*. In one email I shared with her my process of searching for elements to include on stage that had projective value beyond their utilitarian purpose. She wrote back something along the lines of: "ah, you are searching for the *concrete detail*." I assumed she was using the term concrete detail to refer to any element in a production that is sufficiently anchored in some reality for an audience to recognise it, while simultaneously creating an emotional and thematic resonance that is not innately embedded in or associated with the utilitarian function of the detail. The piano in August Wilson's *The Piano Lesson* is an obvious example. Blanche's paper lampshade in *A Streetcar Named Desire* is another example I use with students. It functions practically as a way to help her attract male interest and maintain an illusion about her age and image of herself. It is also emblematic of her desire to live in a world of refined beauty. Seeing it violently ripped off the light fixture by Stanley at the end of the play can be experienced as a second rape, this time a brutal violation of her entire being.

I emphasise that narrative art, and most theatre is narrative art, requires the director to be very selective and efficient when choosing which elements to include on stage. The selection process needs to be meticulous and, as the novelist Willa Cather said concerning narrative writing, is almost always a matter of simplifying. Part of a director's job is deciding how little they can put on stage and still ensure maximum active projective participation by the audience. This does not mean that a stage needs to be bare, but that every element should be contributing to the progression of the narrative and the conceptual interpretation of that narrative. Ideally, that progression would include many moments of robust contradiction. As I mentioned earlier, the selection and contextualisation of elements has grown increasingly complicated over the past decades. On the one hand, narrative art requires the ability to lean on cultural assumptions that are assumed to be agreed upon in order to enable efficient story telling. On the other hand, a young director will most likely be aware, or will become aware, that many of those cultural assumptions are erroneous and sometimes damaging. I think the concept of inclusion in narrative theatre must encompass the full range of human experience, from the most vile to the most sublime, not just what is culturally pressing at the time. That said, I think directors must be very mindful of the immediate cultural zeitgeist of the times in which they are creating. I do not see any way around a young director building the capacity to accept that the selection of concrete details will be complicated. It requires courage, humility, intelligence, intuition, research, compassion, an open mind and an open heart.

We then discuss how the selection of concrete details (symbols, images, staging, design and acting choices) has become increasingly complicated due to the breakdown of cultural, religious and political meta-narratives.

Meta-narratives

By meta-narratives I am referring to the term made popular by Francois Lyotard in his book *The Postmodern Condition*. Meta-narratives are the grand, broad and influential social, political or religious narratives about human life

and culture that have been used historically, and are still used, to contextualise lived experience and legitimise behaviours from spiritual devotion to social liberation to cultural and human genocide. Various religions and political movements are founded on meta-narratives that valorise their members and relegate non-members to second-degree status. Given the array of belief systems and understandings that will exist in any given contemporary audience, a director cannot assume that there will be a consensus with regard to understanding the intent of key dramatic moments, unless their work is consciously contextualised both dramaturgically and in concrete scenic terms. In other words, Shakespeare could generally assume that the majority of his English audience believed in Hell as an actual location and accepted the legitimacy of the monarchy and their own location in the meta-narrative of the Great Chain of Being. A director in the early nineteenth century prior to Darwin could assume that the majority of the American audience believed in Creationism due to the Christian meta-narrative. A director in 1930 could assume that the majority of an American audience still accepted the 1896 Supreme Court separate but equal ruling, predicated on a meta-narrative regarding race that legally legitimised racial segregation. They could assume that the majority of an American audience of the early 1960s was much more accepting of the 'boys will be boys' rationalisation for sexual harassment predicated on a meta-narrative regarding normative gender roles. A contemporary director cannot make similar assumptions about the audience. This does not mean dated and 'problematic' material cannot be done, provided that its tacit meta-narratives are contextualised in some way.

Meta-narratives are exclusionary by nature. An inclusive classroom needs to create space for an examination of the potential influence of a wide range of exclusionary meta-narratives. A student director needs to consider the ways in which meta-narratives influence an individual character's points of view toward themselves, the world and other people. Differing points of view toward meta-narratives such as a religion, a political system, or cultural identities, may be the core source of much interpersonal and intrapersonal conflict in narrative theatre. I define interpersonal conflict as conflict between characters and intrapersonal conflict as conflict within a character. Hamlet is an obvious example of a character riddled with intrapersonal conflict. A director's job includes identifying and activating interpersonal and intrapersonal conflicts partly through identifying the meta-narratives that may have influenced the character's actions and emotional points of view.

After discussing meta-narratives, I address ways to attack tacit assumptions unconsciously embedded in a play in order to make them visible, if that is something the director is interested in doing.

Attacking the play from within

The concept of attacking a play from within refers to a director's efforts to illuminate or draw an audience's attention to cultural assumptions that are latent but unexamined in the play. Through doing this, a director can widen the frame of the production and an audience's perception of the play. One example I use is from my production of Peter Weiss's *Marat/Sade*.

When I directed *Marat/Sade* in 1993, I was very influenced by Katherine McKinnon's book *Only Words*, which, among many things, questioned when words are viewed as language and when they are viewed as action. If a person

yells ‘fire’ in a crowded theatre the word ‘fire’ can be viewed as action since it creates panic. If a person yells a derogatory term at a woman on the street, even though it can also create panic, the word is viewed as language. This seemed like a clear example of the eternal conflict between aspects of the First and Fourteenth Amendments in the American Constitution: the rights of the individual for free expression vs the rights of the public for equal treatment under that law, including equal access to public space. The conflict between the rights of the individual and the rights of the public are at the core of *Marat/Sade*. During my analysis, it seemed to me that Weiss, by casting a female patient without agency to play Charlotte Corday, had unintentionally repeated what the Jacobins had done to Corday, which was to rob her of her sense of agency. At her trial, the Jacobins dismissed her assertion that when she murdered Marat she had acted on her own, their argument being that as a woman she could not have possibly acted independently. I noticed that when forbidden political references were made in Sade’s play, the head of the asylum would stop the action, but when the inmate playing Corday was actually being molested by the inmate playing Duperret in front of the audience in the asylum, as well as the actual audience in the theatre, he did nothing. It was as though she did not exist as a person. I decided to stage moments that dramatised the inmate playing Corday’s growing awareness of what was happening to her, and then having her actually murder the inmate playing Duperret in the final riot as he was assaulting another woman. We also decided that another inmate was the sister of one of the women Sade had actually raped. She had created small placards denouncing Sade, which she surreptitiously showed to the audience throughout the production.

This was an overt way to attack a play from the inside that included adding staged moments not directly implied by the text. I make it clear to students that attacking a play from within does not always require altering the dramatic action or adding concrete details not suggested by the playwright. By skilful arrangement of the elements on stage without altering the structure of the play, a director can create work that enables an audience to recognise the influence of tacit cultural assumptions that support the character’s behaviour. It is at this point in the discussion I introduce the concept of Maya and its use for a director.

Maya

A secular adaptation of the Vedanta concept of Maya suggests that, by skilfully arranging the elements of daily life reality, an artist can reveal truths or influences hidden within the fabric of that reality. In short, and in very simplistic terms, Maya suggests that essential truth exists but is hidden beneath our subjective projections onto daily life experiences. Maya veils the truth and then encourages the projection of images onto the veil that capture our attention and which we take for fundamental reality when they are, in fact, illusory. However, artistic practitioners from various countries discovered that it was possible to create art using images of illusory daily life that would allow the viewer to experience what might reside beneath the projections and the veil. For a contemporary director this suggests that, by arranging the images and elements of daily life reality in a skilled way, the director can lead the audience to perceive truths and influences that reside inside the real illusions of daily life. The later plays of Chekhov are clear examples where aspects of illusory daily life reality are used to reveal deeper truths about characters and human existence.

It is standard practice for a professional director to use staging to arrange daily life behaviour in ways to help an audience perceive truths or influences that characters are in denial of or are attempting to keep hidden. How this can be done has to be made explicitly clear to a student director. In addition to being used to reveal underlying influences, staging can enable the audience to know more than the characters know, which is a key to creating suspense. For example, there is a moment near the beginning of *Miss Julie* when Jean briefly mentions that, as a child, he was in awe of Julie. Throughout most of the scene Julie and Jean mask their true feelings from one another. They engage in mild flirtation and spar for position under the guise of small talk while pushing, but still remaining within, the boundaries of their respective social classes. However, in that one moment Jean may unintentionally reveal and then quickly cover up his sincere early attraction to Julie. If Julie is positioned downstage facing the audience but away from Jean, it is possible to stage a brief moment when she unconsciously reveals how truly touched she is by hearing what Jean reveals. This gives the audience a glimpse of the naïveté and vulnerability hidden beneath her well-defended façade of authoritative assurance. The audience would then witness an aspect of Julie's intrapersonal struggle that is influencing her interpersonal interactions with Jean without Jean being aware of it. This is, of course, an interpretation of the play and that specific moment but these kinds of moments tend to engage an audience's interest. They subliminally or overtly create a sense of suspense and encourage the audience to speculate on when that aspect of the character will be revealed to other characters and thus impact the story. This will seem obvious to a professional director, but it is frequently a revelation to students how simply altering one bit of staging can illuminate an aspect of a character and a relationship between characters.

One primary takeaway from the discussion about Maya is how important it is for a director to understand the ways in which characters are deeply committed to protecting the 'illusions' that give their lives a sense of meaning. This leads into a discussion about endowment, projection and meaning.

Subjective logic – endowment, projection and meaning

Human beings are projective creatures. We tend to organise perceptions into patterns and project meaning onto them, which is why I refer to the way an audience member perceives a story as an act of unconscious subjective logic. In that way a story, like beauty, exists in the mind of the beholder. I suggest to students that much emotional meaning is endowed meaning. In other words, we unconsciously endow experiences with emotional meaning and project that meaning onto similar experiences. Actors do this consciously in order to help create the illusion of character. In a way, theatre is people watching other people endow with meaning stories about people endowing things with meaning. Theatre holds a mirror up to that part of our nature – the innate drive to endow our experiences with meaning.

As with Maya, if much meaning is endowed, i.e., projected and not innate, then it may be seen as illusory. But as a colleague once said to me: "if everything is an illusion then illusion might be everything. It doesn't matter what a character wants, all that matters is how much they want it". And to be clear, the fact that something is an illusion does not mean it is not perceived as real and, in fact, the suspicion of

its impermanence and fragility can stimulate a deeper need to protect it at all costs. As society becomes more inclusive, the fragility of various endowed meanings will become more apparent. Dramatic narratives that centralise the struggles arising from characters' attempts to maintain and impose their sense of endowed meaning will become more prevalent and complicated. A beginning director needs to be mindful of that.

