

# HOW CAN WE PLAY TOGETHER

survival kits for devising and process-based theatre within  
institutions  
or  
on trust

HALLVEIG KRISTÍN EIRÍKSDÓTTIR



**ABSTRACT****DATE:**

<b>AUTHOR</b> Hallveig Kristín Eiríksdóttir	<b>MASTER'S OR OTHER DEGREE PROGRAMME</b> Masters Degree Programme in Directing
<b>TITLE OF THE WRITTEN COMPONENT/THESIS</b> HOW CAN WE PLAY TOGETHER	<b>NUMBER OF PAGES + APPENDICES IN THE WRITTEN COMPONENT</b> 82 pages
<b>TITLE OF THE ARTISTIC/ ARTISTIC AND PEDAGOGICAL WORK</b> FÖRLORARNA. Premiere September 19 <sup>th</sup> 2024, Åbo Svenska Teater, Turku.  Title of the artistic component, and if applicable, information about the performance (team, premiere, location). <input type="checkbox"/> The artistic work is not produced by the Theatre Academy (copyright matters have been agreed upon). <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> There is no recording available for the artistic work. <input type="checkbox"/>	
<p>This thesis is an attempt to define what actions can be taken during the creation of a devised performance within an institutional theatre by the three agents of director, actor and artistic leader, to find a middle ground despite their differences. I will explore what steps each participant can take towards the middle, hoping to also define what the middle is and what the middle can be; and, since this is a thesis on Theatre Directing, to place the main responsibility to organize these conditions on the director themselves.</p> <p>Using my own artistic thesis project FÖRLORARNA at Åbo Svenska Teater as a case study and through conversation with other directors, artistic leaders and actors both from Finland and Iceland, I hope to find tools to facilitate similar processes within institutions. To take one step closer to normalising non-text based creation processes within the mainstream production houses and to create space for more of the different, strange, unknown, unpredictable, norm-questioning and unconventional art to be visible on our best-funded stages.</p> <p>I will also define what devising means for me, basing my thoughts on my opinion that devising relies on the conditions for play and to analyse what is needed to create and maintain the conditions for play within a process.</p> <p>I will attempt to analyse what needs professional actors at institutional theatre have to be able to perform at their desired standard and to stay open through-out a process, what needs the theatre as an institution has to be able to meet their duties and what needs a director has to stay true to their artistic vision and not burn out, and where those needs can be modified or have to be compromised.</p> <p>This thesis is both personal and practical, as I reflect on my own practise and experience, examining where my own taste and methodology comes from while also opening up to a wider context of how this kind of work can be facilitated and normalised on an institutional level.</p> <p>My personal life situation at the moment affects the writing of this thesis to a large extent, since it is written with a newborn child in my arms. Some reflections on this situation will be found in the footnotes.</p> <p>I have found it more giving to think through conversation with other people and thus I explore these topics through 9 interviews with different theatre professionals, some of which are friends and/or colleagues.</p> <p>In the later part of this thesis, I will reflect on directing a devised process through the philosophical and practical paradoxes encountered in the terms of freedom, violence, trust and taste.</p>	
<b>KEYWORDS</b> Devising, Play, Failure, Postdramatic, Theatre, Performance, Institution, Healing, Trust, Taste, Freedom, Violence, Motherhood, Breastfeeding.	

---

1. INTRODUCTION	4
2. "SAMSKÖPUN"	7
2.1. <i>DEVISING WITH INSTITUTIONS</i>	8
2.2. <i>PLAY</i>	10

---

3. FÖRLORARNA AND FAILURES	14
3.1. <i>FÖRLORARNA</i>	14
3.2. <i>SYNOPSIS</i>	15
3.3. <i>FAILURES</i>	16

---

4. ASSUMING UNCERTAINTY	19
4.1. <i>THE ZONE OF DISCOMFORT AND GETTING LOST</i>	19
4.2. <i>TRUSTING THE PROCESS</i>	22

---

5. SURVIVAL KIT FOR INSTITUTIONS	26
5.1. <i>NEEDS</i>	29
5.1.1. <i>TIME NEEDS</i>	30
5.1.2. <i>ACTORS' NEEDS</i>	32
5.1.3. <i>MARKETING NEEDS</i>	33
5.1.4. <i>SUBTITLE NEEDS</i>	34
5.1.5. <i>COSTUME DEPARTMENT NEEDS</i>	35
5.1.6. <i>HAIR AND MAKE-UP DEPARTMENT NEEDS</i>	36
5.1.7. <i>STAGE DEPARTMENT NEEDS</i>	37
5.2. <i>HINDSIGHT</i>	38
5.2.1. <i>ATTITUDE AND SUPPORT</i>	39
5.3. <i>CONCLUSION vol. I</i>	42

---

6. SURVIVAL KIT FOR ACTORS	44
6.1. <i>DECISION MAKING AND TRANSPARENCY</i>	45
6.2. <i>ARTISTIC LANGUAGE</i>	51
6.2.1. <i>TOOLS</i>	52
6.2.2. <i>OPENINGS</i>	57
6.2.3. <i>RESISTANCE</i>	60
6.3. <i>CONCLUSION vol. II</i>	61

---

7. SURVIVAL KIT FOR DIRECTORS	62
7.1. <i>CONDITIONS FOR PLAY</i>	62
7.1.1. <i>ENERGY AND CREATIVE JUICE</i>	62
7.1.2. <i>FREEDOM</i>	65
7.1.3. <i>VIOLENCE</i>	67

7.1.4. <i>TRUST</i>	69
7.2. <i>CONCLUSION vol. III</i>	73
<hr/>	
8. MEETING IN THE MIDDLE	74
9. FINAL WORDS	76

References

Appendices



# 1. INTRODUCTION

In this thesis, I intend to define what actions can be taken during the creation of a devised performance within an institutional theatre by the three agents of director, actor and artistic leader, to find a middle ground despite their differences. I will explore what steps each participant can take towards the middle, hoping to also define what the middle is and what the middle can be; and, since this is a thesis on Theatre Directing, to place the main responsibility to organize these conditions on the director themselves. Using my own artistic thesis project FÖRLORARNA at Åbo Svenska Teater as a case study and through conversation with other directors, artistic leaders and actors both in Finland and in Iceland, I hope to find tools to facilitate similar processes within institutions. To take one step closer to normalising non-text based creation processes within the mainstream production houses and to create space for more of the different, strange, unknown, unpredictable, norm-questioning and unconventional art to be visible on our best-funded stages.

I will look at what base conditions are needed for a process-based performance to be possible. I will also define what devising means for me, basing my thoughts on the notion that devising relies on the conditions for play and to analyse what is needed to create and maintain the conditions for play within a process; from a director's point of view within the rehearsal space, from the institution's point of view on a structural level and from the actor's point of view on a participatory and acting level. I will attempt to analyse what needs professional actors at institutional theatres have to be able to perform at their desired standard and to stay open through-out the process, what needs the theatre as an institution has to be able to meet their duties and what needs a director has to stay true to their artistic vision and not burn out. Looking at the combination of these needs, I will reflect on where those needs can be modified or must be compromised.

Departing from my own experience with FÖRLORARNA, I will attempt to define where difficulties can arise from the institution as a setting, the difference in participants' taste and background and where individuals can take on personal responsibility to make the process function successfully (and even be enjoyable and illuminating). I will go through my own journey with Åbo Svenska Teater, analyse the difficult situations that emerged in the process and try to learn from them, hopefully creating useful knowledge for others along the way.

This thesis is both personal and practical, as I reflect on my own practise and experience, examining where my own taste and methodology comes from while also opening up to a wider context of how this kind of work can be facilitated and normalised on an institutional level. My personal life situation at the moment affects the writing of this thesis to a large extent, as it did the creative process of FÖRLORARNA as well, since it is written with a newborn child<sup>1</sup> in the next room and sometimes not at all in the next room but in my arms, breastfeeding or curious about this interesting keyboard and the possibilities of its erase-button. Navigating this brain-fog postpartum, I have found it more giving to think through conversation with other people, feeding off their experience and expertise. I explore these topics through 9 interviews with different theatre professionals, some of which are also friends and/or colleagues. They all work actively in the theatre either in Finland or Iceland and have all had experiences with creating process-based performances within an institutional setting, either as directors, actors or artistic leaders and with them I discuss the topic from these three different angles. The interviews were conducted between October and December of 2024, after the premiere of FÖRLORARNA. The interviewees are artistic leader of Åbo Svenska Teater Kira-Emmi Pohtokari, actress Aðalbjörg Árnadóttir, performance maker Friðgeir Einarsson, actor Hallgrímur Ólafsson, actress Daniela Franzell, director Una Þorleifsdóttir, dean of Iceland University of the Arts and former artistic leader of the Reykjavík City Theatre Kristín Eysteinsdóttir, current artistic leader of the National Theatre Magnús Geir Eyjólfsson and theatre maker and dancer Saga Kjerúlf Sigurðardóttir.

In the later part of this thesis, I will reflect on directing a devised process through the philosophical and practical paradoxes encountered in the terms of *freedom*, *violence*, *trust* and *taste*, which I feel is what it all boils down to. What has stuck with me, now a few weeks after the premiere of FÖRLORARNA, are the problems I had with communicating with the actors and the institution about various aspects of the approach, either regarding performance quality, material creation or staying in the unknown. I also encountered a gap of both taste and references in terms of these approaches and modes of performance, and I will try to decipher what exactly was the problem, where my own thinking was insufficient or unclear and where there was simply a difference in taste.

---

<sup>1</sup> Who is the cutest and best

As a theoretical background to this thesis, I base my thoughts on devising and its place within theatre world on the writings of Karl Ágúst Þorbergsson's "Leit að formi", Steinunn Knútsdóttir's *Lóðrétt rannsókn*, Hans-Thies Lehmann *Postdramatic Theatre* and Forced Entertainment's various reflections of their work and methodology. My own artistic approach and taste I reflect on through Jack Halberstam's *The Queer Art of Failure* and Maggie Nelson's *On Freedom*, Susan Sontag's *Notes on Camp* and Bourdieu's *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*. Other written works I am in conversation with are Anne Bogart's *A Director Prepares*, Elinor Fuchs' *The Death of Character* and Michael Kirby's article "On Acting and Not-Acting" in the book *Acting Re-considered*.

## 2. “SAMSKÖPUN”<sup>2</sup>

*How do you force an institution that has grown old to free itself and become again  
the boards that “mean the world”?*

-NTGhent (2018)



Daniela Franzell, Jerry Wahlforss, Ingemar Raukola and Samuel Karlsson in  
FÖRLORARNA (2024)  
Photo: Riku Suvitie

The performance FÖRLORARNA premiered at Åbo Svenska Teater's main stage on September 19th, 2024. It was my final artistic project from the Directing programme at the Theatre Academy in Helsinki in collaboration with the theatre, and the process was a joint attempt by me and artistic leader Kira-Emmi Pohtokari to explore how to create the ideal conditions for a process-based performance to thrive within the rigid and traditional structure of an old institutional theatre. We tried to find ways where we considered all departments involved in such a big process, where the structure of staging a pre-written play with the participants playing the conventional roles of actors, writer, director and designers didn't always apply in the normal way. Considering the

---

<sup>2</sup> (en. Collective Creation)

needs of different departments, both artistic and practical, we tried to find what could remain as it was and what structures needed to be re-thought.

There are several reasons why this experiment was appealing to me. First, my own personal taste in theatre usually leans toward the postdramatic, non-linear and physical - both when it comes to what I enjoy seeing onstage and what I enjoy doing in my own work. This is in part indebted to my education in directing from the Icelandic University of Art, which was established in 2005 and is based on directing programmes in Gießen in Germany and Dartington in the UK, both of which rely heavily on postdramatic methodology and art theory. In IUA, the focus is on the director as an author and collective creation processes, and students are trained to blur the lines of the traditional roles of the theatre, often directing, writing and performing their own shows (Karl Ágúst Þorbergsson, 2021, p. 243). This is the area where I have had the most education and working experience, and I have found the aspect of collective creation fulfilling on an artistic level as it opens up a playful way of working and a more unexpected result than traditional playwriting.

A second reason for wanting to explore this topic is the clash I have witnessed and experienced between the traditional theatre world and the independent theatre scene in Iceland in the past decade. FÖRLORARNA was an attempt to bridge the gap between the institution and the alternative, setting out on a journey destined to crash into some walls and suffer in the hope of finding new paths around the old ways.