However, although endowed meaning may be fragile and illusory, it may be that those very illusory elements of daily life are most readily recognised by the audience member, which might enable them to project meaning onto what they are watching. For example, as an audience member, I may momentarily fully believe a character cannot survive if their true love rejects them. While many of us recognise this experience from our lives, we have grown to understand that it is ordinarily not reality. But presenting an audience with common illusory aspects of human experience will help them project meaning onto the production. I remind students that part of a director's job is to encourage maximum projective engagement from the audience.

I suggest to students that, in general, a human being likes to believe that life, or at least their life, has meaning. Human beings may search for beliefs to supply them with a sense of meaning. This is something for a young director to keep in mind when analysing characters. There are various ways a character can gain a sense that their life has meaning. I discuss two basic possibilities. The first is that life has innate meaning, and a person strives to make choices that allow them to experience that meaning, a somewhat religious orientation. The second is that life itself is without innate meaning, so the individual must bring the meaning to it, a somewhat secular orientation. In either case, I suggest that once a person or character has established or discovered what gives their life a sense of meaning they will defend it, often resolutely, irrationally and sometimes violently. I suggest that identifying core life-sustaining beliefs of a character, which are sometimes influenced by a cultural meta-narrative, may help a director identify and activate moments of conflict. The process of identifying and researching these core beliefs will force a young director to gain broader understanding of different peoples. That process in and of itself can help a young director become more inclusive when thinking and conceptualising.

I finish this series of short lectures with a discussion of what I refer to as the three tracks a director must activate when working on a production and what I consider to be the two most essential skills for a director to develop.

The three tracks

I suggest that a director is responsible for activating three tracks: The Dramatic Track, The Theatrical Track and The Personal Track.

I define the Dramatic Track as the narrative and the interpretation of that narrative made manifest in choices concerning action and emotional points of view. I define the Theatrical Track as the ways in which the narrative and interpretation are told in theatrical terms such as concept, design and staging choices.

I define The Personal Track as the subjective reasons for which the director is working on the project. The reasons may be very clear to the student director, or they may be too inchoate or intuitive to be put into words, but the director should sense that every project is anchored in some real inner interest or compulsion. That anchor is what will help

the director withstand the bouts of profound uncertainty and the inevitable obstacles that will be encountered during the process of directing a production. I suggest that those reasons are no one else's business and are often best not shared with others.

The two essential skills and the purposeful use of self

I think the two most important skills a director needs to develop are the ability to communicate with other members of the creative team and the ability to problem solve (assess situations, identify and prioritise action points, make decisions and then implement them.) Learning how to communicate effectively includes developing some level of cultural competency in order to widen the young director's perception of the world. This enhances the ability to actually hear what collaborators are expressing verbally and non-verbally. It also includes becoming familiar with the concept of 'purposeful use of self'. This concept, derived from group work theory, is based on the premise that an artistic leader needs to know how to select which aspects of themselves to draw on when engaging in different situations. Some situations are best addressed directly and assertively. Some are best addressed with subtlety and diplomacy. I am very clear there is no best or prescribed way to communicate; all directors find their own unique way to communicate effectively. However, they must develop the ability to communicate since the realisation of their artistic work is completely dependent on the other members of their team.

2. CREATING THE FRAME

After this series of theoretical framing lectures, the bulk of the class focuses on teaching practical skills in composition, script analysis, dramaturgical research, working with actors, devising original material and staging scripted scenes. I emphasise that it is only through gaining some mastery in these skills that a director can hope to effectively stage their own interpretations of material and so ensure making genuinely inclusive theatre.

Stage composition

I suggest that once a director is in the rehearsal room, after the research and analysis process is completed, one of the primary concerns will be *how* to create meaning through staging.

I begin by teaching fundamental compositional tools, the nuts and bolts of staging and visual storytelling. I introduce these skills first because I think they should become second nature, as they are the primary means whereby the director's vision can be concretely realised in scenic reality. I want students to experience how the stage composition itself stimulates associations in the audience members' minds and psychological associations in the actors' beings. I also show how those tools are used to create focus, create and disrupt expectations, physicalise action and illuminate contradictions. The class explores how the composition/staging is the embodiment of interfacing the real and the imaginary. I explain that where the actor is located in the performance space is real. The characters they are playing and the circumstances they are embedded in are usually imaginary but where the actor is located in relation to the audience

influences how the audience will assess the character's behaviour; it influences our perception of the imaginary. I make it very clear that these tools are 'neutral' and can be applied to any aesthetic and any kind of live performance. Students do several in-class exercises and always reflect on them in small groups. They also create longer devised pieces with no text. Years ago, I would have suggested content for these pieces. Now I leave the choice of content completely up to the students. The freedom to create narrative content in and of itself contributes to the creation of an inclusive learning environment as long as the teacher does not comment on the content of those narratives but rather on how effectively they were staged.

The use of six viewpoints to embody information

I use some components of Six Viewpoints as a warm-up and as a springboard into improvisations. This is done to help students embody the staging skills being learned and to demonstrate the relationship of the viewpoints of space, shape and time to the staging elements of spatial relations, gesture, hand-props and movement. Throughout the semester, students do this warm-up every class with more and more elements being added, including the introduction of dramatic action. I suggest that this warm-up will help them to eventually visualise staging ideas quickly and enable them to communicate those ideas clearly to the actors.

Given circumstances, dramatic action and character

After several sessions devoted to developing staging skills, the class focuses on the relationship between given circumstances and dramatic action. Students are given a sequence of transitive verbs and a list of instructions on how to go about creating given circumstances and characters to support the actual *doing* of those verbs. I refer to those verbs as actions. Students then write short scripts in which the dialogue must be an *extension* of the character's actions. They then stage the scenes in such a way that the staging physicalises the dramatic action. The scenes must be about characters in situations with forward moving dramatic action, i.e., not structured like post-dramatic material. Beyond these instructions the content is completely up to the students. They complete a simple written analysis of the scenes in which they address the dramatic action, character spine, points of view, atmospheric and tone changes from beginning to the end.

The class then examines the relationship between written dialogue (including punctuation) and dramatic action. Students are given 'neutral' text and then find ways to justify and activate that text by creating given circumstances, characters and emotional points of view towards moments and assigning doable transitive verbs to each line. The narrative content is up to them. They also do a simple written analysis following the same prompts from the previous assignment. This is an introduction to basic text analysis. In assessing these exercises, I rarely comment on the content the students have created. I reserve my comments to address how effectively, or not, they have analysed and staged that content.

Basic script analysis and dramaturgical research

At this point in the semester, each student chooses a play to analyse thoroughly. Until five years ago, I limited the students to analysing only plays that I had directed because I thought I could be most helpful to them if they were working on material with which I was deeply familiar. Now I leave the choice of material in their hands, which enables them to analyse and then interpret material that is of most interest to them. I do require them to do dramaturgical research to support their analytical and interpretive decisions. Allowing students full agency in selecting the plays they analyse and the sources they use for dramaturgical research opens up the curriculum to include plays and theoretical writings of a wide range of theatre artists and scholars, ensuring a more inclusive learning environment. Plays and readings can range from Frantz Fanon and Amiri Baraka, to August Wilson, Jeremy O.Harris, Annie Baker, Lynn Nottage, Naomi Iizuka, Diego Rivera, bell hooks, Jessica Benjamin, Zeami, Feminist theatre, Helene Cixous, Elin Diamond, Judith Butler, Queer Theatre aesthetics, Black Acting Methods, or Latinx theatre, essentially to any material that the student is interested in exploring. I act as a consultant and can suggest books and articles for them to read.

The approach to detailed script analysis is one I have developed based loosely on the work of Francis Hodge and others. The analysis is done in three separate stages over six weeks in which students write papers that address three fundamental questions: What did the playwright create? What story do you want to tell with what the playwright created? How do you intend to tell that story in theatrical terms?

1. What did the playwright create? The students are given a three-page list of questions to answer. Responding thoughtfully to these questions requires them to do a very close reading of the text to unpack all aspects of the given and prior circumstances; get a sense of the characters and their emotional and functional relationships to one another; identify the dramatic action; be mindful of cultural assumptions that might be informing the dramatic action; speculate on the implications of how the playwright uses language in the dialogue and stage directions, and consider what overall idea about life the play seems to be exploring. I emphasise that they are engaging in a real wrestling match with the play. They need to understand and respect its structure, cultural context and language before they can skilfully craft a personal interpretation of it. The catch phrase I use for the adventurous young directors who want to use the play to serve their own concept is: “you need to learn how something is constructed before you deconstruct it”.

2. What story do you want to tell with what the playwright created? Based on their first analysis, the students decide on an interpretation that interests them. They need to provide evidence that the dramatic action of the play will support their interpretation.

3. How do you intend to tell that story? Based on their interpretation of the play, students need to describe specific choices they would make to ensure that the interpretation would be manifest in scenic reality. Those choices would include decisions regarding character actions, emotional points of view, staging, design elements and production concept. They must engage in and cite added dramaturgical research to support their interpretation, conceptualisation, design ideas and the relationship between the dramatic story and theatrical story. The research must include readings from various areas of cultural studies, not simply dramatic theory.

Cultural dramaturgy - different analytical and conceptual approaches

After students have completed their initial analysis of what the playwright created, the class explores other approaches to script analysis, interpretation and conceptualisation. Those approaches include: Stanislavski's Active Analysis (three steps: External Action, Internal Action, As-Ifs); Brecht's Fable, Haltung and Vorgang; my own work on *The Bacchae* (merging dramatic and post-dramatic approaches); writings from *Black Acting Methods* and *Post Dramatic Theater* and short discussions on post modernism. The class also examines aspects of Erving Goffman's theories about social behaviour as a way to enhance crafting communicative sub-textual visual storytelling. Students create devised pieces utilising ideas from the readings and discussions. These ideas include framing narrative content with a central theatrical metaphor; creating multiple levels of performance; use of a meta-theatrical surround; emphasising the influence of social context on a character's behaviour; finding ways to illuminate the, often invisible, social context; understanding and using the fluidity of time and location and other advanced compositional tools to surprise and engage an audience. Discussing these various approaches to analysing text and behaviour supports the student's thinking into the second and third steps in analysing the play they have selected, which is deciding on a thematic interpretation of the play and a concept that supports their interpretation. This is when I draw on my own experiences as a director to cite various examples, positive and negative, that led me to emphasise the importance of supporting a personal interpretation with very close reading of the material, solid crafting skills and dramaturgical research.

Staging a scene

At this point in the semester, the students stage a scene from the play they have analysed. They are encouraged to apply any or all of what they have studied in class. Their interpretation of the scene is up to them, but they must support it with evidence from their analysis of the play and dramaturgical research. My job is to help them realise their interpretation rather than to question *what* it is. But I do question *how* they are attempting to realise their interpretation and offer my assessment of its effectiveness or lack of effectiveness.

They can cast the scene in any way they choose. However, there does need to be a discussion about casting decisions, as some playwrights are adamant that, in professional productions, their work be cast with strict adherence to the racial, ethnic or gender identifications of the characters.

52 things to keep in mind when directing

I end the class with a lecture that summarises and contextualises several points we covered during the semester. The lecture also addresses various situations a young director will encounter when attempting to interface directorial vision with the hard realities of mounting a production. It includes knowledge based on my personal experience and suggestions for ways to anticipate and effectively navigate those situations.

3. SUMMATION

It has been a long journey from my early days as a teacher of directing. The gradual awakening to my unconscious imposition of my aesthetic preferences and assumptions about 'universal' human experience has led me to make many changes in how I teach. This process has widened the frame through which I perceive the students and, hopefully, through which the students perceive dramatic literature, theatrical storytelling and the role of the director. To be clear, I think a professional director can work intuitively and stage essentially whatever they choose to stage. An audience is free to walk out of the performance if they so desire. But a student is captive inside an unequal power relationship and subsequently the teacher of directing is under a different set of obligations from those of a professional director. It is the teacher's responsibility to create and work to maintain an inclusive classroom environment in which each student is respected. Part of teaching directing today, in addition to diversifying the reading material and encouraging students to develop agency concerning the selection of narrative content, requires a willingness to recognise one's cultural blind spots and seek to develop cultural competency through educating oneself. It also requires willingness to engage in difficult conversations and truly listen to students. It requires that one fully own one's authoritative grasp of the skills being taught without expecting complete deference from students. Fundamentally, it requires one to work even harder to find the most effective ways to communicate with students to help them develop the skills, projective ability, conceptual capacity, self-reflection and the social consciousness that will enable them to develop as theatre artists and realise their unique artistic visions. This is, after all, the only way a directing teacher can effectively contribute to advancing the field and ensure the future development and relevance of the art form.

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Saana Lavaste (1976) was born in Kokkola, Finland and lives now in Helsinki. She has been a theatre director and a professor in directing at Uniarts Helsinki since 2016. Saana has studied theatre directing in Uniarts Helsinki and pedagogy in the University of Helsinki.

Saana has worked in the Finnish theatre field extensively directing 35 productions, most of them first performances of new contemporary plays. She has founded three theatre groups; DraamaRäätälit (1998) focusing on forum theatre, Teatteri Sipe-ria (2006), an ensemble of actors, writers and directors from generation X investigating co-creative methods and processes, and Teatteri 2.0 (2010) working with new play texts in addition to rethinking and experimenting with artistic processes and structures.

Saana has also worked as an artistic director for the Finnish international theatre festival Tampereen Teatterikesä (2007-2008) and been a part of the working group assigned by the Finnish Minister of Culture to reform the law on state about the state subsidies for museums, orchestras, theatre, dance and circus (2016-2017). From 2016 to 2021 Teatteri 2.0 ran a six-year development project called New Play Finland (UNO), bringing together theatres and playwrights in fostering Finnish new drama.

Saana is currently interested in leadership in art organi-sations, working with the unknown, reading as an artistic prac-tice and – as always: directing as a practice of bringing alive.

FLOWERS AND RULES Ikebana and the pedagogy of directing

Saana Lavaste

1. INTRODUCTION

In 2016, when I started to work as a professor in directing, I was painfully aware of my inability to formulate what directing is and how it should be considered in a pedagogical and didactive way. It seemed to me that most of the directors who were teaching directing - including myself - tell the students how they direct themselves. While this is also certainly beneficial for the student, as a professor I wanted to be able to dig deeper. I was interested in creating pedagogical tools for myself to help the students become the directors they are, not directors like me.

This field of art called directing has not been the subject of much theory, unlike acting, dance, or choreography where there is significantly more theory and research available. The art of directing simply lacks universal concepts, and this makes the pedagogy of directing an adventurous business – especially for a novice professor.

I can find several reasons for the lack of theory and common concepts. First, the art of directing is working with the entire theatre performance; therefore, it is difficult to fully separate it from the other areas of the performance, such as acting, dramaturgy, or the spatial solutions of the performance. Secondly, directing is processual work and can only be done in co-operation with others. Directing happens amidst incompleteness, changing elements, and crises. Work tools are immaterial, abstract. The most concrete places where the director's work exists are in the director's consciousness and communication with the work group. Work happens in quickly disappearing, surprising moments, which are impossible to fully analyse afterwards. Thirdly, directing is very personal. It takes place in at least the following areas of the director's personality: observation, memories, thinking, emotions, intuition, communication. As the observing eye cannot see itself, it is very difficult for the directors themselves to conceptualise their own processes of observation and decision making. In addition, these cognitive areas are so particular to each director's persona that for a beginner it easily starts to seem there are no joint, common principles in the art of directing. That everyone just directs in their own manner. This type of thinking leads to the idea that skill in directing is dependent on the persona, charisma and talent, things that cannot be learned, evaluated, or practised.

Around five years ago, I made a joyful discovery in relation to theorising and teaching the art of directing. I taught a directing course together with an Ikebana master, architect Riitta Salastie[1]. Ikebana – the Japanese Art of Arranging Flowers - turned out to be a close relative of the art of directing. Contrasting Ikebana and directing made some of the typical and important features of each field of art clearly visible. We were able to talk about directing using the terminology of Ikebana in such a way that I felt many of the central, often too abstract, areas of the art of directing were clearly visible, and that they could be understood, practised, and observed in a pedagogically meaningful manner.

1 Riitta Salastie (PhD in architecture), has studied ikebana with Japanese teachers for more than 30 years since 1987. She is one of the very few people in Europe holding both classical Saga Goryu and Sogetsu -ikebana teachers' licences. As an architect she is interested in space and some of her ikebana works can be seen as a kind of architectural installation made of living plant material. Riitta Salastie is also a calligraphy artist. The influence of these studies can be seen in her ikebana works as a strong emphasis on the beauty of line.

Riitta Salastie surrounded by students of the Ikebana and the art of directing workshop in São Paulo 4–9.2.2018. The participants were: Yu Miwa, Lilian Jardim, Cynthia Sampaio de Gusmão, José Anderson Marques Vieira, Vivi Mori, Ana Carolina Angrisani, Fiorentino Nanci, Ingrid Naomi Barbosa Lustosa, Nicole Puzzi, Solange Faganello, Marcella Pupatto and Gabi Smurro.

2. BALANCING BETWEEN CONTROL AND CHAOS, PLANNING AND THE COINCIDENT

The title of my MA work (2003) would loosely translate into English as *To Leap Knowingly into the Unknown. The directors work at the crossroads of planning and the coincident.* When I started to study directing, I genuinely thought that directing was the same thing as control. Slowly I started to realise that creativity happens at the crossroads of control and chaos, planning and the coincident. If we as directors plan too much and are too rigid in executing our plans without the 'touch of the unknown', the result will be lifeless and dull. On the other hand, if we don't plan enough, the process is chaotic and the end result random: it can be great, but it can also be a disaster. In other words, we must find the right balance between control and chaos, planning and the coincident.

As a student of directing, I felt that we were taught how to plan, but not how we should work with the unplanned. Later I realised that one can only learn to work with the unknown by working with the known. They are two sides of the same coin. Planning makes room for the unplanned. Mistakes are only visible against clear rules.

This means that the director has to develop both sides of the brain: the intuitive side and the rational side, as well as quick transitions between them. One has to have an unusually agile mindset to be able to move effortlessly between known matters, in other words planned concreteness (e.g., space, money, time, work group, analysing the play) and unknown matters which can be for example the minds of the people in the working group, one's own intuition, dreams and visions, or life itself that manifests through coincidences and mistakes. One has to alternate between being a mad hatter and a worried rabbit with a watch, and sometimes be both of them almost at the same time.

After my dialogue with the art of Ikebana, I now talk about the importance of imperfection and the meaning of mistakes, rather than coincidences as I did in my earlier work. I believe that as theatre makers we must learn about mistakes and their meaning for our art. This is one important way of learning *the art of making alive*, which is the common ground for the Ikebana master and the theatre director. It means balancing the planning and the controlling side of our art

and becoming friends with the unknown, the unpredictable, the mistake. I feel that this is especially important in theatre these days, when so much of what we see in the digital world can be controlled to the extreme. A moment in theatre is alive, and therefore also imperfect.

When working with experts from other fields of performing arts, I have noticed that we theatre people have a special relationship to failures. We are afraid of them, but they also provoke and inspire us more than they do many other artists. For example, while a violinist or a ballerina finds it hard to see her mistake as a possibility, we as theatre makers will subconsciously understand that mistakes and imperfection are essential to theatre, insurmountable even. At the same time, we try to control the mistakes and imperfections, and create functional compositions on stage. Perfect control is impossible, as in theatre we are trying to control life itself: living humans and flowing time-space. In theatre there is no lag, editing board or chance for a re-take. Anything can happen right now – and does happen. Our hard work, toil and battles can go to waste at any time. One actor gets sick, another forgets the lines, lighting or video equipment stops working at an important moment, a fuse blows, props are in the wrong place, the audience reacts or does not react in the expected way, somebody's mobile rings; all this will affect the actors sharing the same space-time with the audience. Even in the best case, at the end we are left with an empty stage. This imperfect and impermanent nature of theatre is sometimes heart-breaking for us as theatre makers. At the same time, this temporality is at the core of our art. It is also at the core of the Art of Ikebana.

3. THE SITUATION ON THE STAGE – THE ARRANGEMENT

In my early attempts to verbalise the general principles of directing, I first developed the idea of *situation*, or more specifically three situations inside another, as defining them is a director's essential job when preparing a performance. These three situations from the largest to the smallest are 1) *the production situation;* the situation where the art is produced, 2) *the performance situation* including the performers and the audience and 3) *the fictive situation* of each scene, often dealing with the characters of the play. The situation is created at all these levels by answering six seemingly simple questions: *who, what, where, when, how and why*, the last being the most difficult and the most important (Lavaste, Rautavuoma and Sirén, 2015, 25-34).

An Ikebana arrangement can be seen as a parallel to the fictive situation on the stage, as both are temporal and living compositions in space. I will describe later in this article how this parallel can be used as a pedagogical tool. After my dialogue with Ikebana, I now define the situation on the stage as a four-dimensional composition answering the six questions mentioned above. By four-dimensionality, I mean the three spatial dimensions with time as the fourth dimension. A useful aspect of this situation tool is that it works just as well at both the dramatic and post-dramatic stages, since it doesn't presume a character or any kind of fictive narration.