## 2.1. DEVISING WITH INSTITUTIONS

I believe that contemporary theatre making is an extremely important part of the ecosystem of the theatre scene. But, at least in the context of both Iceland and Finland where I live and work, it is a part that is traditionally kept on the margins because of not fitting within the very set structures of institutions, thus keeping the money on only one end of a very large spectrum of theatre and starving the end where the experimental is happening. My impression is that commonly it is seen as an artistic risk to invite alternative working methods onto the larger stages of the institutional theatres, and there is a heavy tendency to lean towards what is believed to be "safe" artistic options.<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup> "Safe" meaning text-based, psychological dramas and adaptations of classics, staged with traditional hierarchies, reaffirming societal norms and values; whatever sells to a middle-class audience.

Meanwhile, paradoxically, the scene is bursting with experimental artists whose work is immensely successful whenever they get space and funding.<sup>4</sup>

The most experimental and provocative artists and collectives are seen surviving on the margins of the scene while the institutions remain traditional in their choices in both content and form, keeping the funding safely tucked away for maintaining tradition while the artists who work with collective and contemporary authorship, that question hierarchies and redefine what theatre can be are either forced to work multiple jobs and risking burn-out,<sup>5</sup> or eventually to bow to traditional ways of working in order to fit in with the institution's streamlined processes. In a time of budget cuts and backlashes, I believe that it has never been more important to take care that the experimental, the queer, the questioning and the transformational work remains properly funded. If we, as theatre professionals and/or institutions, are to believe that *theatre matters* and that what we put on stage has value, meaning and power; then we must admit that representation, how we portray hierarchies and what voices we elevate to the stage, *matters*. That staging work that provokes tradition and opens a window to the possibility that there are alternative ways of thinking and acting and being and approaching each other, *matters*. Theatre has the power to change and to affirm societal values and if those repeatedly affirmed values remain unquestioned or always subject to capitalist values, then theatre has lost its artistic and transformative potential.

*What theatre projects deserve the most money? Of course it should be the projects that are taking the biggest risks. That's where the money should be.*

-Saga Kjerúlf Sigurðardóttir (2024)

I think institutions who have public funding should be opening their doors to different working methods that allow for a multitude of voices to be heard, finding ways to accommodate both directors working with alternative methods of creation and groups and collectives doing the same. Changes need to be made, a few of which are probably hard and complicated to enforce but most of these changes have to do with taste,

---

<sup>4</sup> In the Icelandic theatre context, this can be seen concretely in the success of Marble Crowd's *Eyður* (2020), Þorleifur Örn's *Njála* (2016) and Halla Ólafsdóttir and Erna Ómarsdóttir's *Rómeó <3 Júlía* (2021); all devised or non-text-based works that have sold out the big stages.

<sup>5</sup> Or, as is common in the case of Iceland, to leave the country.

questioning the idea of theatre as a product for consumption and simply the interest and energy to imagine new ways of doing things.

I clearly experienced this when working with Kira-Emmi Pohtokari, whose goal as an artistic leader is to create the conditions where the artist can flourish at work and reach their full artistic potential while simultaneously seeking ways to create a sustainable working environment for the theatre's permanent employees. (Kira-Emmi Pohtokari, 2024) It must be emphasized how brave the choice of programming FÖRLORARNA was for her, as this was her first premiere as a new leader of the oldest theatre in Finland. To place trust on a new director who is also a<sup>6</sup> foreigner, and to follow through and show full support throughout the whole process, always seeking ways to connect departments and communicate and facilitate my artistic vision as a director. I genuinely hope that this thesis will be read by some artistic leaders of theatre institutions because she is a role model for all of you and you need to learn from her.

## 2.2. PLAY

To shed some light on what my intentions were with the actors of Åbo Svenska Teater in 2024 and what kind of a process I wanted to facilitate, I will attempt to position myself within the universe of what we can call devised or contemporary or process-based or non-text based or postdramatic theatre and to formulate what that genre means to me. It can stand for a myriad of different artistic approaches but is perhaps easiest defined by the tendency to work from *other* sources than a readymade text – for example from a theme, from the body or by taking inspiration from material or space. In his article in *Skírnir*, theatre artist Karl Ágúst Þorbergsson states that the most common denominator of postdramatic theatre is the value placed on questioning hierarchical structures and societal norms (Karl Ágúst Þorbergsson, 2021, p. 234). This tendency of questioning and re-defining accepted norms can either apply to the work aesthetically, structurally and/or methodologically, in infinite constellations and implementations. It can mean non-hierarchical working methods, where the role of the director is completely abolished and all decisions are made in a fully democratic manner, it can mean that the choice of subject and how it is handled is norm-questioning and dealing with marginal themes or it can be implemented in the structure of the performance itself, renouncing the tradition of the Aristotelian storyline or the hero's journey. It can mean redefining what a theatrical performance can be, who can be seen, who can be

---

<sup>6</sup> pregnant

heard, how we experience the performance and who is allowed to act how and why. It means questioning tradition, setting off into the unknown and trusting that there are alternatives to the tradition to be found, re-imagined, explored and played with. Sometimes, the form is even more important than the content, where the meaning of the performance is felt through atmosphere or a way of being, rather than through character, text or plot (Steinunn Knútsdóttir, 2016, p. 20).

At IUA I have studied some concrete approaches to devising, developing my approach further in a professional context with my theatre collectives *CGFC* and *Losti Collective*. One approach that I think is worth analysing, which for me serves as an entrance into devising, is a basic tool of process-based performance: the “opening”. This is the smallest building unit of the devising process, where the actors/performers enter the subject and explore the theme, stage presence and style that will later tie together into the finished performance. It shares similarities with the Stanislavskian etude and can be called by many names - be it demo, sketch, draft or simply performance, but the term “opening” will be used here as taught in the Directing program of IUA since it carries in its name what I believe to be a core difference between script theatre and devising: the intention to get lost. Other common elements of devised methodology that I commonly employ are working with lists, open dramaturgy and improvisations from real space or from fictional margins within the rehearsal room (for example the method known as *The Theatre Machine*, a method coined by art collective *Mindgroup*), treasure hunting and task writing.

The Icelandic word for devising, process-based and/or postdramatic theatre is the wonderful word 'Samsköpunarleikhús'. Directly translated into English, this means 'Collectively Created Theatre', carrying within its meaning the renouncement of the single author and the emphasis on creating material through democratic collaboration with others. My personal interpretation of this genre and perhaps how I choose to work with it artistically is to highlight the questioning of form, to find different ways to invite multiple voices into the creation of the material and to adopt the element of *play* which I find to sit at the core of my approach.

Play for me means to let go of restrictions, to turn off the outer eye, to open up to listening to each other and our surroundings and to abandon ownership and status. It means celebrating that we are here, now, that the people around us are gifts to lift up and to support without expecting anything back. Play for me means *entering the unknown*, trusting that the others will be here to catch us and that wherever we go, we will reach an endpoint. It's about trust; trust in our intuition, trust in that we are enough;

that within us and everyone in the room lies a whole world of feelings, beauty, joy, pain, experience and opinions that can be taken out and put into a costume for everyone to enjoy. Play is celebrating stupidity, of not knowing too much and looking dumb. It's allowing oneself to surrender the role of an adult and being irresponsible with one's words, actions and self-performance. I see play as a subversive act and it is in *samsköpun*, collective creation and material gathering, that I find it to be most artistically interesting. I believe that play flourishes best when we get to define our own games and let go of or toy with tradition, remembering where we are coming from and taking a conscious step into unwritten territory.

As mentioned before, there are many different ways to work postdramatically and it does not always include the methods of collective creation that I have incorporated into my work. The reason I'm drawn to this particular way is because I believe that the act of questioning the hierarchies within a process is crucial to someone in the role of a director, while also valuing the element of curiosity and engagement that comes with opening up to more voices to be heard within a process, seeking material outside of the rehearsal space and allowing oneself to get lost.

That being said, I do feel that when working in an institutional setting or with new colleagues, some defined roles/hierarchies are useful to make the work go forward. I have worked extensively in completely non-hierarchical collectives, recognizing that those collaborations have been built on years of trust, friendship, work towards dismantling our shared ideas about hierarchy as a group and the fundamental act of *choosing each other*, which brings an atmosphere of freedom and play that is optimistic to expect from a completely new group of people. What personally interests me regarding this genre is the possibility to get lost and to discover new things, to go on a journey that has the high stakes of potential failure and to dwell in the vibrant space created within the unknown. That is the spark behind my artistic drive, and I believe that when the working method is transparent, it will translate the stakes to the stage itself. To place trust in the working group and believe that together we will create something unexpected. But this of course only works if everyone wants to play, which is not always the case. So my question on all fronts after this process is:

**HOW CAN WE PLAY TOGETHER?**



Julia Korander in FÖRLORARNA (2024)  
Photo: Pette Rissanen

### 3. FÖRLORARNA AND FAILURES



Photo: Hallveig Kristín Eiríksdóttir

I will briefly explain the process of FÖRLORARNA, as it will be referenced as a case study throughout the thesis. I will describe the performance scene for scene for you, dear reader, as I myself love hearing about performances that I didn't see and fill in the blanks with my own imagination. After that, I will list out some difficult moments during the process that will guide the topics in the chapters on SURVIVAL.

#### 3.1. FÖRLORARNA

FÖRLORARNA was performed by 5 actors (and sometimes one stagehand or costume designer (and even once by artistic leader Kira-Emmi Pohtokari herself)) on Åbo Svenska Teater's big stage throughout the fall of 2024. Involved in the creative process were actors Daniela Franzell, Ingemar Raukola, Jerry Wahlforss, Julia Korander and Samuel Karlsson, set-, costume and videodesigner Riku Suvitie, dramaturge Per Ehrström, sound designer and composer Tuuli Kainulainen, hair & make-up designer Sarianna Sormunen, lighting designer Antti Niitemaa and myself. The performance travelled between improvised physical and spoken scenes to set, rehearsed text scenes and back. The audience was invited to sit on the stage, to participate in the games and to actively cheer on the actors during their play.

The theme of the show was play through the lens of handball, with a sub-theme of losing. The performance was a fully devised piece, with very little decided beforehand and was created from watching sports games, reading texts, interviews, googling, drawing on own memories and from physical exploration in space, both inside and outside of the theatre's rehearsal room.

The stage was a realistic looking handball court with a functioning score board, which contributed to the use of real time on stage. The performers and stageworkers wore sports outfits throughout the show, and the soundscape was inspired directly from the world of handball and consisted of whistles, eurotechno and the squeaking of shoes on the gym floor. The relationship between the performers began as that of a sports team and their attitude towards the audience was as if they were their cheering-squad.

### 3.2. SYNOPSIS

The first act of the performance started with an introduction to handball by its founding father, Holger Nielsen, then moved to a warm-up choreography and then entered a world of sports and games. The popular sports anthem 'Live is Life' by the Austrian DJ Ötzi was sung in the style of an anthem.

Then came 'the Quote scene', where the actors sat down at the front of the stage, as if on a bench in a locker room, and we heard quotes from all the different interviews that had been made during the creation of the process, including sentences from the ÅIFK's girls team, coach Brynjar Karl Sigurðsson, team founder and pizza place owner Dennis Rafkin, handball mother Jessica and her son Liam. This ended with the whole audience being counted, to be able to bake the right amount of mockarutor for the intermission.

The actors then played a real game onstage (one that we had invented as a group during rehearsals, our own simplified version of handball), where they had to actually compete with each other, dividing the audience into cheering teams, improvising team names and having to give their best. The game lasted 5 minutes and the time was shown on the score board in real-time.

After the game, there was an improvised feedback scene where the actors had to give feedback on their own performance during the game. All the actors had a pre-determined intention they would give feedback with (positive, pessimistic, enthusiastic), but always referencing things that actually happened during the game.

This scene ended with scripted text by one of the actors, transitioning into a scene with the coach where he was kicked off the team and became a mascot.

Then we went into an Olympic television scene where a handball mother was competitively baking mockarutor for her children's tournament with live commentary from announcers and a coach watching anxiously from the sidelines. Then we went into intermission.

During the pause, mockarutor were sold in the cafeteria.

In the second act, the audience was welcomed back into the auditorium with the invitation to sit on the bleachers onstage and participate in a game of *Roskisboll* - where the goal was to throw a soft, orange ball into a trashcan and win a prize. When an audience member finally managed to hit the trash-can, which sometimes took under a minute and sometimes the game lasted a lot longer, one character hijacked the prize-ceremony by being a sore loser, ruining the moment for everybody. A confetti bomb exploded anti-climatically.

A soft choir version of DJ Ötzi's *Live is Life* was sung, and we heard snippets from childhood memories of moments of encountering loss and misunderstanding rules in sports, where the feeling of losing was tangible, which transitioned into unrealistic fantasies of winning where one character imagined his whole life as a successful series of wins, finally encountering Ingmar Bergman's *Döden* and playing handball for his life.

Then, an improvised game where the actors made up rules from all different games and sports, which had the rule of ending with everybody winning and nobody losing.

At last, a ritual celebrating co-operation and communality, making an attempt at rejecting the toxic atmosphere of individualism that is so praised in the sports world.

### 3.3. FAILURES

In this chapter will focus on what challenges I met as a director during the process, zooming in on the difficult moments and try to draw some lessons from them. It is worth mentioning that I am very happy with the final result of the performance and would not want it to be anything other than it was. I choose to focus on these difficulties

in an attempt to become an ally with my own problems and to direct the spotlight towards my blind-spots in the hope to illuminate them for myself and hopefully to make that a useful lesson for any future productions attempting something similar. The main questions I will address are those stemming from the walls I've run into and failures I've experienced during the process, where there have been clashes and where I've felt a lack of tools to handle the situation better. Some are related to me as a director and others are more related to the structure of the institution, many connected with the paradox of juxtaposing play with the productive work environment. My personal directorial failures are connected to how to create and maintain a free space for play, failures in communication about the meaning of this agenda and failures in handling conflicts with some of the actors. Coming from a background of working cross-disciplinary with artists who have been used to performance art and different ways of working than actors with classical training, I realised that I had perhaps never before worked with a group of actors who are used to working strictly from the Stanislavskian perspective. Because they were used to always departing from character or psychological drama/narrative and my work-language is based on task-based performance and physicality (and Icelandic), words fell short in the moment of explaining what I wanted which sometimes resulted in increased frustration with the actors and myself, which I will analyse later in this thesis. I feel that this created a breach of trust, felt from the actors towards the process as well as within me towards the actors. As I am not a native Swedish speaker, I was also quite far out of my element regarding language and especially professional vocabulary when it comes to expressing myself about art, abstract ideas or acting in general, which definitely added to feelings of unclarity.

The feelings of shame that arose around failures like these were difficult to come to terms with in the moment and could produce frustration, anger and insecurity, all things that can create distance and discontent within a process. Failures can however also be seen as a gift and some would say that it is impossible to fail at play or art, that doing it is already a success in itself. Failures can be seen as the incongruities that open up windows into the alternative and invite unexpected things in and are thus often used as a conscious tool in theatre making. Great ideas or scenes often appear from misunderstandings or accidents and when things don't go as planned. One exercise I frequently work with for example is where people write tasks for each other, that must be so short that they are doomed to be misunderstood by the receiver, giving birth to a third, strange and failed thing that nobody is quite sure where it came from. This and other 'celebrated failures' were part of the creation process of

FÖRLORARNA also and brought some wonderful things into the rehearsal space. But here, I will look at the times where I felt like there was failure in maintaining the space where productive and artistic failures could take place, if that makes sense. Failures to secure the playground where other people could feel free to fail.

The failures I have picked out from my experience with FÖRLORARNA are related to the topics of uncertainty and risk, decision making, methodology and transparency, questions about aesthetics, communication, participants' energy and time management.<sup>7</sup> These will then be presented as SURVIVAL KITS in three chapters; for INSTITUTIONS, ACTORS and DIRECTORS. Some of these topics will appear in one chapter and some in all three from varying angles, drawing on concrete examples from the process; both reflecting on them through interviews with people I look up to and by banging my own head against the wall.



Samuel Karlsson in Warm Up scene in FÖRLORARNA (2024)  
Photo: Riku Suvitie

---

<sup>7</sup> Included in the footnotes, for those interested, will also be the topic of the emotional landscape of a director/new mother, reflecting on the challenges of (the quite extreme situation of) having a baby in the middle of a rehearsal process (in an unknown city (in foreign country (speaking a semi-foreign language)))

## 4. ASSUMING UNCERTAINTY

*Lost really has two disparate meanings. Losing things is about the familiar falling away, getting lost is about the unfamiliar appearing.*

-Rebecca Solnit (2010)



Photo: Hallveig Kristín Eiríksdóttir

### 4.1. THE ZONE OF DISCOMFORT AND GETTING LOST

Before going into concrete examples of things that can help to make a process go smoothly within an institution, I want to discuss what the core needs of a process that is not based on a script are. What needs there are to maintain the conditions for play, written in my belief that art flourishes when there is room in a process for uncertainty and the artistic need to get lost. Finding the right balance to work non-text based within an institution can be hard but it's absolutely possible, and I want to air out some questions that can help others prepare for such work.

I base this chapter primarily on my experience again with FÖRLORARNA but knowing that devised processes have different needs and methods and wants and aims, I have interviewed other artists working on the spectrum of

process-based theatre to try to find what the most common needs of these processes are. Most answer how it's really not that different from traditional processes regarding time or budget but emphasize the need for the institution to make friends with uncertainty: "We need people to be ready to not always know" (Saga Kjerúlf Sigurðardóttir, 2024). My conclusion after these conversations is that the core needs for devised processes to flourish within institutions are the following:

- I. Support: in the form of space, money and a trusting attitude
- II. Artistic freedom: tolerance for uncertainty and the permission to get lost

The main challenge and a theme that is an undercurrent to all topics either discussed with institutions, directors and actors, is that of the uncertainty that comes with devising. A vital part of artistic freedom for some and something that blocks and stands in the way of working for others, this is the paradox that seems to be constantly negotiated and fought over between everyone involved.

There is a reason for the presence of the uncertainty within an artistic process and especially in devising. The core of devising lies in the search, in staying open for as long as it is needed and finding within that space the conditions for play. When discussing how to bring this kind of process into an institutional theatre, I got the advice from my mentor Akse Pettersson to resist making decisions too soon. I tried to listen to that advice during the process of FÖRLORARNA, however often finding it hard when all different departments were pressing for answers about things unknown. I feel and felt during the process that most clashes and problems that we ran into were in some way related to this core need of the devising process, and that everyone had a different view on how far it should remain present in the process and when to step away from the fluid and into the concrete. On paper, this need for uncertainty is hard to argue for when stress is high and you must make decisions on the spot, and it's usually the first thing that gets compromised. Before we continue into practicalities and concrete ways to meet in the middle, I want to make an argument for uncertainty as a valuable aspect of a process-based theatre performance, one that does in fact benefit the artwork on stage and consequently, the theatre as an institution. From my conversation with Saga Kjerúlf Sigurðardóttir (2024), member of the artistic collective *Marble Crowd*, who is currently working on her third devised performance for a big stage (*Árið án*

sumars, e. *A Year Without Summer*, premiering at Reykjavík City Theatre on January 27<sup>th</sup> 2025):

It comes down to facing what is uncertain and to assume getting lost. To assume to be confused and accept that it is part of the path when you are creating. Assuming that along the way you're going to come across things that you don't know what role will play [in the final artwork]. Going through that zone of discomfort. Making friends with the fact that it's part of the job. In "formula theatre", I feel like they're trying to minimize that. It's not like it's more time-consuming, I think it's more about this level of discomfort. It's more of about making a streamlined process and to lubricate it emotionally for the staff. It's quite mysterious. But it's also about freedom. If you're incredibly constrained by having to sell a certain number of tickets to a certain group, it takes away from the freedom of what you're doing. It puts constraints on the artist. You need to be free to take risks and to explore. You don't do that if you're not free.

Staying with the uncertainty comes down to artistic freedom in a capitalist world where everything is conditioned by the values of the market economy. The conditions for play rely on there being freedom to behave in an unproductive way, freedom from the need to profit and freedom from treating a work of art as a product. Roger Callois, the author of *Man, Play and Games*, argues that play is "defined as a free and voluntary activity, a source of joy and amusement", and that "it is an activity connected with no material interest, and no profit can be gained by it" (Callois, 1958, 6). This statement positions play on the opposite spectrum of economic profit and is perhaps why it is so tempting and important to bring this atmosphere into artistic institutions that are, to varying degrees, driven by marketing gains. I would argue that a purpose of art is not to contribute to economic growth but to question norms and ideals and to challenge and reflect society, but the institutional theatres have become more inclined towards profit [especially during these budget cuts], which consequently is limiting towards artistic freedom. Bringing play into the institutional theatre forces it to take a stance with or against artistic freedom, with or against a core value of art.

## 4.2. TRUSTING THE PROCESS

While working with a relatively high level of risk and uncertainty can feel stimulating and a vital part of the artistic process for some, it can also feel blocking and restrictive to others. Uncertainty can feel like a promising blank canvas, full of potential and hidden treasures. If you trust that the process will carry you towards a rewarding end-result, it can feel like an infinite playground with endless possibilities for exploration. But if this process feels obscure to you for whatever reason, for example if not knowing or trusting the artist or from lack of experience with the methods, then the uncertainty may feel like running in a dark forest with a blindfold and no-one to hold your hand. If there isn't trust in the process, then it can understandably feel uncomfortable and intimidating.

Trust in a process can easiest be built from experience and over time. Working on FÖRLORARNA, it was plain to see that those who had done any devising work before were the ones most comfortable with the process and managed to deliver the best, while others for whom this was completely new grew increasingly frustrated or were sceptical from the start. Kristín Eysteinsdóttir (2024) talks about how much easier the second devised process she programmed was on the big stage of the Reykjavík City Theatre. When they had already gone through a deep learning curve with the same director and all departments had learned what the process could look like and that there would be an end-point to the uncertainty, people felt much more relaxed to work like this and enjoyed the process better when they knew what to expect from personal experience. It could be argued then that as things get easier the second time around for everyone involved, maybe the solution is to repeatedly program process-based works within institutions rather than just once a decade, to benefit from the knowledge accumulated during the first time. (What a good idea!)

Some artistic collectives work from this premise of building trust through experience and refining taste over time. In her book *A Director Prepares*, theatre director Anne Bogart talks about the need to always work with a collective or your own company. She mentions this in her conversation with Ariane Mnouchkine, where she realizes that "every great performance in theatre and dance I had ever experienced, without exception, was accomplished by a company" (Bogart, 2001, p. 15). Ensemble theatres are in a way companies within themselves, where the actors with permanent contracts have worked together for many years and have built trust between each other. However, there is a core difference in having a collective where everyone involved has

worked towards the same goal and aligned their working methods over a long time, versus half the working group knowing each other really well and the rest coming from outside, each time bringing in a new way of working. Finding ways to bring trust and security into the process when stripping away the script and conventional working methods, which normally provides just that, is something I tried to do in the process of FÖRLORARNA but would definitely have needed to do better and in different ways, underestimating how uncommon devised methods are within institutions in Finland and people's interest in and taste for this type of work.

Taste, in these circumstances, plays a part. Opening up a creation process to a collective of artists also means blending taste in a way that doesn't quite present itself in a more traditional process.<sup>8</sup> What does it mean to be open to everyone's taste in the working group? Where to place the director's authority if the material is brought in by everyone but has later to be molded to the director's taste? Why would even I want to compromise my own taste?

---

<sup>8</sup> Speaking of tradition: Many people have asked about what it was like to work on this performance and have a baby at the same time. Therefore I want to honestly address this experience here, as this is not something that often gets talked about publicly.

It should be stated that Eyja's father, Birnir Jón Sigurðsson, was instrumental in making this arrangement work as he was on parental leave and had her full-time while I was at work. This might give hope to mothers who fall pregnant during a busy or complicated time in their lives and equally to fathers who wonder whether they can be alone with a baby this young, at least since in our case, this went really well. The tradition goes that mothers stay at home with their children for the first months or year as the primary caregiver, this of course being somewhat connected with breastfeeding but I feel is also very tied to pre-conceived gender roles. This is my personal experience and I want to recognize that all pregnancies, births and post-birth experiences are different, everyone can do exactly what they want and I'm not necessarily pro-mothers-going-too-soon-back-to-work. But, the hour of having children so often collides with people starting out with their careers, when they're not in full control of schedules and opportunities are scarce. This causes many to feel helpless in the face of this question of reproduction and is felt most heavily by the people with the wombs that have very real expiration dates.

My circumstances were the following: I was quite nauseous for the first 4,5 months and had some physical pain for the last months of the pregnancy, sometimes making it hard to work but having other times of clarity.

I gave birth to Eyja on March 12th 2024. The birth went medium well (on a scale of 1-10, let's say 6.5, so not easy but not disastrous). I did not have that many problems with breastfeeding after the first week, but I did have stitches from a 4 cm cut that made it hard to walk/exist for around 5 weeks after the birth.