My own education in directing (1998-2003 at the Theatre Academy in Helsinki) mainly focused on creating the fictive situation of each scene. Since that time, the importance of the performance situation and the production situation has increased steadily. The audience reads meanings in these situations too, and they blend with the meanings of the scenes. It is no longer enough to direct the fictive situation on the stage and assume that it will justify itself, for example as a remake of a classic. The director must be more sensitive than ever before to the time and space where this particular interpretation is being created. This means that both the production choices and the performance situation have to be considered carefully.

At the level of the performance situation, the director needs to ask **who** is presented on the stage and **how**? **Who** is the audience (or what are our assumptions about it)?

What is happening between the performers and the audience?

When is the performance happening? This is a very interesting and complicated question as there are so many layers of time present in the theatre: the fictive time levels of the play, the historic time we are living right now with the possibility to refer to the past and the future, the durationality of the performance and the magical shared now-moment of theatre.

Where is the performance happening (the physical space and its socio-cultural context) and how does this affect the performance?

Why make this performance here and now?

Moreover, the production situation is more and more considered as an inseparable part of the artistic expression. For example, creating a performance about the Sami people in Finland today wouldn't be considered artistically valid without at least some kind of co-operation with the Sami at the production level. Making a performance about poverty without considering the ticket prices might also be seen as a lack of artistic creativity.

The question **why** is the most difficult and the most important. If there is a why, there will be a way to create a meaningful situation – on the stage, in the rehearsals, in the production process. On the other hand, if the core reason, *the why*, is missing it is of no help to have elaborate answers to the other five questions. The situation on the stage will still feel empty of meaning. Why are we making this performance? Why should anyone come and see it? These are scary questions but facing them fully and finding an answer that inspires the director is absolutely necessary. Only then does the director have answers for the actors, the team of the designers, the producers and finally the audience. The director's ability to articulate the why may change during the rehearsal process, since we learn more about the meaning of the work while we are doing it, and sometimes we just get lost in the midst of different possibilities and alternative paths. *The why* follows us throughout our whole career as directors. To constantly ask this question, and search sincerely for the answer, is the best we can do. In my opinion, as long as we do this we can call ourselves artists.

4. WHY THEATRE?

When trying to define how to teach directing, I have to take one step further back and ask myself: what is the nature of theatre as a medium for sharing experiences and

telling stories? What is my answer to the question *why*? Why is making theatre necessary in the first place?

I very much agree with biologist-artist Aura Raulo (2021) when she says that the meaning of art is to share emotional and resonant knowledge. Raulo claims that as a species we humans developed speech to communicate exact information (like how and when to hunt together) and art in different forms to communicate emotional knowledge. By observing art - hearing a song or seeing a painting for example - we can resonate with the same emotional experience as the maker of the piece if we have had a similar enough experience. Interestingly, this type of communication was as vital for the survival of the human species as the communication of exact information. Otherwise, we would not have art.

I also agree with philosopher Elisa Aaltola when she describes art forms that share stories as rehearsals in empathy (Aaltola and Keto 2017: 27-45). According to Aaltola, research shows that narrative forms of art, which enable the observer/reader to imagine what it would be like to live as another being: human, animal, plant even, can increase our ability for *simulative empathy*.

In theatre, we can define the limits of our morality and empathy together, since we observe and experience the narration together in a public space as a community. This makes theatre a political and collective form of art that has many societal implications. Sanna Ryynänen, a social scientist specialising in creative and participative research method as well as social and sociopedagogial dimension of theatre, has been lecturing at our Theatre Academy about these important aspects of our art (Ryynänen, 2021; Ryynänen, Nortio & Varjonen, 2021).

But these descriptions - sharing resonance knowledge, growing in empathy, the collective and political nature of a performance - are general in the sense that they certainly apply to at least all performing art forms, maybe even to films and literature to some extent.

It is my belief that, compared with other forms of art, theatre is not so much about the skill of being perfect and not making mistakes as it is about the skill of being real, alive, present and - borrowing from the philosophy of Ikebana - natural. And as the Ikebana masters of old knew, in order to construct something that seems to be alive, there has to be imperfection and dynamical imbalance in the composition. Therefore, theatre not only allows for mistakes and imperfection, but needs them to be alive.

Disappearing moments in theatre remind us of the impermanent nature of our lives. At its core, theatre is about sharing the fleeting and disappearing moment of now, and thus about sharing the experience of our own mortality.

This kind of analysis of the medium called theatre implies that an interesting and meaningful situation on stage would be *a living situation* that enhances our experience of the shared, unpredictable and impermanent moment of now. It is a kind of situation that reminds us of the finality of our decisions and the uniqueness of the moment.

The essential work of the director then would be to create a moment on stage that seems to be *alive* and *real* in some way. This is done by constructing a situation, a composition of living people (both on stage and in the audience) and their actions in time and space.

I want to point out that I am not using words like *real* and *natural* to talk about the style of acting, as in realism or naturalism for example. I am referring to the quality of the pre-constructed and publicly shared situation, a moment in theatre. This moment should carry enough resonance with

real-life experiences of the spectators that they will find it meaningful. In other words, it has to have a connection to the reality, to *the now*, that surrounds it. The situation on stage must be meaningful *now*, as it is being observed by the audience. The meaning of the theatre performance cannot be found later, by the next generation. It is literally either now or never.

How, then, do we teach constructing something that seems to be real and alive?

Pedagogically speaking, how to teach the planning part seems to be relatively clear, although not easy. We can teach our students to read plays and analyse them; we can teach them skills in leadership and communication. In this area of directing, all life experiences and general curiosity about the world are beneficial. However, the real deal comes after the pre-planning: how can we teach students to turn their ideas and plans into living interesting moments on stage, without simply asking them to observe what other (more experienced) directors have done and copy them?

5. IKEBANA – MAKING ALIVE

Ikebana is the Japanese art of flower arrangement. I attended my first Ikebana workshop in October 2014 due to the fact that a friend of mine was teaching it. After the workshop led by Riitta Salastie I had a revelation: I realised that Ikebana and directing are parallel art forms in many ways. I started to wonder if as a teacher of directing I could learn something from the way Ikebana masters teach their students. Salastie, just retiring from her day job as an architect, had time to engage in long discussions with me. Together we taught three one-week-long workshops in Ikebana and directing 2017-2018 and wrote a paper for our students about the connection between these two art forms in the form of a dialogue between us. Salastie also contributed as a teacher to my 'Foundations in directing' class in the fall of 2019.

Ikebana is an ancient art form[2] that
strives to create a connection
between nature and the
human heart-mind
through the arrangement
of flowers and other
living materials. This
connection is created by
making the arrangements and by
observing them. The temporal nature of life is at the core
of Ikebana. The flowers have been cut from life
and are dying. An Ikebana master
gives them new life in the
arrangement, but only for a
brief moment. In this way,
the flowers remind us of
the shared impermanence
of all living things. Reminded
by the impermanent nature
of the arrangement, the
observer has an enhanced
experience of its beauty.
Philosophically, Ikebana
has been influenced by
the dominant religions in
Japan, especially by Zen Buddhism.

2 The first known Ikebana master in Japan, Senkei Ikeno-bo, is mentioned in texts of the year 1462. In ancient China the way flower arrangements were made had already been codified during the Tang period 618-907, so the art form might be as much as 1400 years old.

The Japanese ideogram for arranging flowers is *ikeru* which means and is usually translated as *making alive* or *come to life*. But interestingly, *ikeru* can also mean *to alter* or to *transform* (Lavaste and Salastie 2018).

This is exactly what we do in theatre: we take things away from life (experiences, emotions, characters, stories) and try to make them come alive again on stage in order to create a connection with the heart-mind of the spectator. We also transform everything we put on the stage – as we know, a chair that is placed on the stage is no longer just a chair but can be anything.

6. HOW DO STUDYING IKEBANA AND STUDYING DIRECTING RELATE TO EACH OTHER?

Studying Ikebana is very concrete: learning from a model presented by the teacher, learning by making. Traditionally, the Ikebana master doesn't explain anything, she just makes an arrangement that the students observe before making their own arrangements. The master will then consider each arrangement by the students and give feedback. (Although 'feedback' might be a benevolent expression in describing the Japanese way of pointing out the mistakes the student has made.)

In my experience, learning by making and learning from a model are also necessary when teaching the art of directing, even though our aim is to raise artists with their own voice. This is because we are not only developing knowledge, but also skills. For example, although many smart students of directing can expertly analyse play texts and the rules of the stage, an inexperienced teacher may be surprised when the same students start to direct. Their *ability to observe* what is happening on stage right in front of them when they are directing can be very unclear. Or, even if they can observe the stage, they might not know what they should change in order to be closer to the desired end result.

Making Ikebana sensitises and significantly trains the aesthetic and spatial ability to observe. It also trains the ability to make quick decisions - even scary ones, those that cannot be undone - like cutting a living branch. Materials (branches, flowers) are alive, coincidental and surprising. They are to be set in space three-dimensionally, giving sensitivity to the relationship of the living branches, the vessel and the whole surrounding room space.

Everything I have just mentioned also applies to the art of directing, where there is the most surprising material (living people), the stage is the 'vessel' and there is some kind of space (theatre/society/world) in a relationship with the arrangement (composition, performance).

Listening to the flowers. São Paulo 2018.
José Anderson Marques Vieira and Vivi Mori making arrangements.

7. RULES AND ORIGINALITY

Western art is about originality, Eastern art is about following the rules of tradition. This is of course a rough generalisation, but there is some truth to it. To most Western art students, the pressure of having to be original is a real burden. This pressure can be quite paralysing and take the focus away from the learning process. In the Eastern traditions, students don't have to worry about being original because learning starts from the imitation of a model. This model is called *kata* in Japanese, and is used in martial arts as well as in art forms like Ikebana. The pedagogical idea is that the model should be repeated until the students are experienced enough to change it intuitively according to their needs as an artist.

In this time of Western culture, when individuality and originality is appreciated even at the cost of meaningful content, skill and talent, I find that this Japanese way of following a model can be quite relaxing for Western students. Individuality means that one does something differently compared with others, something that could also be considered as a mistake. But the mistake or 'something different' can only become visible against rules and models. To be able to make something 'different', one first has to accept the rules and work with them. There is no way around this.

In the worst-case scenario, the curse of trying to be original will make the students all alike. The truth is that no-one can avoid being original, because we all observe the world in a different way.