I was subletting a friend's apartment in Helsinki, my family and my partner's family living in Iceland. They came over shortly after the birth and we had help for a few weeks, but during the process in Åbo we were completely without familial network to help with the child. This was often hard but at the same time, those close to me in the process would often step in to help. Set-, costume and videodesigner Riku Suvitie would help me remember things and bring me snacks and lunch when I was stuck breastfeeding, sound designer Tuuli Kainulainen babysat and dramaturge Per Ehrström held Eyja numerous times if she needed to come with me to work. Producer Anna Ehrström fixed up us with a babysitter, we borrowed a bed and play-mat from artistic leader Kira-Emmi and in general, the everyone at the theatre was very positive and helpful regarding the situation.

We were relatively lucky with Eyja - she ate well and slept mostly fine, recognizing also that this could have not gone that way - that some children get sick and sleep badly. We introduced the bottle to her when she was only two weeks old, which was crucial when preparing her for her father to be the primary care-giver for the three weeks of rehearsal in May and again in the fall. This went well, and I started pumping to get comfortable with that four weeks after the birth. I also consciously had times where I took some personal alone time, getting used to leaving Eyja with her father, letting go a little and learning to trust.

The biggest challenges I found with this scenario was how to maintain my own energy, how to give my partner space for himself when things were so busy with work and perhaps feelings of guilt from being away from the home so untraditionally soon. But if I'm honest, getting out of the house and being allowed to work and use my brain after being restricted to a pregnant body for nine months and on bedrest after the birth was *completely fucking wonderful*.

I think that I entered the process with a pinch of naïvety regarding this topic, not anticipating that the moment of tastes clashing could spur conflict since I don't have much experience of doing a devised process with strangers. Director Una Þorleifsdóttir (2024) had a clear answer about taste when I asked her opinion on this:

*H: How do you approach differences in taste when you enter a process?*

U: I would never think about taste. I would never even talk about taste. I don't think people's taste is relevant. It's about their ability to produce material. And their ability to process material and develop it further, because it's my taste that decides. Ultimately, I'm the one responsible for creating the show, even if we're working in a flat structure and the actors are developing material during earlier parts of the process.

Una Þorleifsdóttir traditionally works from a text but with a heavy emphasis on improvisation, creating material from sketches and investigation with the whole working group. Her position as a director is always clear and hierarchical, employing methods of devising more as a tool for improvisations at the beginning of a process but not calling it collective creation in the sense of sharing ownership. But despite her decisive answer, I do believe that when entering a more collaborative process, one has opened the doors to increasing the actors' autonomy in a way where taste *does* start to matter or at least starts to carry a different meaning than when the hierarchy is traditional. I'm not saying that one should necessarily give way to other people's taste, but it is a new area of friction which would be helpful to talk about openly to avoid frustration building up. If the intention is to make a collaborative performance with a new working group that still aims to present some aesthetic coherency, there might be a need to make a conscious effort to align people's taste and find where the group can meet aesthetically.

But taste is a fleeting sensibility that can be hard to describe. It's personal, formed by one's surroundings and often unconscious, but a very important part of our artistic selves since it is the faculty by which we make judgement about art. As Susan Sontag says in *Notes on Camp*: "Taste governs every free - as opposed to rote - human response. Nothing is more decisive" (Sontag, 1966, p. 2-3) It runs through every artistic offer and judgement that we make and, in a process aimed at increasing participant's

autonomy, can't be seen as a neutral force. It also connects to how we experience meaning in the work we do, how we associate and how we engage emotionally with the material created in the space.

I tried to communicate my taste in different ways during the process of FÖRLORARNA. At first briefly through our talks at the beginning of the process, but mostly through the exercises I chose for the creation of the material, trying through that to create a coherent frame into which the actors could bring material stemming from their own taste. The following chapters will search for ways to find frameworks within the chaos and to identify what kinds of solutions can be provided to bring security, without compromising the element of uncertainty or taste too much.

## 5. SURVIVAL KIT FOR INSTITUTIONS

*What if? What if our work is on the big stage? What if it resonates with a lot more people than you dare to hope?*

-Saga Kjerúlf Sigurðardóttir (2024)



Samuel Karlsson as the Mascot in FÖRLORARNA (2024)  
Photo: Riku Suvitie

To address the part that an institution can play and how a theatre's artistic leader can act as a facilitator for artistic exploration and vision, I reflect on my collaboration with Kira-Emmi Pohtokari and Åbo Svenska Teater. In addition, I have interviewed artistic leaders Kristín Eysteinsdóttir and Magnús Geir Þórðarson who have both programmed devised performances on their biggest stages. Included in this chapter are also snippets from my conversation with Saga Kjerúlf Sigurðardóttir and her reflections on collaborating with institutions.

The effort to redefine how we stage theatre within institutions is not a new one. Here I'm not talking about the cases in which independent groups secure their own funding elsewhere and get to stage their productions within institutions, but when the institution itself makes a conscious effort to put *money* and *resources* into something

different than what is traditionally staged there. In Helsinki City Theatre, curator Riikka Thitz stands behind the project “Nykyesityksen Näyttämö” (e. Stage for Contemporary Performance) or “NYNÄ”, which invites artists to work on projects with contemporary methods under optimal circumstances, with access to practical and financial resources and autonomy over their artistic working group (Minna Lund, 2025). Another recent example is the project ‘Umbúðalaust’ (e. ‘Unwrapped’) which ran at the Reykjavík City Theatre from 2019–2022. Its purpose was to create space, both literal and financial, within the institution to invite contemporary theatre makers to experiment and work within the walls of the institution. This was a small project but an important step, as it showed acknowledgement of the changing theatre scene in Iceland and was a conscious step towards finding ways to have a dialogue with those changes. The project was successful in the way that it gave space and opportunities to a completely different way of performance making, with some of the most interesting performances in those years being made under that hat<sup>9</sup> and brought different styles of theatre to the traditional audience of the Reykjavík City Theatre. It was launched by former artistic leader Kristín Eysteinsdóttir, performance maker Hlynur Páll Hlynsson, dramaturge Hrafnhildur Hagalín and the now-retired dramaturge, Hafliði Arngrímsson.<sup>10</sup> Hafliði was also the one who pointed out the NTGhent manifesto to me for the first time.

NTGhent is the City Theatre of Ghent in Belgium. In 2018, they released *The city theatre of the future – Ghent Manifesto* as their new artistic leadership's guidelines, aiming to provide a tool to dismantle the tradition of state funded theatres' unwritten or unpublished rules. Inspired by their belief in change and radical motives, I tried to imagine and design a process with some reference to their rules.

---

<sup>9</sup> This is my personal opinion, and I want to shout out to *Á vísun stað* by Slembilukka (2021), *Skattsvik Development Group* by Ást og Karaoke (2020), *FemCon* by Fyndnustu mínar (2021) and *Rómantík* by Anna Margrét Ólafsdóttir (2022).

<sup>10</sup> Who himself has a long history of experimenting with the theatrical form and also gets a shout out here as one of the most imaginative and brave theatre makers in the contemporary Icelandic theatre scene.

## GHENT MANIFESTO

One: It's not just about portraying the world anymore. It's about changing it. The aim is not to depict the real, but to make the representation itself real.

Two: Theatre is not a product, it is a production process. Research, castings, rehearsals and related debates must be publicly accessible.

Three: The authorship is entirely up to those involved in the rehearsals and the performance, whatever their function may be – and to no one else.

Four: The literal adaptation of classics on stage is forbidden. If a source text – whether book, film or play – is used at the outset of the project, it may only represent up to 20 percent of the final performance time.

Five: At least a quarter of the rehearsal time must take place outside a theatre. A theatre space is any space in which a play has been rehearsed or performed.

Six: At least two different languages must be spoken on stage in each production.

Seven: At least two of the actors on stage must not be professional actors. Animals don't count, but they are welcome.

Eight: The total volume of the stage set must not exceed 20 cubic metres, i.e. it must be able to be contained in a van that can be driven with a normal driving licence.

Nine: At least one production per season must be rehearsed or performed in a conflict or war zone, without any cultural infrastructure.

Ten: Each production must be shown in at least ten locations in at least three countries. No production can be removed from the NTGent repertoire before this number has been reached.

The NTGent-team

Ghent, May 1, 2018 (Rau, 2018, p. 279)

What the NTGhent team aims to do is offer guidelines for institutions to widen their horizon of what is possible with their given resources and to challenge the unwritten rules by which institutions make their decisions. In an introduction to the manifesto, they themselves claim that it is likely that their own productions will

probably fail to meet all ten rules, favouring the importance of making the conscious effort over the fear of failure. It claims that the form is the message and that by creating a performance which is based on a process that defies hierarchies, we are staging that subversive act and making the change a reality. As a visiting director to the institution of Åbo Svenska Teater, the rules that I felt I could borrow and at least try to follow were number three, five, six and seven: to share authorship, to rehearse outside of the theatre, to speak more than one language and to try to involve non-actors in the performance.

Some of this worked, other things were more complicated on an organizational level. Money and time always play the biggest part, and it must be said to the theatre's credit that they met all these ideas with the most positive and joyful attitude, always trying to make things work before deciding on something else. When talking about what role tradition plays in decision making within an organization, Kira-Emmi Pohtokari (2024) comments:

I believe that you can combine many things that have traditionally been seen as opposites. For example, popular and innovative, or practical/well-planned with process-based. I feel that there are still a lot of misconceptions and unnecessarily negative attitudes towards process-based creation in (institutional) theatre contexts. We are constantly working with processes in theatres. If you forget that, you are in trouble, you kill the spark, the essence of what performing arts is and can be and become.

## 5.1. NEEDS

*Skibadee, skibadanger*

*I am the rearranger*

-Scooter (1999)

Sitting down in a café in Hakaniemi with Kira-Emmi Pohtokari in the fall of 2022 to plan the process of FÖRLORARNA, we tried to identify the needs of the different departments in the house and to imagine as many deadlines as we could for them. The following chapter will focus on these different departments and the practical and logistic aspects that we thought were important when planning the process.

### 5.1.1. TIME NEEDS

We agreed that since the plan was to not work from a script, it would be wise to split up the process into a few periods to have time for the material to brew in between workshops. We set it up so that the process was split into three parts: first one workshop in January, then a three-week rehearsal period in May and finally a six week rehearsal period in August-September. An extra week was later added to give the performance a bit more time to brew, so in total we had around 11 weeks to create a performance that we expected to last around than 2,5 hours, including pause. This was ideal in many ways, as it gave time for me and dramaturge Per Ehström to meet between these periods of gathering material to piece it together and imagine different versions of it.

The plan we drew up looked something like this, where we tried to make clear how long the phase of uncertainty and material gathering could be and when concrete decisions would have to be made:

#### **PRE-PLANNING:**

*Fall of 2023*

Stage and costume design ready

Marketing texts and ideas for visual material

Research by designers on the topic and gathering sparks for rehearsals

#### **STAGE 1: 8–12 January 2024**

*1 week workshop*

Getting to know each other

Entering the topic

Gathering and creating material

Bringing curiosity and energy into the process

Active participation in discussions, field trips, research within the group and sharing of ideas

Exploring individually and/or in groups how the material gathered can be staged

Staying patiently in the unknown

*During the 4 months between rehearsals:*

Per and Hallveig go over all material gathered and decide what to go forward with in May

Foundation for sound design inspired by workshop and research

Set and costume changes communicated and accounted for if something comes up

## **STAGE 2: 6–23 May 2024**

*3 weeks rehearsals*

Gathering and creating material

Processing the material

Creating openings and scenes from that process

Active participation in discussions, field trips, research within the group and sharing of ideas

Exploring individually and/or in groups how the material gathered can be staged

Staying patiently in the unknown

### ***During the 2 months between rehearsals:***

Per and Hallveig go over all material gathered and decide what to go forward with in August, writing out whatever scenes can be put down as text

Time for making and composing sound

## **STAGE 3: 1 August–19 September 2024**

*7 weeks rehearsals*

Cont. exploration of material for the first 2 weeks

First draft of script ready around August 15th

Test material with audience on Konstens Natt on August 15th

Focus on learning text and rehearsing concrete scenes after script has been locked in for the rest of the rehearsal period

Rehearsals

Premiere

The rehearsals were organized as both long days and split days, the split days taking over in August. We planned for the first draft of the script to be ready sometime around

4 weeks before the premiere, around the middle of August, being conscious of the possibility that some things still might change up until the last weeks. For me it was important to stay faithful to the aspect of uncertainty on some level, to keep playing until there was no need for play anymore. Reflecting on this plan with Kira-Emmi, she claims that she would have liked to have the script locked in earlier than we originally planned. (Kira-Emmi Pohtokari, 2024) We had set the deadline for the locked script around the 20th of August, because we had the opportunity to test some material during Konstans Natt on the 15th of August when we have a full house of audience (2 days after we got down to the stage for the first time). As we were working so much with games and improvisations that relied on audience participation and reaction, this was perfect to be able to actually test that out, but in hindsight maybe that could have been organized earlier to give more time for the locked script. As the locked script works as the safety anchor for all other departments in the house, a conversation needs to be had about what can compensate for this traditional tool regarding safety.