An Ikebana class is a beautiful example of the fact that the best way of being original is to relax and focus on observing. Even if every student has the exact same materials: for example, three roses, a branch and a few green leaves, the same kind of bowl to put the flowers in and the same set of exact rules for making the arrangement, the end results will all be distinctively different from each other. When everyone has made their arrangement, the class will observe and discuss each work one by one. It is pedagogically very interesting to see what the arrangements tell about the observation skills of each student, and how the exact same strengths or challenges in observation or in decision making come up while directing.

Director students Michael Panula-Ontto and Esa-Matti Smolander placing their Ikebana arrangements for display. Helsinki 2017.

This classical arrangement is a beautiful example of constructed naturalness & the principle of Artlessness. Arrangement by Ingrid Naomi Barbosa Lustosa, São Paulo 2018.

8. ARTLESS ART – SOME TOOLS FOR MAKING IT ALIVE

One criterion for classical arrangement in Ikebana is that it looks and feels *natural*, as if the arrangement wasn't constructed at all, or was only constructed by nature itself. This sense of naturalness is of course the result of hard work: refined techniques and methods used by the Ikebana master, methods that have been developed for centuries by moulding and pruning nature. This principle of constructed naturalness is known in Ikebana as *Artless Art* or *Artlessness*.

The idea of Artless Art really resonated with me in relation to directing. Although a director is usually seen as the maker of the performance, in the end it is impossible to say which of the things we see on the stage really 'belong' to the director. Everything. Nothing. I don't believe it desirable that the spectators think about the director while watching the performance; they should be engaged with the performers, the story, the characters and the atmosphere of the performance, and at that moment the director should be invisible. Her work should disappear, giving space to the meaningful moment she has been part of creating. I would say that in this way directing is definitely Artless Art.

I will now describe five concrete Ikebana tools or techniques that, in my view, apply also stage directing. These techniques are used in Ikebana for making the arrangement natural and alive so that the observer doesn't think about the maker of the arrangement but rather sees the flowers and branches and enjoys their beauty. In the same way, the director aims to create (dramatical or post-dramatical) situations on stage, situations carrying a sense of naturalness that make it possible for the spectator to focus on the narrative content of the situation.

In the workshops Riitta Salastie and I led together, we started each day with around 10-15 minutes of *zazen*, which is a form of Zen Buddhist meditation. Zazen helps the practitioner to be present and to observe. It is a way of sensitising oneself to the encounter with nature, to be able to listen better to the flowers and branches – or for example the actors, in the case of directing. Following that, Riitta Salastie would make an Ikebana arrangement as a model for the students. All the students then made their own arrangements followed by a round of observation and discussion on each of them. In the second half of the day, I would give the students a directing task and a short lecture about the theme we were going to be investigating on stage. Each student would then plan and direct a scene, observing the same principal as with the Ikebana arrangement, for example contrast or multidimensionality. In a one-week workshop, the students had time to make approximately three Ikebana arrangements and the same number of scenes/situations on stage. The discussions based on the observation of each arrangement and scene took quite a lot of time and were at the core of the learning process.

I. Cutting away: The lesson of emptiness

Riitta Salastie making an arrangement.

In nature there is 100 % nature, which is why we don't see it. In a classic Ikebana arrangement, there has to be 70% nature and 30% emptiness. 'Emptiness' here means the empty space that is an integral part of the arrangement, but also the 'non-natural', constructed part of the arrangement made by a human. The Ikebana master removes the excess for nature to become visible. This happens by pruning and cutting. For example, if there is a branch that will be part of the

arrangement, one has to make a choice of what to keep and what to cut away and this is surprisingly stressful because we are dealing with living material. Once something has been cut out, it cannot be put back.

Students are always surprised by how 'natural' a branch looks after they have pruned away a lot of material. Cutting something away makes something else visible: for example, the beautiful curve of a branch that was hidden by many small branches or leaves. At the same time, we understand that the parts of the branch that were cut away weren't 'bad' or somehow worse than the parts that were left; they just had to be cut away to make something else visible.

In the abstract, free-style Ikebana arrangements characteristic of the modern Sōgetsu school, this 70/30 rule is turned upside down: it is 30% nature and 70% emptiness. This means that even if the style is free, the arrangement cannot be totally controlled or constructed but has to have an element of naturality for it to qualify as an Ikebana arrangement. Pedagogically, this relationship between the classical and free Ikebana arrangements can be compared to the relationship between dramatic theatre and contemporary theatre.

In classical moribana- and heika-arrangements, 1/3 of the edge of the vase or container is always left empty, without filling it with branches. The empty spaces are as essential as the branches themselves and their significance can be compared to the empty white areas that are left unpainted between the black lines in calligraphic work. The space between the branches is, however, not just blank empty space, but an Emptiness that is full of meaning and life, giving the arrangement the necessary tension and dynamism.

The lines of the branches and the beauty of the whole arrangement can be truly understood and appreciated only against the beauty and vividness of the empty space that surrounds the arrangement and is part of the branches themselves. Salastie and Lavaste 2018

The same principal can be applied on stage. Of all the things that happen at any one moment in the rehearsals, we have to delete some to make others visible. It is quite common for actors, light designers, set designers or sound designers to do too much, or for us, as directors, to place too many things on the stage for something else to be visible. For a director, it is very important to learn how to cut away, how to learn to work with emptiness as well as with action.

II. The three main branches: beginning, middle and end

In Ikebana, everything starts with the three main branches of the arrangement: one higher branch, one lower and one in-between. This is known as *the heaven - earth - human -principle*. Ikebana favours asymmetry and uneven numbers. Unequal numbers are important for creating dynamic imbalance, asymmetry, and the feeling of naturality. There are specific rules, degree angles even, on how these three branches are arranged in relationship to one another and to the imaginary straight vertical line that is the centre of the arrangement, pointing to the direction of the sun. It is also important to recognise how the branches originally grew in nature in relation to the sun. All plants grow towards the light, and each branch and flower has 'a sun side' and 'a shadow side', and should be placed in the arrangement accordingly.

Which of the three branches is the most important, the focus point of the whole arrangement, can change. Even three branches are not obligatory, there can be 5, 7, 9… All the rules are there to be broken for a good reason.

The equivalent structure in our arrangements on stage, corresponding to the three branches, are the beginning, middle (turn/change) and end. Since we as directors work with temporality, our 'branches' don't necessarily exist simultaneously but may occur one after another.

The beginning-middle-end structure is a very simple tool[3], but a surprisingly complex thing to master. The practical thing about the B-M-E structure is that is works as a tool for both dramatic and post-dramatic stages. In the post-dramatic stage without characters, the middle isn't a change in the action of a character, but some other kind of change – maybe a change in the rhythm or atmosphere of the scene for example.

Beginning, middle and end are the alphabets of narration. They are simple enough, but require a lot of practice to be used flexibly and creatively. During my studies at the Theatre Academy at the end of the 1990s, I was taught that creating the beginning is a question of imagination and creating the end is question of philosophy, but creating the middle is a question of skill and professionalism. It has also been my experience that directing the middle is the most difficult to learn. Generally, beginnings and ends come easier. It is helpful to remember that a problem in solving the ending is most often a problem in solving the middle. Without a functioning middle/turning point, it is impossible to build a satisfying ending. In addition, suspense is created when the spectator and character(s) receive information at a different pace, i.e., when the spectator knows something that a character doesn't or vice versa. This means that the turning point for the audience and for a character can come at a different time.

Just as the maker of an Ikebana arrangement creates endless variations on the rule of the three main branches, the director can make endless variations by simply arranging the beginning, middle and end (of each situation/scene/act/performance) in different ways. This is an important way of creating meaning and rhythm in a performance. If each scene follows the same kind of beginning-middle-end structure, the performance will inevitably be monotonous. For example: a scene can start dynamically from the middle or start from the ending creating questions of what happened, or one can make the end into the beginning, as this will create a circular structure carrying the feeling of a vicious circle or comical desperation. One can leave the end out and cut from the middle of one scene straight to the beginning of the next, creating a feeling of suspense, a question of what happened that we didn't see? Or one can create a feeling of limbo by repeating the beginning and never coming to the turn of events.

III. Multidimensionality

Ikebana is a spatial art, like Architecture or Japanese Garden Art. The arrangement has 'a front side', that is, an idea of the direction of the viewer's gaze. Still, the arrangement has to work from many directions and the maker has to think in terms of 360 degrees as well as the vertical and the horizontal. The sense of depth is especially important, created by placing branches at the back of the main branches.

Theatre is also a spatial art, even if our arrangements are moving, disappearing and temporal. Stage is not a flat screen, but a three-dimensional space shared with the

3 *Beginning* is an introduction. The questions that create a situation, who/what/where/when/why/how, are answered. Not necessarily all of them, but enough of them for the spectator to be able to start following the narrative.

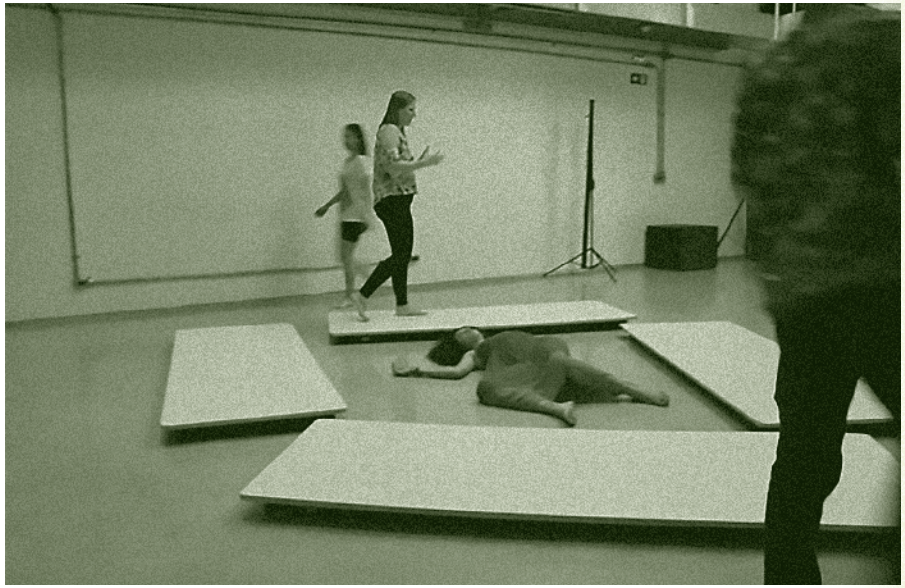
Middle is the turning point in the dramatic action, or some other kind of change, if we talk about the post-modern stage. One (or more) of the answers given at the beginning changes. New information is given. The perception of the spectator and/or the perception of a character changes as a result of the new information.