### 5.1.2. ACTORS' NEEDS

Kira-Emmi and I discussed about the actors needing time to learn text and rehearse their scenes, also keeping in mind the holy week of run-throughs in front of an audience running up to the premiere.

Other needs we talked about was to get a proper introduction to working methods and to talk about responsibility within the process. As mentioned before, we set the date for a first draft of the script where all the major text-parts would be ready to be around four weeks before the premiere. This was a lot later than the actors are used to, but since this process did not rely on text-heavy scenes and most of the material being text that they would have come up with themselves, participated in creating or improvised, we felt like it should be enough time. We kept in mind the last week of rehearsals being the ones where you can't change anything, for the actors to get proper time with the performance to sit in their bodies.

We planned for the workshop in January to serve as an introduction to the working methods and where we would have conversations about the process and responsibility.

These needs will be addressed further in the chapter between actors and directors.

### 5.1.3. MARKETING NEEDS

Talking both with Kira-Emmi and the people from the Marketing Department, the issue was raised about their need to be able to talk and write about a show that doesn't exist.

We planned marketing meetings in the fall of 2023, where we talked about the starting points and themes of the performance, imagined different target groups and brainstormed about the poster. The poster picture, teaser and portraits were taken after the first workshop in January, with a deadline for the poster on February 14th (7 months before the premiere). The idea here was to create some visual material that would be ambiguous enough that it didn't rely on characters but would communicate the feeling of the performance.

We then kept brainstorming and co-writing marketing texts with the Marketing Department throughout the spring of 2024. We took inspiration from other process-based shows that have been produced elsewhere and tried to find the balance of saying enough but not too much. What could we talk about that didn't involve describing a final product? Through this research, we found that the common thread was to place focus on talking about the artistic team behind the performance and the visual aspect. We opted to talking about the theme, the approach of devising and the desired vibe and feeling we wanted to achieve in the auditorium.

This worked to some extent but there was definitely a steep learning curve as it seemed obvious to me that the Marketing Department felt lost in how to talk about a performance that didn't have a plot or a script or exist. The high concerns they had about knowing how to talk about and sell the show caused a disproportionate amount of marketing meetings, often taking up valuable time that could have been used for reflection of rehearsals and adding a lot to the stress and exhaustion on my part. There was also a clash in styles and unclarity about decision making, in who had the aesthetic final say of the marketing material and how these decisions were made. This resulted in a lot of extra work for everyone involved and would have needed to be talked about a lot better in beforehand.

In dialogue with the Marketing Department and Kira-Emmi, the title was decided before anything else happened, around 1,5 years prior to the actual creation of the piece. I had proposed the concept of working with sports and losing and it seemed like a fitting name for the performance then to call it 'the losers', stemming from an early brainstorm about the topic of exploring the winning mindset and focusing on

failures and anti-climatic experiences. This, in hindsight, was either too early a decision to make or too short-sighted of myself, as I feel like it dictated the exploration of the material too much and often felt like an unuseful frame to our work. A lesson for myself to draw from that is to wait a little longer with the title if possible, or to have it slightly more ambiguous so it doesn't feel one-dimensional and restrictive. I would have loved to name the performance BOLL for example, preferring the theme of losing to have come in as more of a subtext to the performance.

All in all, it was useful to be forced to make some decisions on a production level, and it is very easy to understand how that is beneficial to the house and the Marketing Department. Of course you need to know what to write about and how to present the performance visually. But being pressured into making decisions and giving premature answers also made it hard to have a democratic decision process with actors later on. Knowing the need to give a certain amount of answers to the production side of the house before the rehearsal period started, there was never going to be a fully democratic decision making process with the actors, which created problems in rehearsals that I will address later.

#### 5.1.4. SUBTITLE NEEDS

The question of subtitling may seem like a small issue but ended up being quite a big one as it is so tied to the dates of the final version of the script. The subtitle team needed their time to translate it and get enough time to rehearse the translation with their staff. This need was a new one for me and perhaps quite specific to the Finnish-Swedish theatre scene, as having subtitles is almost unheard of in Icelandic theatre and only done on special occasions, usually long after the premiere.

We set the date for the subtitling of the performance two weeks later than would have been their usual deadline, with the argument that there would be a lot less text here than in a regular performance. In the last phase of the process, dramaturge Per Ehrström was responsible for the oversight of the text and we decided that he would be the one communicating with the subtitling team regarding sending the drafts of the updated script when they would be ready and notifying of any changes made.

The job of the prompter and the subtitling was quite different in this process than what they were used to, as there were many scenes that relied on improvisation and physicality rather than rehearsed text. I think this caused a bit of

insecurity with the person responsible for this job, as it is quite a clear role in a traditional process but was now more up in the air. However, it often became playful and fun to have them as a witness in the room and sometimes it was great help to have someone in the room only focused on text when so much was happening and things changed rapidly. But the risk here, at least in this specific situation, is that the person might feel a bit useless when the question of text is so abstract, and it would maybe be a good idea to prepare that person for that dynamic, or to involve them more with the dramaturge's job and to share responsibility of having oversight of new texts coming and going.

Subtitling-needs also connect to some audience members' needs and accessibility, as a big part of Åbo Svenska's audience is Finnish speaking and relies heavily on the subtitles to follow along. The improvised scenes could of course not be subtitled, as they were different every time, and instead came with the caption 'IMPROVISED'. This raised the question of whether we were ruining the 'product' of the performance for the Finnish speaking audience by having so many improvised scenes, that some people buying tickets couldn't understand, and where the artistic need of staying true to one's ideas should give way to the needs of accessibility. In hindsight, Kira-Emmi says that she would strongly have wanted to write out more scenes instead of keeping them improvised, to be able to have them subtitled so that a part of the audience wouldn't feel left out. (Kira-Emmi Pohtokari, 2024) I understand this but still disagree, as for me it would have lost a quality and stake that I cherish and wouldn't want to sacrifice artistically. This was a moment when I realized that coming to a mutual agreement was out of reach. What remained was to agree to disagree and try to move past the friction, hoping that the energy of the scene would give something different to those who didn't understand it word for word.

### 5.1.5. COSTUME DEPARTMENT NEEDS

Concerns had been aloft within the Costume Department in the face of the uncertainty prior to the process (Ellinor Hellström, 2024), but this was an area that went surprisingly well. We focused quite a lot on their needs to have time to work on the costumes and for there not to be unexpected changes too late in the process, as their work is some of the most time-consuming in the theatre.

We tried to have as much of the costume design ready already before the process started and set a margin of not adding any new characters or major costume

changes during the last rehearsal period or STAGE 3. This was a useful margin to set and we did manage to follow it, with no major changes happening after the May workshop. We had decided on a base costume before rehearsals started, that we stuck to, and then three other characters appeared during the January and May workshops that the department then had a few months to work on. We decided that, both because of taste and because of the preliminary essence of this decision, the costumes would be worn more as masks than in a psychological sense, creating some idea for the style of how the costumes would be used.

This was an artistic decision that dictated the final outcome and the whole process with the actors. Leading up to rehearsals, we brainstormed with Set-, video and costume designer Riku Suvitie what could be interesting costumes to play with, thus quite important decisions about the end result being made here long in advance of the actors entering the process. This is necessary if one wants to actually use the resources that the institution offers, but does affect the process of creating material a lot and the autonomy of the actors during that creation. Making preliminary decisions like these was our idea of creating a toy box that would set clear frameworks for the moment of play with the actors. This worked in a way that we did have clear material to work from but perhaps it created the feeling with the actors that decisions had been made without them knowing *why* and that they weren't fully a part of the decision making process.

According to Ellinor Hellström from Åbo Svenska's Costume department, she finds it to be her own responsibility to share information about how they work and communicate about the theatre's resources and schedules when working with new people and especially when questions of working methods are in the air. She talks about having had the concern before the process started about something completely new suddenly popping up that would involve clothes that needed to be made in too short of a time, but since the planning of the costumes and set was so clear and thought through before rehearsals by Riku she felt safe and understood.

#### 5.1.6. HAIR AND MAKE-UP DEPARTMENT NEEDS

We had an early meeting with the Hair and Make-Up department where we talked about resources and what plans we had regarding ways of being onstage and the visual aesthetics. We decided with them that there would not be many wigs and that the hair and make-up would mostly consist of sweat, recognizing how incredibly time-

consuming wig-making is. In the end, we had one wig and one moustache, for which the department could use the time provided to make.

### 5.1.7. STAGE DEPARTMENT NEEDS

We tried to accommodate for the Stage Department's need to have time to make all props and rehearse scene changes, these two things being connected as there was overlapping staff in the workshop and working on the stage, as it often is in smaller theatres.

The set was one of the things that we decided to fully design before rehearsals started, thinking of that as the playground from which we would draw inspiration and the frame that we would bump against. It was helpful to have that as a consistent and unchanging margin and it served as an anchor that we could always come back to. The stage department had around a year to work on the set and it was ready in good time, and made it possible to rehearse in the set from the 13<sup>th</sup> of August – around 5 weeks before the premiere.

Despite things going mostly well, we had some minor and bigger problems. The biggest problems we encountered with the stage department was about information getting lost and that created some stress in the last weeks. There was one major change in the set during the May rehearsals which involved some extra carpentry but in quite a manageable way. Before we had the script locked down and there being no inspicient working at the theatre, we tried to find ways to make matters as clear as possible by having an interactive Google document online that all departments had access to. Any changes to scenes or their arrangement were updated after every rehearsal, meaning this as a tool for everyone in the house to stay updated and on the same page. There was however often some confusion, and my feeling is that the departments didn't use this tool but relied on being told about all changes in person, which was hard during a process like this when there was no-one working as an inspicient and time before and after rehearsals was often busy with meetings with other departments. This resulted in information getting lost and frustration accumulating as we got closer to premiere. My take is that it's crucial to have a full-time inspicient working on a large stage like this when doing a performance that is so based on experimentation and changes, as the information flow needs to be on point. When working on a stage big enough that you can't see everyone and don't know who is

where, it can't be the responsibility of the director to communicate all changes to all the different departments of the house.

## 5.2. HINDSIGHT

Reflecting on the process, I would have liked to have a longer period of the first workshop. It amounted to three days with four out of the five actors present (the missing one who was on parental leave<sup>11</sup>),<sup>12</sup> where the aim was to get acquainted with the working methods and getting attuned together as a group. Then came a four-month long break, the downside of which being that most of the things we did in that first workshop was forgotten by the actors and there would have been a need to re-do some of the work done in those early days.

Another organizational matter that fitted badly with a devised process like this were the split days – that is, rehearsals that run from 11:00-15:00 and 18:30-22:00, instead of a long day of 10:00-17:00. We had some long days during the beginning of the process but then the theatre insisted on having rehearsals on split days, this being for some unclear reason better for all departments. I want to make the official statement that this is horrible for a devised process, as this takes away the time where one would re-watch the material from the rehearsal during the day and be able to spend quality focused time on it, instead of splitting it between the afternoon and the late evening.<sup>13</sup>

Even if we managed to follow through with most aspects of the time plan, small frictions occurred with some departments. We presented the plan at the beginning of the process with all departments present, making a point to include everyone and list out everyone's responsibilities so that nothing would remain unclear. Even so, some

---

<sup>11</sup> First encounter with the effects of human reproduction on the process.

<sup>12</sup> This is of course a lie. At this point in the process, I was 8 months pregnant with Eyja who had been distracting me during pre-planning for many months already by borrowing my sleep and my nights, enjoying my body's nutrition and sending my mind far away in dreaming about herself.