Ending means that the action created by the change in the middle comes to an end, there is feeling of closure and solving the tension. Ending can then turn into the beginning of the next scene or situation.

audience. I find that Ikebana helps students rehearse their sense of three-dimensionality, a sense in danger of being lost now that we constantly operate with two-dimensional screens. The use of space is a way of creating meaning on stage. Robert Lepage (2017) has said that, unlike circus, the modern theatre has lost the vertical at the same time as we have lost the connection to heaven and hell, to the gods and demons. Most of the narratives in theatre these days happen horizontally between humans, not vertically between for example humans and gods. A *deus ex machina* is rarely seen on the stage anymore. It is good to challenge ourselves to think about the vertical too, both philosophically and spatially – what is above us, and what lies underneath.

As theatre directors, we don't operate only with three spatial dimensions, but must also deal with the fourth dimension: time. Creating and moulding temporal arrangements is one of the most interesting and most difficult sides of our craft as directors. In the four-dimensional narrative space of the theatre, it is easy to have many narrative layers existing one after another or simultaneously. This narrative and spatial multidimensionality is a very natural way of telling stories in the theatre. For example, we can have the narrative level of the actors rehearsing a play, then the narrative level of the deceased writer of the play, and the narrative layer of one of the fictional characters, all simultaneously present on one stage.

In the workshop with Salastie, we asked the students to explore three-dimensionality in their Ikebana arrangements and in their scenes. They were free to interpret this either as spatial or narrative multidimensionality or as both. It became quite clear that these two dimensions are intimately connected. One cannot really create many simultaneous narrative layers on stage without using the space multidimensionally.



Two scenes investigating multidimensionality, São Paulo, February 2018. Both scenes are based on Savannah Bay by Marquerite Duras. Upper picture: directed by Solange Faganello, on stage José Anderson Marques Vieira and Cynthia Sampaio de Gusmão. Lower picture: director Vivi Mori standing on the white board, actors Gabi Smurro, Ingrid Naomi Barbosa Lustosa and Yu Miwa.

IV. Contrast and scale

To make something visible, one must learn to use contrast. In Ikebana, the red flower becomes visible when contrasted with the green leaves and the withered branch, and the three main branches representing heaven, earth and human create a scale for the whole arrangement.

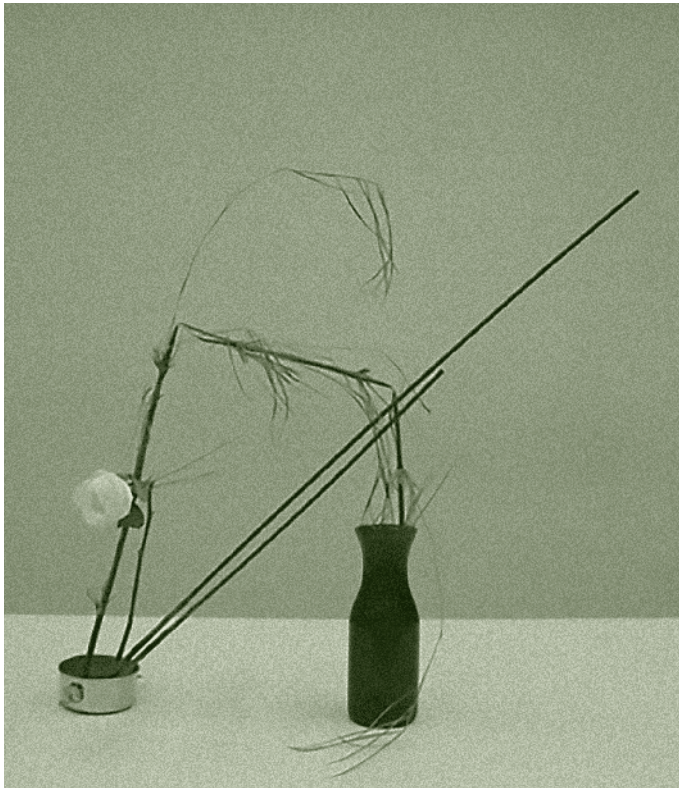
The stage is a place of absolute freedom. Taking this freedom seriously means that we can't presume anything when looking at the stage. When a character first comes on stage, we know nothing about that character or the world she is inhabiting. We don't know the history, the rules, the language, we don't even know if she is a human or not. On the stage everything becomes visible only in relation to something else.

When transferring Ikebana's heaven-earth-human principle to the stage, the director's worldview and thinking are challenged. What is the scale of my stage? What is the relationship between heaven, earth, and human? A human alone is not enough, because if you put a human on stage, you must also include something the human can have a relation to, a scale, the earth and the heavens.

The use of contrast is also a very useful skill for a director. We shouldn't add more shouting if we want to make the feeling of hate stronger on stage, for example. Instead, we can use the opposite to reveal what we want the audience to perceive: if we want to depict violence, we can use gentleness, or if we want to talk about loneliness, we can use intimacy as a contrast.

If the director is working with a text, there are two layers of dramaturgies present: the dramaturgy of the stage and the dramaturgy of the text. These two must work together in order to create meaning, but not necessarily by telling the same thing. For example, *the situation on the stage* (*execution row*) can create a contrast for *the situation in the text (family dinner)*, and in this way make the situation of the text more visible compared to using the same situation (*family dinner*) at both levels.

V. The beauty of imperfection



This arrangement is a perfect example of the beauty of imperfection.
A free Ikebana arrangement by Nicole Puzzi, São Paulo 2018.

As I described at the beginning of this article, making mistakes is a way to enhance the experience of our shared now-moment in the theatre. In my view, this unique, shared now-moment is at the core of theatre art.

In Japanese aesthetics -
especially in those influenced by
Zen - incompleteness or brokenness
is seen as an important and meaningful
aspect of beauty. This quality of deformation
and being worn out is known and appreciated
as *Wabi-sabi*, the beauty of imperfection. Wabi-
sabi aims for aesthetic
experience that reminds us of
temporality and the impermanence of all living things,
and the resulting acute feeling
of beauty. Ikebana is no
exception to this rule. The
highlight of an Ikebana arrangement might
be a worn-out branch,
a broken flower, or a leaf with
a hole in it.

"There is a crack in everything, that's how the light gets in" is a line by Leonard Cohen, a musician, poet and zen-practitioner. The line well describes the Wabi-sabi way of thinking: imperfect things are beautiful, since they comfort us by reminding us of our human condition, which is imperfect and temporal, but still – or because of that – beautiful and meaningful.

Our contemporary audiences generally consume many more recorded narratives than live ones. They are also exhausted by the constant feed of perfect images and thus the constant need to produce them. As theatre makers, we have the opportunity to wake the audience up from their 'record dream state' and make them realise that this shared moment on stage is as unique as it is imperfect.

To attain this, we can rehearse making mistakes on stage. A mistake as a tool is of course a different thing than an involuntary mistake. It requires planning, thinking and rehearsing. Mistake and error become visible against the expectations of the audience, against the attempt to be successful, skilful, or even perfect. In order to make voluntary mistakes on stage, one must have a clear understanding of what the audience expects to see and experience at this specific time and in this specific venue. Something that would be interpreted as a mistake on the big stage of the National Theatre, wouldn't be a mistake in a small group theatre, for example. Moreover, the expected style of the performance influences what can be seen as a mistake. Having an actor talking straight to the audience without a character, can be seen as a mistake in some frame of theatre, while in others it is just the most common way of acting.

Duration (something takes too long a time or too little time on stage) is one common way of creating the feeling of a mistake, or at least bending the expectations of the audience. The failure of a task or placing an impossible task on a performer are also ways of creating voluntary mistakes. If the meaning of the performance is to immerse the audience in the fictional narrative, like the story of Hamlet for example, commenting the shared context outside the performance space (like the weather, politics, the venue, the time of day, the historical time etc.) might be seen as a mistake.

In my experience, rehearsing mistakes is also good for one's own creativity because we are brought to think about our own expectations, standards and goals. What do we want to achieve, what kind of mistakes scare us, what are we ashamed of? These questions create limits for our expression, and mistakes (voluntary or involuntary) are one way to cross those limits.

9. FEEDBACK FROM STUDENTS

Teaching directing through another form of art has been a pedagogical breakthrough for me personally. My dialogue with Riitta Salastie has been a real joy and a privilege. Since this was an experimental process, student feedback was especially valuable for us. Both experienced directors (one student had already directed five professional performances) and beginners with no previous experience of directing felt they benefitted from this pedagogical approach. As teachers, we noticed that the discussions about Ikebana arrangements led to interesting, calm (!) and analytical discussions about the scenes being directed. Ikebana teaches us that it is not only about opinions and personas, but we can estimate and discuss our work with the help of the concept of *kata* (model or form). This is in line with the ideas of the philosopher Juha Varto, who wrote the following about art pedagogy:

… by discussion, one can try to fit concepts onto the experience gained in a skill-intensive phenomenon. At the same time, one learns the right words, descriptions, and other communication tools for this skill specifically. ---

Pedagogy in art has to deal with a strange practical problem on a daily basis: on one hand, it must be asserted "do it now, don't ask, you will understand later"; on the other hand, it is necessary to communicate that whatever should be understood actually is something, even something that we can talk about. Words can't indicate how to act; however, they supplement the action and can only be understood after the action. Varto. 2008: 68-69. Quotes freely translated by the author.

Since the students came to recognise and understand the connection between the two arts of Ikebana and directing during the workshop, it seems that the similarity between the two was fortunately not only in my own head. The concept of constructed naturalness and the importance of emptiness in the arrangements were especially seen as very useful tools.

Philosophically, the meaning of temporality in theatre has been a major revelation to many of the students. Investigating and appreciating this impermanent and imperfect quality of the living moment in theatre instead of seeing it as some kind of problem with (the director's) control, has helped the students relax and enjoy directing in a new way.

When they came to the workshop, almost none of the students knew anything about Ikebana. It was a totally new and alien form of art for them. Pedagogically this meeting with something 'new and alien' also has its importance as it gives a new perspective to something familiar that we have a lot of opinions about: theatre directing.