<sup>13</sup> I had to account for 40 minutes of breast pumping before each rehearsal and then spend all lunchbreaks in the syateljé with Ellinor and Camilla, pumping. Pumping is a physical process and doing anything else apart from eating and having light conversation is a challenge, as it's inconvenient to move when attached to the pump and there is a loud pumping noise in the air. This was a new challenge and compromised valuable time to plan and prepare for each rehearsal and could sometimes be a complete fuckup and very painful if I forgot to account for this time.<sup>[SEP]</sup>

I got a very good recommendation for a portable breast-pump from choreographer Gígja Jónsdóttir, the 'Pippeta Dual & Hands Free pump' that runs on battery and was a lifesaver during this process. It's important to remember to charge it every day and then to remember to bring a container for the milk pumped, to be able to use it later.

I sometimes got home after Eyja had fallen asleep, even though Birnir tried to keep her awake until 22 when I finished on the split days. Then I would have to pump again during the evening, during which time I sometimes managed to upload videos from rehearsals and watch them then.

frustration and insecurity started brewing with the departments when we didn't have a script ready already before starting rehearsals again in August, and some people started losing trust in the process when decisions weren't being made fast enough in their opinion. Even though we had presented this time frame earlier in the process, there was a lack of consensus that this was how it would go and that when things didn't develop in a traditional sense, anxiety started creeping in. My conclusion is that it is not enough that I, as a freelancing director, present a new frame of working at the beginning of the process and then expect people to remember that or take it fully in, when they have many years of experience working in a different and very set way. I think this is where the artistic leader can come in and prepare all the departments in support of the process.

Former artistic leader of the Reykjavík City Theatre, Kristín Eysteinsdóttir talks about when preparing the house for devised performance *Njála* in 2016, that she made a point of personally preparing every single department in the house for the fact that there was going to be a completely different process going on. She says that it's crucial to create a common understanding throughout the whole house that time frames will be different from what they're used to but at the same time, that there is also a margin for saying no and that the intention is not to cross anyone's boundaries. To voice the notion that in this space for experimentation, the departments that do the most manual and time-consuming work serving the performance are not slaves to whims of the visiting artists but that they also have an active voice within the process (Kristín Eysteinsdóttir, 2024). To get people on board with working like this and frequently reminding the different departments of what the plan is, noticing the staff's tendency to go back to expecting things you would from a traditional process. That way, the whole theatre can know what to expect, what is expected of them and find safety in knowing that the threshold for communication is low if concerns arise.

### 5.2.1. ATTITUDE AND SUPPORT

*When you take such big risks, the rewards can be unimaginable.*

-Kristín Eysteinsdóttir (2024)

One of the most important things I experienced at Åbo Svenska Teater was there was not only positivity and support from the artistic leader but also from most of the inhouse staff. To feel this kind of trust and interest in the work is paramount for it to go well,

and makes a big difference when stress sets in and tension is high towards the end of the process.

Support can be shown in many ways, both through personal interest and respect for the work but also on a structural and marketing level. Saga Kjerúlf Sigurðardóttir describes her experience of, when working within institutions, getting the clear message that they are at the bottom of the ladder when it comes to respect and attention. This gets manifested in how their work is repeatedly forgotten from the brochures and other marketing material and the artists constantly need to remind the theatres that they exist and that their work matters. ‘It explains a little bit where we are in their organ system. We are just around here...’, Saga says and points at her appendix. (Saga Kjerúlf Sigurðardóttir, 2024) Having to constantly be in a defensive mode takes away energy from the creative process and has underlying negative effects, creating a sense of ‘us’ and ‘them’ when the most important thing is for the whole house to be united in the project and feel like everyone is on the same team.

Artistic leader of the National Theatre of Iceland, Magnús Geir Þórðarson, talks about the effect of programming the process-based performance *Eltum Veðrið* on their big stage in 2024. Looking for a way to keep his actors active and on their toes, he wanted a process that would spark their creativity and describes how a loving and inclusive spirit spread through all departments of the house, as everyone was allowed to contribute and the whole theatre acted as one being. (Magnús Geir Þórðarson, 2024) On this note of team spirit, Kristín Eysteinsdóttir mentions the importance to make sure that nobody, especially the director, gets isolated in their role and to create a space where support is shown in all directions (Kristín Eysteinsdóttir, 2024).

Kristín Eysteinsdóttir and Magnús Geir Þórðarson both speak of the importance they placed on showing support in the last weeks of their respective devised processes, which Kira-Emmi also made a point of doing during FÖRLORARNA. Kira-Emmi Pohtokari (2024) on her view of her own role:

What I try to safeguard is to enable good conditions; clear frameworks, support, a work environment that feels safe and meaningful to stay in and return to, questions and observations that help solve possible knots, safeguard the desire and playfulness, the open dialogue. I also try to keep a certain distance, look from the outside, with ‘fresh’ eyes, while being familiar and informed about the processes that are going on. My job is very much to clarify things, to support where necessary.

They all mention how important it is for the artistic leader to be present at run-throughs, to give constructive feedback and help the artistic team to reach their goal, while Kira-Emmi often openly stated that that she has no wish to impose her own taste on the performance. That it's more about being there for the artists, serve as a responsible outside eye and to be responsible for deciding to add time if it doesn't seem like the performance is going to be ready for the premiere. This last part, she adds, is of course true for her role in all the theatre's performances as artistic leader but is highlighted when creating a completely new show like this. During the last weeks of FÖRLORARNA, Kira-Emmi would come in and see most run-throughs, always sending thoughtful and supportive notes and taking time for long conversations about where the piece was going. Kristín Eysteinsdóttir (2024) emphasises the importance of not going into panic mode if things are looking unclear nor to try to steer the piece towards her own taste but to stay with the trouble and stay with the team.

Never go into the blaming game but always go into thinking where? Where is the core? What can we do to achieve it? What do we need to do in these last few weeks? If you go in and dare to look the lion in the eye and go all the way with it, something amazing can happen. But you must do it with great humility. Because there comes a time when everyone loses faith and is just like 'What is this satanic acid?' and you can't see through. But then you just have to say okay, let's start with this. What if we cut this? And involve all the dramaturgs in the house in trying to see: What is the essence? What is the vision? And how can we peel away the layers so that it becomes clearer? So yeah, it's incredibly demanding. Much more so than [traditional theatre]. But at the same time, *it's much more rewarding.*

### 5.3. CONCLUSION vol. I

Some points to keep in mind for the institution and director regarding the shared planning of the process and the needs of different departments:

#### TIME

- Make space in the institution's calendar for an ample time frame for the process to take place and consider splitting up the process for the material to brew in between
- Include workshops and playtime, assume for time to get to know each other and get acquainted with different working methods and homework
- Schedule whole working days instead of split days and discuss giving the actors free days occasionally
- Account for the director's need to re-watch and go through all material gathered in rehearsals, every day
- Set many deadlines, and think about them thoughtfully and as realistically as possible

#### MARKETING

- Marketing texts can be thought of visually and thematically, rather than focusing on plot or the author. Write about the theme, the approach of devising, the desired feeling that the show will produce and the artistic team behind the production
- Choose a title for the show that you are very happy with
- Have the conversation about decision making and aesthetics in marketing material early to avoid double work

#### SUBTITLES

- If there is a prompter on payroll, engage them actively in the rehearsal process as they can be a valuable eye in the rehearsal room and their job is clearer if they know what's going on
- Consider how improvised scenes affect the audience who don't speak the language of the theatre and if they are worth keeping or can be substituted with something different

## COSTUME

- Design as much of the base costumes as possible before starting rehearsals, leaving a margin for small changes during the process
- Stay mindful of how time-consuming costume making is and how much labour goes into making a dress, suit or mascot

## HAIR AND MAKE-UP

- No surprise wigs

## STAGE

- Design and make as much as possible before rehearsals start. It was useful to view the set as a fixed playground, the margin for changes only existing in some props that are easy to buy or make
- Account for room for the stage department to rehearse all scene changes

## AS AN INSTITUTION:

- Make friends with uncertainty and trust that it will bring you something interesting
- Support the artists and the journey
- Remember that everyone is on the same team and that there is no 'us' and 'them'
- Prepare the house for what is to come, that some time frames are and will be different and that it's ok to say 'I can't'
- Read the NTGhent Manifesto and get inspired. The sky is the limit baby. It's after all theatre, where everything is possible

All in all, making decisions before rehearsals started was positive for those departments that got those decisions made for them. But, at the same time, it's important to recognize that for every decision made before the actors come into the picture, something has been decided that they are not a part of and takes away some of their autonomy. There is a delicate balance to be found between providing enough facts, vision and safety for there to be a clear starting point for all departments and then having moulded the performance too far before the actual creation of material begins.

Every decision is an artistic decision, setting the style and frame for what is to come.

## 6. SURVIVAL KIT FOR ACTORS



Samuel Karlsson during the process of FÖRLORARNA (2024)  
Photo: Hallveig Kristín Eiríksdóttir

As mentioned before, when planning the process Kira-Emmi and I discussed the actors needing time to learn text and rehearse their scenes, the obligatory run-throughs, along with clarity on working methods and responsibility within the process. During pre-planning I was quite focused on researching enough material to bring into rehearsal and planning detailed exercises and how to implement them.<sup>14</sup> I was very conscious of being inside an institution and after setting all the deadlines with Kira-Emmi, wanted to make sure we would have enough material to work with and to shape into a script that would be ready at the time decided, which, even if two weeks later than the theatre is normally used to, was still quite early compared to any devised performance I've participated in. Focusing so much on this, I failed to recognize the importance of transparency in decision making and how we talk about meaning.

I base this chapter on my reflections of communications with the actors, an interview with actor Daniela Franzell about the process of FÖRLORARNA and three interviews with Icelandic actors about devising and style. I have chosen to interview this particular actor because we experienced some friction during the process and it seemed to me that she was the one who enjoyed the process the least, feeling the most

---

<sup>14</sup> Along with learning all this professional theatre vocabulary in Swedish, as my Swedish speaking skills come from three years spent in Lund between 1996-1999 which was 11 years before I had an adult conversation.

disconnected to it and getting the least out of working this way.<sup>15</sup> This friction brought tension into the working space and was not a friend to the conditions for play that I aimed for and therefore seems like a valuable insight in the search of how to make things work better.

## 6.1. DECISION MAKING AND TRANSPARENCY

In a reflection from Franzell about decision making within the process, she remembers feeling frustrated and confused when it came to how decisions were being made and by whom. "It felt like there was a process going on somewhere else that I wasn't involved in. That decisions/choices were made outside of this group and the reasons for those decisions were secret" (Daniela Franzell, 2024). It is of course never the intention to behave in a way that makes people feel excluded and that is not fruitful for the process in any way. However, she is right - decisions were being made outside of the rehearsal room.

Franzell pinpoints a paradox created in a process like this, where the approach for creating material is non-hierarchical but in the setting of the institution, answers are needed at a tempo that doesn't rhyme with a non-hierarchical process. When working completely non-hierarchically, decisions can be voted on, everyone in the process participates in re-watching videos from rehearsals every single day and acts as a fully collective bee-hive mind. That requires everyone to work for some extra hours a day, which is not an option within an institution where people have contracts about how long they can work. To decide that decision making and material curation lies in one person's hands imposes a hierarchy to the process that can feel contradictory to the philosophy of the form itself. When planning the process with Kira-Emmi, it was agreed upon that the material would be created through frames and exercises that I as a director would bring, in conversation with dramaturge Per Ehrström, and that the actors would create material stemming from those exercises. These exercises involved a lot of improvisations, demo-making, games, creating and writing scenes for each other; the idea and hope being that autonomy and ownership for the actors would be found within these exercises while the responsibility of planning them, going through the material

---

<sup>15</sup> This was not an easy interview to conduct as I felt a lot of shame for having had this conflict with an actor. Shame from having caused someone discomfort, shame from being so openly disliked by an actor at work and shame from feeling like a stupid and incompetent foreigner. My instinct was to distance myself from that conflict as much as possible and rather focus on teaching my baby to eat carrots and pretend like it didn't happen. But there is something to be learnt from the moments that ignite shame and it tells about what counts as a failure for a director so let's go.

between rehearsals and deciding what to take further would be the task of me and Per.