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Robert Schuster (1970) was born in the former GDR. He was in military service when the Berlin Wall fell in 1989. In 1991-1992 he studied theatre at the Humboldt University in Berlin and worked as a freelance dramaturge at the Freie Kammerspiele Magdeburg. From 1992-1996 he studied stage directing at the Ernst Busch University of Performing Arts in Berlin. There he began working with Tom Kühnel, with whom he made various theatre productions for eight years. In 1999 they became artistic directors at the TAT in Frankfurt. At TAT he produced his debut film “Draußen ist Drüben” with Charly Hübner, Oliver Masucci and Jenny Schily. In 2001 he was appointed a member of the Academy of Performing Arts and in 2003 he was appointed professor at the Ernst Busch University of Performing Arts in Berlin. He heads the directing department at the university. In 2017 he founded the international KULA-Compagnie, which has already released four major productions.

Robert Schuster is married and lives in Berlin.

A PROPOSAL NEEDS THE TENDER BRUSH OF AN EYELASH AND THE THRUST OF A WING BEAT

Robert Schuster

This text is intended exclusively for students on the move, seekers! Draw no conclusions from the suggestions about the form to be expected, nor about the artistic preferences of the person making the suggestions! It can make sense to learn scales, even if one's own harmonic longing is not bounded by church tonality! All exercises are good only for a practising personality! This is not a text about directing! If you read it, you will realise how banal this list is as a text! But your doings will not be! If the individual results of your practising seem banal, correct the suggestion in question! Note the difference with the proposal that got you moving, that enticed you to get others moving! Find partners for the work! Do the work! Describe the way!

Keep a notebook and pen at hand while reading this text! If you want to try something, note the time when you propose it, to whom, and, above all, where and how you can do it! The next morning, write down your experience with this experiment! Tear out the pages on which these lines are written and insert your text! Keep the resulting text! This text is all you will need later!

Write down what you want, but can't do yourself, but would like to see others do!

Respect those who have the courage to do it!

Make a suggestion! Make a suggestion even though you don't know exactly how it will be implemented! But make suggestions that can be implemented! And always try the opposite! Take responsibility for your proposals! Take responsibility for transforming the unimaginable into the imaginable! Every proposal must be designed in such a way that further interaction remains possible!

In the proposal, consider that you do not want to do it, but you want to see it! Translate that into a suggestion that someone wants to put into practice! Modify the suggestion so that her or his action leads to something further! Modify the suggestion in such a way that this action, this expected surprise, can be integrated into a context!

Turn one proposal into several proposals!

Take responsibility for the proposal that you do not wish to make today, but which could be possible tomorrow! Suggest a game to make it possible for the proposal to be possible tomorrow!

You could try out all the suggestions in this article in one play! For sake of comparison, do this in parallel with a novel that interests you! Check the procedures that interest you, but also still with poems and a non-fiction book!

Try not to pre-figure but to conjure up! Practise the art of trying not to control the spirits, let alone master them! Learn to act with other people! In contrast to simply 'doing something together', acting presupposes the inner infinity of the other person, one's freedom to decide for oneself! I need practice to realise that the production of that which is different from my imagination is the meaning and richness of my own doing! - But that's not what this is about - this is about the practice that only comes about through doing; it has a double form, the 'doing' as a value in itself and the 'what has been done' as experience. If you can't believe a thought, that is, if it doesn't set you in motion, then turn it into its opposite and create a second exercise out of it for your own practice! But after this exercise, also do the one in which you lacked faith! Move from faith to questioning and practise trying! Rejecting before doing will not get you any further - if you practise this long enough, you will learn for yourself to do the same with your own suggestions! Start focusing on what you want to experience and start distrusting what you think will happen

again! Generate an atmosphere of curiosity among your peers as well! Ask your comrades to make suggestions! Give other people suggestions to propose to your comrades-in-arms! Observe how they do it and learn from them!

Enter a practice room! Write down a list of as many items as you can that are in the room! For each item, note the verbs that describe a possible use for it! Choose five items from them! Spend some time with each until you have found at least five different uses for each of the five items! Play with them! Hint at something with them! Give them a different meaning in your game! From the resulting 25 different possibilities for these five objects, choose the five most joyful and put them in order! Order them once to construct a machine and a second time to create a narrative!

Write down as many verbs as you can think of in your language! Create an archive of verbs! When you take suggestions from this text and try them out, try them out several times with different verbs! Pay special attention to transitive verbs!

Create rituals for yourself during the day! Find the one hour of the day when you write or draw! Create a ritual for doing the work with others! Create a reason for your work that goes beyond your own desire for knowledge!

Accept every question! Try to find answers only if by keeping the questions you risk leaving your fellow campaigners hanging in the air! Try to translate questions into suggestions as often as possible!

Organise 'Create an experience for performers'! Open windows for them on how this experience could be interwoven into new action!

Find a text containing a function between two subjects! Find a function between two subjects for any text! Make the function visible! Extend the exercise to consider subject and object! Check whether the exercise can also be done with movements, gestures or other categories than text! Create variations of this function! Make them visible from the different perspectives of those who change themselves, those who change something or someone, or those who are being changed! Try to clarify at what point a subject becomes an object!

Let the spectators believe something that you then shatter! Let them believe something that you vary! Then show off the variations!

Have a person describe to you what they want to see! Try to organise it!

Collect photos or pictures and match them to your attempts!

Make a mistake that redeems itself! Create a scene or performance in which you integrate something that doesn't fit in! Design two versions! One in which the 'mistake' is attributed to the performers! And one in which it is attributed to you! Compare the structure! (This exercise is not intended for public dissemination!) Expand both variants to the point where the 'mistake' can be perceived as necessary! Then take it out and look at the performance!

Cross out every suggestion you tried from this book and put a new one in the book at www.alexandrianova.eu!

Ask yourself what would be uncool! Then try to shape it anyway until it speaks to you and tells you something!

Organise spectators! Create an audience out of them! Create things that make spectators want to do something, to join in!

Every day, describe a situation in which one person makes another person do something! Create your personal warm-up for yourself as a director! Try out different exercises that train the most important muscle for a director.

Imitate a movement! Then a gesture! Reduce the latter until the gesture is only a movement! And expand the imitated movement until it becomes a gesture!

Find the point where the imitation becomes mimeisthai and where the danced imitation becomes self-value! Put different events, movements, gestures in chronological order! Design a sequence that produces meaning! Design another so that a story emerges that does not give away its meaning! Repeat the exercise to create a situation! Then do the same, but let chance do the conducting!

Through practical exercises with your fellow participants, explore the difference between the phrases 'women must start the fight', 'a woman walks across the square', and 'a woman says: "What's the point?"'.

Observe someone who is pushed into action by this text and those who involve themselves in the action!

If it confuses you to read sentences that must be pronounced in order to make sense, in order for them to have a function, in order for them to be unsettling, first of all don't tell anyone! In conversations about this, feel your way towards the question of how your counterpart views the question! Does the person see danger or purification in the transformation?! Write down this confusion of yours and keep it! Preserve it through the many conversations and lectures that are given to you on the subject that these sentences no longer make sense, that one can no longer say this in this way today! Look for the gap that brings these dormant sentences back into play! Bring this game into a productive relationship with the burning questions of our time! Discover/search for/lift up the hopes that have perished, the future that has not yet come to pass in the game of dead sentences!

Skip the next pages if for you it is not yet a question, is no longer a question or has never been a question anyway, how a dormant sentence sleeping on paper awakens when used in the body of a human being! Write down a sentence that you would like to see spoken in a certain situation! Read a text and mark what is strange to you! Write it down and formulate the questions your mother would have asked with a different colour! Design a scene and ask yourself how many spectators you would have in the best case! Try to rewrite the same scene so that you get four times as many! Answer the question of whether you see your quest solely as an idiosyncratic expression of yourself or your art as cultural work! Give this article to an ally and ask her to read it aloud to you! Listen! Make a note of what changes!

When you hear yourself explaining to a work partner what you don't want, write down what you want! Move from avoidance to affirmation! From affirmation to variation! From variation to creation!

Turn a pause into an action!

Give someone a task! Describe its implementation! Describe the difference from the idea you had of its realisation! Try to formulate disappointments and surprises!

When teachers use these suggestions in the training of students of directing, they should not use them to legitimise one aesthetic or another! They should also take a step back to be surprised! All these suggestions are only useful for those who want to find something out! If one simply reads on, this text remains as dead as any play in a closed book! If one uses the suggestions to legitimise preconceived theses, it is as breathless as a copied game!

Stop reading! Put an end to the text! Decide! Take the first step!

Produce an expectation and deal with it in a surprising way! Stage an event! In the second step, stage an event that directs the imagination or curiosity of the audience to the next moment!

Create a reality! Create a layer for a scenic design that introduces a reality!

Create an event! Create a second event! Combine them in a different order! Frame the different possibilities differently again! But use each of these different framings once for each of the different orders so that you can see what each does to the designs! Combine several events so that they build up to a catastrophe! Then design a disaster without an event!

Create an event and think of it as a performance! Create an event and make the performance character disappear! Create a performance and make the event disappear!

Design a situation that you do not want to be part of! Formulate it in such a way that a person would want to face it in a protected space, a game! Change the result until you become a witness to the scene you do not want to experience! Design a scene that you want to be part of! Then create the protected space for it!

Take a novel or a story that interests you! Use a pencil to divide the text into sections! Separate them according to the point of view of a changing location! Learn what to do first so that the jumps in the scene come to consciousness! Find a way for characters from the previous location to communicate with those from the new location without dissolving the locations!

Initiate a scene where someone does something on stage! Defamiliarise it until it is seen with different eyes! Make it even stranger until something else is seen!

Design two images that interact! Transform this game into one that takes place between two people! Give this game rules! Break the rules in a place that is sensitive for you!

Find the field on which your art plays and also its borders! Mark the boundary stone between this field and the area you think your art should not touch! Do not avoid this border but seek its proximity! Describe how the game changes! In the second step, do not flee the foreign area! Look for the bridge between these two fields on which your art plays in a new way! Say goodbye to the idea that you can play in any area of the theatre! Name for yourself the area that is furthest from you! Work on it!

Create a scene of 180 seconds in which something happens that really interests you! Revise this scene so that it interests your grandma! Revise it again to be of general interest! Record all these scenes and describe what makes them different! Invent your Friend Harvey for whom you are directing! Let him ask you the question you fear!

Repeat a sentence! Put it in different contexts! Take a play that interests you! Give it a different name and get others interested in it!

Re-enact one of your scenes with different actors!

Design ten sentences that lead to something! Design ten sentences that make other people want to do something! Observe them and write down the peculiarities in the execution that deviate from what you had imagined! Design ten sentences that lead nowhere! Put these sentences into contexts so that they have consequences!

Tear out the page on which these lines are written and decide where to embed them so that they have the greatest possible effect for you! Find a place for the torn-out page! Determine a time and a working context in which they could set something in motion! Or destroy them!

!!!!!

Stop working when you are bored! But don't punish yourself and your comrades-in-arms because you stopped! Get to know your feeling of boredom! Learn to describe the difference between the potential boredom of publishing what you do and the mental boredom of working! Overwrite the last page! Find the difference where you are not bored but really interested! Transfer this exercise to a time when you are working with others!

Create attention! Make two attempts in this direction! Once in such a way that it does not appear as theatricalising! And the second time so that it is reflected as an art process! Describe the differences in an article you write yourself! Ask someone to behave theatrically without it seeming theatrical! In your school or work environment, organise attention for a cause for which there would otherwise be none, without it being noticed that you let it happen! Analyse what you have done and apply it to a scene you are staging!

Search for fabrics not themes! Find a material or a play for topics that interest you!

Read at least as many plays as you read texts about themes! Don't be afraid of stories! Try to translate this fear that rises within you into interest in people and their fears! Read a play ten times! Don't be afraid that you will never find the right play! You don't have to find a play that interests you! Interest is the result of work! Leave behind the idea of being contemporary! Find the form in which a text, which by now has a function that can be described as historical, visits our present! Your invitation to a story in our time is not a reproduction!

Design a performance in which the performers play no role! Try the same thing again, so that it is not certain whether they allude to something that exists outside the performance! In a third attempt, try to approach this border exactly from the other side!

Design a scene in which the performers do not generate meaning! Try the same in mimetic play!

Practise telling stories! Use every opportunity! Even in the tram! Transfer your experiences to the stage! Take an object! Write the script for an advertising clip for this object!

Use a picture as the starting point for a short story! Use the same picture for a story where the picture is the climax of the story! And then create a story where it is the final image!

Write a back story suggesting that someone could come to this or that action!

Make a funny moment appear as a tragedy! Do the same with a tragic or sad moment! Make it seem funny! Transform a story into another genre!

Read a sentence that claims to describe what contemporary theatre is or what it should do and try to see what this text is trying to deny theatre! Try to treat this prohibition in a carnivalesque way! Start translating texts about theatre into propositions for yourself! Go this way also with explanations you doubt!

Theatricalise a factual text! In a second step, let two performers step out of this figuration for an episode in which the central idea stands between them as people!

Do not let a suggestion be tried out without consequences! Combine suggestions! Don't let the work stop! After a day or two, remind yourself of what you have done and what it has led you to! Give back! The thought will come to you of what could come out of it! Don't let the opportunity pass if you don't want the practice to fall asleep again! Only what you do can continue! Find spectators! Organise them! Learn to love them!

Put this text into an order of exercises that makes sense to you!

Justify a gesture by making its social function visible! Justify a prop in the same way! Build a prop! Build a prop into an action! Build it into the plot twice! Make it a necessary part of the drama! Make the prop an object again! Create a performance with this object!

Divide a scene into sections! Give the sections headings! Formulate the headings as processes! Determine the 'point of new attention' and set this point as the hypothetical starting point of this section! Find a 'triggering moment' for the process of each section! Tighten up the questioning from this moment on! Identify the force in the text that drives this intensification or culmination! Describe the moment when this movement turns in another direction and the reason why it cannot go higher! Try to move the peak! Make a hypothesis as to what force is now at work! If you see this force outside a person, try to make it visible inside a person! Decide if the struggle, the dance or the question finds a resolution or becomes covered up by a point of new attention! If you are surrounded by too many voices telling you that this is 'painting by numbers', follow them and skip to the next chapter in this book or else seek the silence of your profession and expose yourself to its solitude! Struggle with the doubt that this is just a process after all and that there are a thousand others! Make as many teas as this doubt will take!

Use alternative structures! Use the Japanese pattern Jo-ha-kyū, which could perhaps be translated as beginning, interruption, fast! Give different speeds to the sections of a five-membered structure and to a three-membered structure! Try to use the speeds in counterpoint to the content!

Use text situationally! Use it to explain or report! And use it as material! Design a mixture of these!

Turn an activity into an action! Theatricalise an activity! Theatricalise an action!

Tell a story in which this or that object appears! Tell a story in which this object plays an essential role!

Design a scene with props! Design a scene without props! Describe the differences in terms of the emotionality of the actors! Design a scene with props and then act it out without props! Design a scene without props and then act it with props!

Replace the word prop with a concrete noun like spoon! Practise being concrete!

Design an outlandish episode! Then, in retrospect, create an exposition for it, so that this moment even seems plausible!

You have to do it!

Mark the sentences in the text that repel you the most! Underline with another colour the suggestions that you suspect will lead to something! And choose a third colour for the suggestions where you are interested in what they lead to! Practise formulating proposals that include this 'open question'! Translate the suggestions that repel you into work! Also cross out any sentence in this article where the apodictic outweighs the propositional! Turn these sentences into questions!

Read plays! Copy a play word for word! When reading, don't be satisfied with the suggestions you get! Translate them into the actions of others!

Invent games! Play them! Play them with others! Get others to play them for you! Let the game allude to something! Practise reading the verbs that come into play! Write them down one after the other! Develop a story out of them! Vary,

change and deepen the original game by suggesting additional adverbs for the verbs! Also do this game with alternative adverbs! Describe the changes! Note how the interpretive inferences and the conversation change the original game!

Underlay a scene that alludes to something with a game!

Look at the world from another person's perspective! Start with a single moment! Then look at it from the perspective of other people!

After a rehearsal, note the moments when you reactively tried to correct something and the moments when you made suggestions!

Try to develop a relationship between reactive work and the active process of making suggestions that makes sense for you personally and is productive for the collective!

Keep a video diary of your experiments! Structure it according to questions! Prepare it for publication on the Alexandria Nova website!

Write another page in this very manageable style and make it available to the community of seekers on Alexandria Nova!

Copy this text proposal by proposal! Change the intention or even turn it around! Don't be content with mental games! Put them into practice too!

In comparative experiments, try to keep the differences as small as possible! Try to compare the totally different with the comparable! Try to develop your own next task from the comparable!

"Every theatre begins with a dream!" Write it down! Learn to dream with others!

THIS PAGE IS FULL

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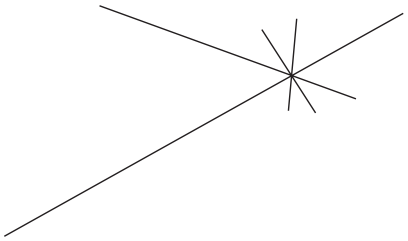
WORKING BEHIND THE SCENES

Alexandria Nova is a network of seven North European directing programmes, the eighth limb of the octopus being a theatre school from São Paulo, Brazil.

The network organized an Erasmus+ project during years 2019-2022. One of the outcomes of the project is this book.



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Suzanne Muller-Jaeschke

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Den Danske Scenekunstskole, Copenhagen, Denmark

Uniarts Helsinki, Finland

Listahaskoli Islands, Reykjavik, Iceland

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Kunsthogskolen i Oslo, Norway

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CO-AUTHOR OF THE INTRODUCTION

Ramunė Balevičiūtė PhD (1981), is a theatre researcher and critic. She is associate professor of theatre studies and Vice-Rector for Art and Research at the Lithuanian Academy of Music and Theatre. She is also editor-in-chief of the main Lithuanian theatre magazine Teatro žurnalas. In addition to academic articles, she has published two monographs: Henrikas Kačinskas (2006) and Rimas Tuminas: Theatre More Real Than Life. Play in Rimas Tuminas' Theatre (2012). Together with Ramunė Marcinkevičiūtė, she edited the English-language book Contemporary Lithuanian Theatre. Names and Performances (2019). Her research areas include acting, artistic research, and theatre for young audiences.

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Suzanne Muller-Jaeschke (1968) was born and raised in the Netherlands, where she studied Business Administration in Groningen and Theatre in Amsterdam. Since 1996 she has been based in Berlin, working as a freelance dramaturge, teacher and project manager in the field of theatre. She has been working in theatres such as HAU, Sophiensaele, Volksbühne and Toneelhuis Antwerpen with artists such as Constanza Macras, Johan Simons and Lotte van den Berg. From 2009 to 2018 she was executive secretary of the German Dramaturgs' Society, cooperating with state theatres in a.o. Berlin, Munich, and Zurich. Since 2019 she has been the project manager for the Alexandria Nova network of North-European theatre schools at the Hochschule für Schauspielkunst Ernst Busch in Berlin.

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Since 2013, Francis Whyte has been working as a freelance English-language reviser and text editor. He received an MA in English and French from the University of Auckland, New Zealand, and a PhD in French literature from Laval University, Quebec City, Canada. He was successively Lecturer in French-English translation at the Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières, Associate Vice Rector for Faculty and Student Affairs at Laval University, and Vice Rector Academic at Concordia University, Montreal. In 1998, he was appointed Director-General of the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada, and in 2005 Rector of the Université du Québec en Outaouais. From 2007 to 2013 he was Associate Professor of English Philology at Vilnius University, Lithuania, where he taught English formal writing.

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Vilmantas Žumbys (1992, Skuodas) is a graphic artist and designer currently based in Vilnius. He graduated from the Vilnius Academy of Arts, majoring in Book Art and studied Graphic Design at the Academy of Fine Arts, Leipzig. Vilmantas is a recipient of awards from The Best Dutch Book Designs, The Best Lithuanian Book Designs and an individual design scholarship from the Lithuanian Council of Culture.

He takes on a wide range of projects focusing on book design, editorial design, typography and illustration. Since 2015, Vilmantas has been working for Theatre Magazine, the only printed publication dedicated to a deliberate and critical reflection on the performing arts in Lithuania. His clients also include: Association of Performing Arts Critics, Kaunas Biennial, Vilnius University, Vilnius and Klaipėda Puppet Theatres, Theatre and Cinema Information and Education Centre, Lithuanian Institute of History, Lithuanian National Radio and Television, as well as various publishing houses, NGO organisations and self-publishing initiatives.

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Rethinking Theatre Directing Practices
and Pedagogies in the 21st Century

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ALEXANDRIA NOVA

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Looking for direction verbalises lore and embodied knowledge about the art of directing and the art of teaching it. All of the 17 writers are directors, and in most cases, teachers of directing. We are looking for a new way of being/becoming a director, but we still believe that the traditions we carry have a lot to give for the future.

The position of a director is a hot spot in theatre today. We need to confront the new questions of power and hierarchy in our work in a very concrete way, as well as the questions of representation and interpretation. How can we create shared meaning on stage when the metanarratives are losing their universality and the audiences interpret meaning more diversely than ever before?

We invite you to play with this book, jump around, change it, add something, rewrite it and if you like throw it right back at us in a dialogue.

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