This, of course, set a hierarchy in the process and placed the power of taste in my hands as I got to choose the frame around how we create material and what material to take further. When talking to Daniela, it is clear that this intention failed, as Daniela claims that "I felt that the exercises we did were very controlled and very detailed. There was little room to really be creative and discovering." She is again right - the exercises were very detailed and precise and aimed at eliminating as much of the uncertainty as possible, suspecting that uncertainty was what would make things clash within the institution.<sup>16</sup> Trying to find the right balance between preparation and room for creativity and uncertainty, my plan was to have clear sparks and exercises, making only necessary decisions that would give answers to the Marketing, Stage and Costume Department's questions before the process started, leaving everything else open for gathering material with the actors. If we assume that this friction had to do with something more than just difference in taste, then we can maybe look at how much I had decided before the process in order to give answers to all the different departments, having through that process already formed quite a strong idea of where we would go during the workshops. When planning this, I did not see this as a negative thing, and perhaps it isn't, if each decision made outside of the rehearsal space comes with careful justification and explanation with the whole group of performers. I did not retrace my steps about the decisions already made in detail with the performers when the process started, not realizing that this could have been illuminating and useful when setting off into the joint creation process. Exercises could also have been more open and less structured, to give space for more autonomy and creativity. In an interview with Icelandic actor Hallgrímur Ólafsson (Halli Mello), he mentions that a wonderful aspect of devising with director Þorleifur Örn Arnarson was to get an assignment 6 months prior to the beginning of rehearsals of the performance *Álfahöllin*, which premiered on the big stage of the National Theatre of Iceland in 2017. He describes the joy he found in spending so much time researching the subject given to him personally, allowing

---

<sup>16</sup> This extremely detailed rehearsal plan is also connected to me being pregnant and knowing that there would not be the same room for extra work between rehearsals like I am used to. When preparing for this scenario of directing with a 7-week-old baby in Swedish, I talked to choreographer Gígja Jónsdóttir who had started a process with the Icelandic Dance Company in a similar situation. Her advice:

"Where I failed was in not having prepared EVERYTHING in advance. I was meeting Pétur [her co-director] during Jökla's naps 2 weeks before rehearsals to finish the script and make a rehearsal plan. It should have been ready before the birth. So I would say prepare EVERYTHING you can before the baby is born, so you can just focus on the joy of being a mom and your baby for the first few weeks." (Gígja Jónsdóttir, 24.07.2023)

himself to get lost in it and feeling unrestricted in his research since there was no context yet for the material (Hallgrímur Ólafsson, 2024). Perhaps that is a good way to give freedom and autonomy, if it doesn't come across as too much extra work outside of paid working hours.

My focus in the attempt to clarify the decision making process went to talking about responsibilities. In the beginning workshop in January, I did a presentation for the whole theatre regarding responsibility and expectations, trying to be as transparent and clear about my intentions as possible. Presenting this in a PowerPoint show, I went over my ideas about each department's role in the process and explained what each part of the process would involve. After the meeting with the whole theatre, we had an afternoon only with the actors and artistic team and talked about the division in responsibility and tried to be as clear as possible on what would be each person's responsibility at each stage in the process.

It looked like this:

### **Process: Responsibility and expectations**

*Actors (Julia, Samppe, Ingemar, Daniela, Jerry):*

STAGE 1 + 2 (January + May):

- Bringing curiosity and energy into the process
- Active participation in discussions, field trips, research within the group and sharing of ideas
- Exploring individually and/or in groups how the material gathered can be staged
- Staying patiently in the unknown

STAGE 3 (August + September):

- Cont. exploration of material, for the first 1-2 weeks
- Focus on learning text and rehearsing concrete scenes after script has been locked in, for the rest of the rehearsal period

*Director (Hallveig):*

- Core idea and approach
- Starting points, research material, where to go and what to do

- Planning the process and making sure it goes according to plan
- Composition and curation of what material stays and what goes
- Making the process transparent for everyone involved
- Responsible for the whole performance (helheten)

*Dramaturge (Per):*

- Participation in initial exploration of material with the group in STAGE 1
- Composition and further work on material between STAGE 1 and 2 with Hallveig
- Presence and observation of rehearsals in STAGE 2 in May
- Focus on script and text before STAGE 3 in August
- Visits to rehearsals during STAGE 3, shifting from daily participation during process to an outside eye

We had a long talk about the actors' own experience with devising and process-based performances, which for most of them was quite limited and predominately based on stories about these kinds of processes in other theatres from colleagues. We talked about expectations, the actors' fear of being left with the responsibility of the end-result and the common idea that a devised process was just another word for a director who isn't bothered to prepare. We even heard some horror stories about directors who cut half the show on the evening before opening night and about performances where two days before premiere, there was no show. The actors had quite varying ideas about what kind of process this could be and I tried to explain what kind of training I come from, what kind of style I'm looking for and what I would be interested in doing. We talked about postdramatic theatre and if there was anything postdramatic that they had seen and liked. I talked about my wish to work postdramatically and how devising doesn't offer a good opportunity to dive deep into character or psychological arcs, but that it relies on affective images rather than the psychological journey of a character. We talked about doing task-based performing, where the stakes in the scene don't lie in the character's journey but in the performer's investment in their task. We then did an extensive mind-map exercise to get a view of what threads were turning people on regarding the topic, both content-wise and in form.

From this conversation about devising I got the impression that the actors mostly did not want to be in a process where they would feel like they themselves

would have to decide what to do and to feel responsible for the script, deciding then to plan even more detailed exercises from the topics gathered in the mind-map.

Looking back, even if this seems quite clear when talked about during the beginning of a process like this, it must be considered that after this, four months passed before we started working again. Four months during which the actors were working on other things with different methods while my head was exclusively on this project.<sup>17</sup> Since this was an attempt at working differently than what these five professionals were used to, talking about the process more frequently would have been important and it was perhaps an unfair expectation on my behalf that they should remember something spoken about only once, sometime back in January.

Another thing to look at is how I presented the material chosen to go forward from the rehearsals. As we created the show from things appearing within the rehearsal room and me being used to working like this more collectively, where everyone spends time between rehearsals re-watching things and decisions are made that way, I didn't think to take care to motivate my choices as much as I could have. Simply choosing things I found interesting and inspiring in the rehearsal room and trying to find exercises and scenarios to take these things forward, my intuition was that since this material came from the actors originally, that would be enough for them to also feel it's motivation. But of course, they were not seeing what I was seeing or feeling what I was feeling when they were the ones onstage, and I got the outside perspective. One thing I could have done here is to make time to have moments of watching the recordings together.

What I did try to do, as a way of involving people in decision making, was to do repeated feedback rounds after every exercise, both as a way to move forward with the material but also as a way for everyone to get their say on what was happening in the rehearsal room and to feel where the group was resonating with what was discovered. We also hung all material written and created during the process up on the walls of the rehearsal room, where it could be revisited and re-used during the workshop weeks. Remembering the feedback rounds working well in May, where the group came to some conclusions about the style of acting that they found interesting, I hoped for this to be a strong enough tool for people to feel sufficiently involved. I could have explained better that this was the intention of the exercise, as they were maybe not

---

<sup>17</sup> As well as trying to log into the Maisa app which I couldn't change from Finnish to Swedish or English, to get in touch with Neuvola to get some help with breastfeeding since the nurse hadn't come for the four-day home visit because they were low on staff in the maternity ward and my right nipple was bleeding.

used to this as a method while I was very used to this when working collectively. The feedback was structured in the way that after a demo, exercise or game, we would go around in a circle and everyone would state what they saw, without adding too much interpretation to it. For example, someone did a demo where they walked around in a grid and counted in Danish, throwing a ball around the court and then standing in the goal, stopping to look across the room. People described the different things they saw:

- Something beautiful about to happen, the goalkeeper seeing a vision.*
- Someone playing an attack and then on the other side of the court, something horrible happened. Someone died.*
- A falling in love moment. Something emotional and sensitive happening. Experiencing feelings through the game.*
- A grid.*
- The poetic side of this sports world.*
- The loneliness of the goalkeeper. Just focus on that person. Just standing there and waiting but has to be prepared.*

This way, the person standing onstage would get the sense of the effect their performance or installation had on the audience. This seemed to work quite well for me as it brought to the surface people's reactions to the material we were doing, but I definitely noticed that this felt more meaningful for some than others. Taking into account Franzell's reflection, there would have been a need for a more transparent decision making process, but how to find a balance in doing that without taking up too much time or energy, I am not sure. The feedback rounds already felt quite energy taxing and I was often shy to enforce them.

When, for example, working with my collectives where we are doing the same exercises but working as a bee-hive mind, the decision making process would be to film ourselves performing, watch that together, re-cycle what we've already done and then things would organically get chosen by what we remember and what gets repeated again and again in open improvisations. This is a time-consuming process and also relies on the group sharing taste, and has the nature of the performance staying very open until the very last weeks, so that would not work on an institutional level. Mindful of that, I tried to be vigorous in making decisions to keep the process moving forward but failed at realising how transparent I needed to be. This touches upon trust as well – when people stop seeing the logic in what they're doing, trust fails, creating frustration

that then gets unresolved when rushing to keep up with the timetables. Here is something to unlearn from a fully collective way of working when blending these methods with the institutional setting, the solution perhaps laying somewhere in how we talk about motivation and meaning.

## 6.2. ARTISTIC LANGUAGE

*A work of art has meaning and interest only for someone who possesses the cultural competence, that is, the code, into which it is encoded.*

-Bourdieu (1984)

I did of course try to communicate the motivation of my choices when talking about what material to go forward with, but it seems like we didn't quite manage to meet in how we talk about meaning in our work. As we weren't working with character or plot but rather with affective images, physicality and dynamics, language fell short and there was a gap in how we talked about meaning of the scenes. While it would feel meaningful for me to see a certain game onstage, finding it to clearly illustrate a recognizable dynamic in society, this would not feel like a proper motivation for the actors to enter a scene and repeat it multiple times. After the process, Franzell mentions that she “felt an enormous sense of hopelessness that the artistic team and the actors spoke completely different languages artistically” (Daniela Franzell, 2024). This mismatch was well illustrated in the moments of talking about meaning and perhaps the best example of that was in the scene of the Feedback Round where we seemed to talk about the scene in circles for weeks. Me feeling like I couldn't be clearer about what we wanted and the actors feeling like we were being completely incomprehensible and vague. I want to accept responsibility here and admit that I have probably been vague or had a hard time explaining myself in some instances, in some part because of wanting to stay in the searching mode and in some part because of having a hard time speaking Swedish,<sup>18</sup> but I do also think that there is some merit in what Franzell mentions about *speaking different languages artistically*. These misunderstandings caused insecurity for all participants in the process, the actors not knowing what was being asked of them and me feeling that whatever I said, it didn't get through to them. Insecurity is the enemy of creativity and openness and causes people to get defensive and sometimes rude in

---

<sup>18</sup> and in some part from staying awake for hours with my newborn baby

communication, creating a hostile atmosphere within the rehearsal room. Believing that we are all just nice people trying to do our best and that nobody was intentionally trying to be hurtful, I want to examine this insecurity in artistic communication through the questions of tools, taste and style.

### 6.2.1. TOOLS

*H: Was the process different from what you had imagined?*

*D: Unfortunately, the process turned out exactly as I had feared. I wish there were devising directors who wanted to learn about the art of acting, acting technique, the actor's craft, timing, intention, motivation, circumstances. Things that people seem to think only belongs in “regular theatre”. (Daniela Franzell, 2024)*

Illuminating the problem of not having access to their tools as dramatic actors, Franzell lists things that she felt she didn't get to use from her own set of skills, which she has developed during her acting training in TeaK and as a professional actor for the last 20 years. This is a very understandable frustration, creating a sense of devaluation to the actor's craft and expertise. The tools she mentions are mostly connected to a psychological character and plot-based way of working that traditionally belong, in her own words, in “regular theatre”. Tools associated with working dramatically that don't seem to find their way into devised or postdramatic work.

This shift from working with character onstage changes the need for psychological acting tools like motivation, intention, given circumstances (that rely on facts and clues provided in the script), as well as building relationships with the other actors onstage in the same way that they would in a dramatic play. When working postdramatically, how to then secure the actor's access to their tools? Here I believe I have failed as a director and would love to find a way to meet in the middle and for actors to find their agency at work. I do not however believe that an actor needs to work dramatically to access their skills as a performer and would love to try to find the nuances in the different ways we speak about performing when we approach it from these different angles. Daniela Franzell (2024) again:

I found it incredibly pointless not to know what we wanted to say with the different scenes. It is impossible for an actor to improve, clarify, develop if you don't know what you want to say with what you are doing.

The core problem I feel here is that there is a gap when it comes to talking about meaning and motivation for scenes. The style I wanted to work with in FÖRLORARNA can be described as a Brechtian, “non-acting” way of being onstage; call it minimalistic acting, performative or bare acting, where the actors themselves are seen through the character. I was not interested in the audience going through the Aristotelian cathartic journey with empathy towards the play's characters and where meaning would be created for them, but to bring forth a distilled picture of reality where characters are symbolic representations of certain tendencies, forces or ideas for the audience to reflect upon and do with, in their mind, as they please. I was interested in blurring and toying with the line between the actor and character, making it into a tool to draw the audience in and alienate at wish. Working with playing games in real time on stage, I wanted, as described by Michael Kirby in *Acting Re-Considered* (2024), to avoid the energy of feigning, impersonating and pretending “to be in a time and place different from that of the spectator” (Kirby, 1995, p. 45), which is usually the case with traditional acting, and to work with a direct contact with the audience - admitting that we are here, now, together. This Brechtian approach means that the actor needs to have a distance to their character, already eliminating most of what is taught in the Stanislavskian method that relies on empathizing with your character and finding a psychological journey to be with on stage. Describing this to the actors, I didn't find better words than what I've written above, which didn't seem sufficient to everyone and made it hard for them to access the scenes.

So how to talk about this, in a better way than saying performing or “not-acting”? What is the difference between the actor and the performer? One way to describe this is in the words of theatre artist Friðgeir Einarsson (2024):

My feeling, if we're going to create some stereotypes - is that the dramatic actor wants to eliminate uncertainty. The postdramatic performer wants to increase uncertainty. To ask questions. This is of course a criminal simplification. The actor (and of course it's ridiculous to say *the actor*, but this stereotype of an actor that we're talking about) emphasizes

entertainment, while that is poison in the bones of the postdramatist. They hate entertainment and they hate joy and they don't celebrate Christmas and just want to listen to sine waves and machine saws.

In more technical terms, this difference in performance registers is also described by Michael Kirby in *Acting (Re)Considered*: “When performers are merely conveyed by their costumes themselves and not embedded, as it were, in matrices of pretended or represented character, situation, place and time, they can be referred to as being “non-matrixed” (Kirby, 1995, p. 44). He then goes on to describe a scale from non-acting to acting, where different registers of pretense are listed, and the level of transparency from character to performer and the thickness of the fourth wall. The list goes from “non-matrixed” to “symbolized matrix”, where you have added some fictive frames but are still behaving as yourself within that given frame; from the symbolized matrix to “received acting” where the matrices are strong enough that even if the performer is acting as themselves, the action would be read by an audience member through a fictive lens (he gives the example of someone in a Santa-Claus costume simply drinking coffee – not adding anything Santa-Clausy to that action but the costume taking the audience to the North Pole), from there moving into the area of pretense that defines what he talks about as ‘simple acting’. “Acting can be said to exist in the smallest and simplest action *that involves pretense*”, (ibid, 1995, pp. 44-46) be that emotional or physical. What I’m interested in is the area spanning from “received acting” to “simple acting”, and the balance and jumping between those registers.

Several problems presented themselves regarding this style of acting. When asked to perform as a heightened version of themselves, a concern arose from the actors about the audience believing the material to be theirs truthfully and what judgements would be made about them personally in that regard. This had not occurred to me at all, perhaps since I am not from the area of Turku and had little understanding of how intimate the Swedish speaking theatre-going community is there. Being quite used to the style of actors performing 'as themselves', using that as a tool to play with fiction and reality, I didn't expect there to be a problem with this and the actors feeling uncomfortable with the audience making assumptions about their private lives that had no basis in reality. Thus, we decided on using not their first but last names, in the style of sports, which gave them some distance to their performance-selves. The scenes they performed as their performance-selves were for example the Warm-up Scene, the playing of the Game in real time, the Feedback Round, Childhood Memories and the

Mystery Game in the end - scenes either based on physicality or tasks, either regarding movement or text. This – having a clear task and a heightened performance self wasn't enough reason for some of the actors to be onstage with. We then tried to make it clearer by creating characters for each actor, for them to have a clearer anchor, but immediately a problem arose when the word 'character' was introduced to the mix. That suggested to go back to the use of the aforementioned psychological tools, whereas for me it meant to use characters as representational, as suggestive to ideas, as reminding of something outside; not as believable people onstage. Not wanting to blend too many acting styles in the performance, I persisted on this approach and in the end they each found their way with it, focusing on physicality and perhaps creating an inner logic that I didn't know about but worked for them. But as a director, I would like to be able to talk about this better as it feels unfair to think that some people are just naturally good at this and others not. What does the actor need, when “not acting”, performing in a non-matrixed or to be able to stand onstage? What frames are needed when one has deprived the actor of the security of the dramatic character and their usual working tools?

As this was something that I ran into time and time again during the process of FÖRLORARNA, I decided to ask people who are used to performing in this style to try explain it to me in their own words. I interviewed actors from the opposite spectrum of the Icelandic theatre scene, wanting to get an opinion from someone with Stanislavskian acting training to illuminate their approach to this style and hoping that this is a solvable matter that doesn't exclusively depend on personal taste in theatre.

In conversation with Aðalbjörg Árnadóttir (2024):

*H: How would you describe the difference between working psychologically and postdramatically?*

*A: For me it's the same work. I've had this exact same problem, trying to explain this when someone has been right next to me in a pickle. The centre is not the character. The centre is the piece. The show. But not your character, not your personal self [...] It doesn't matter who you are. You're just a cog in the wheel of the show. Still maybe performing something. And to get to that, you're not working from character. You just use other tools.*

*H: What tools do you, as a trained actor, do you use when you're playing 'yourself'?*

A: I think every piece calls for different methods. You can never know what project you're getting into. If you're devising a piece, you just work based on the rules that we're devising with. [...] Traditionally, If I were given a character in a play, I would look at which direction this character is going. Do I know someone who is the same? What is said about them, what do I say about others? All these basic tools, which you don't use in devising. Then you get more into the theme, what's actually happening. You don't do anything except just listen, I think. For me, it's much more just like a movement soundtrack. I work much more with tempo. When I'm doing shows like these, it's more about the material, and about tempo and rhythm. And interaction. You just drop this character work that you do as an actor. Leave it. Then you're just listening and focusing on this sending and receiving with the audience. Except there's no front for it. But of course there's some heightening in you as a character because you're in a performative situation, you're in a situation where you have a contract with the audience. A good actor, period, is someone who listens, and there you just have to be in direct contact a lot.

In conversation with Friðgeir Einarsson (2024), when asked to explain his style of acting to an alien:

F: Maybe this alien has been to a theatre course at the University of Iceland with [theatre scholar] Trausti Bragason.

*H: Now you're going to ask the alien in question to jump in for you [in your performance of Club Romantica].*

F: The alien is a shapeshifter. Club Romantica has become so popular that they're touring two continents at once with the performance, and the alien is taking the South American tour because I don't speak Spanish.

*H: Yes.*

F: It all has to be a bit Scandinavian for me, unless there's a really good reason for it. Even the dramatic ending in *Club Romantica* I try to say as flatly as I can. Just a bit factual... It's about being matter-of-fact and being natural, kind of relaxed, except sometimes I go into the scenes and say and show how I feel too but I try to do it with a lid on the pot so it doesn't boil over.

*H: Holding back emotions like you would do in real life [...] Some kind of realism.*

F: Yes. And like with *Club Romantica* and other shows that I've done - you're here. The audience is *here*. You see me and I see you. If I'm going to do a scene, you know I'm doing it. [...] This is also a trick in a way. Taking advantage of the fact that it draws on some real events to create a connection, to get the viewer invested in it. Then maybe ... this is just a trick. I think credibility is kind of the key word in it, even though it's not all true. And even really lacks substance. Then you can create substance through continuity that people have started to buy into, then you can take it further.

So listening, staying with the material, dropping the character work and focusing on theme, tempo and rhythm. Seeing this way of performing as a tool to connect with the audience, a trick to assimilate credibility when not relying on the emotional journey of a character. To strip everything away, in the Brechtian sense. Performing tasks and playing the role by holding it between themselves and the audience, showing the character without becoming one with it. Something like this.

### 6.2.2. OPENINGS

As talked about earlier in chapter 2.2, a basic entrance into devising for me is through the tool of openings. The way I worked with openings during the process of *FÖRLORARNA* was to divide all days up into themes that would serve as a frame for each day, getting inspiration in the first part of rehearsal and working them into openings for the later part of the day. The three weeks in May were all focused on

creating material, exploring the potential threads that had been narrowed down after the three days in January, and aimed to keep the exploration open until the very end of this period. We had two days rehearsing at a sports hall, doing improvisations and openings there and getting inspired by the real space of a gym hall. We conducted three interviews with coaches and players, went to a handball practice with a teenage handball team and then had them visit us in the rehearsal space.

Inside the rehearsal space we read chapters from the book *Man, Play and Games* by Roger Callois, dividing the chapters between the actors and then having a short presentation to get a shared theoretical ground for the topic. From this, we then created our own games and had conversations about cheating, the meaning of games and how to ruin a game. We did many different exercises, from improvisations to collective-remembering, interview exercises, writing tasks for each other and at the end of each day, whatever we had been inspired by during each day's research would result in openings by the actors, either solo or in groups. A lot of creating by the whole group where all were involved, including the designers when they had time. I stepped out of the exercises most of the time to watch but participated in more game or play based exercises.

The walls that I ran into with openings was that there seemed to be a slight difference in how the actors approached the making of an opening to what I expected, it often leaning towards plot or character, rather than staying in physicality and trusting that performing tasks could be interesting in itself. One difference with doing etudes when working from a script and these openings are perhaps that etudes are traditionally used at the beginning of a process as a tool to explore dynamics before continuing on to rehearse scenes, where for me, the opening is the form itself and can be recycled and repeated infinitely for many weeks. Doing the work of openings means paying full attention to other people's openings, recycling that material into your own openings next time, blending ownership and building the scenes together by repetition and listening.

Another core difference between these seemingly identical ideas, I believe, lies in *what is given*. A Stanislavskian etude is intended to deepen what is already there, to explore within a given frame (the circumstance) from a certain point of view (the character's), while the core intention of the opening is to take a journey out, departing from the theme and going into the unknown. In her book *Lóðrétt rannsókn* (en. *Vertical Research*), Icelandic director and performance maker Steinunn Knútsdóttir differentiates between an opening and an actor's etude, which she describes as a

suggestion of the execution of a given scene, while the opening is more of a "hugvekja" - directly translated a 'mind awakening'; a spark, a journey, something to inspire (Steinunn Knútsdóttir, 2016, p. 20).

The intention of the etude in a traditional theatrical process, as suggested by James Thomas in his book *A Director's Guide to Stanislavsky's Active Analysis* (2016) is to uncover subtext and concealed meanings from a given circumstance in relation to and departing from character. Finding something elusive that remains unexpressed in the written text, the actor employs their creativity to unlock the script. This method is reflected in many other approaches that stem from the same theoretical ground, for example in Katie Mitchell's method from *The Director's Craft*, where she talks about improvising from the facts of the play which to her are "the non-negotiable elements of the text" and should be treated as facts (Mitchell, 2009, p. 11). There the etude is the step taken after a deep dive into the psychology of characters and analysis of the text, working from external, internal and framing events, finding the underlying tensions between characters, studying their backstory and intentions. Digging and uncovering subtext and adding more meaning to the text itself and using that as a framework for exploring the relationships between the characters within these stated, given circumstances. It is the step after the table analyses but before adding text to the scene being rehearsed, a way for the actors to "analyse [the text] on their feet", always "honouring the dramatic situation provided by the playwright" (Thomas, 2016, p. 58).

This nuance is something that does make a difference in how the work is approached, as it means looking for quite different things. One means playing within a set frame, deepening what is already there, uncovering secrets and unlocking hidden meanings, while the other means using the theme as a springboard to unforeseen results and to get lost. Both are creative, both can lead to interesting and deeply moving results, but as they do differ in how to enter the work, I think it's important to make an attempt to define where that difference leads us. One means being one with the character in Stanislavski's psychological approach, holding them as an anchor while the other has more to do with performing and exploring material in the Brechtian or even Artaudian way where, as before mentioned, the actor is not immersing themselves in the character but executing tasks or actions and exploring their quality, which will eventually attribute to the atmosphere of the space when the mosaic of scenes are pieced together.

### 6.2.3. RESISTANCE

If or when communication about meaning fails, can there be a way for the director to instead give attention to creating resistance for the actor to give them something to bounce against in every scene? Something to compensate for the removal of psychological given circumstances, motivation and intention?

To draw an example from FÖRLORARNA, The Childhood Memory scene was a battle for several reasons. It was created from improvisations that we did in the sports hall in May, where we explored the space and told stories that the space brought up in us, getting the other people in the room to help re-enact these stories. The idea was that the actors would tell these stories in their own words, as recognizable for the audience to the childhood connections to the world of sports and norms and illustrate how early these encounters of social performance and failure enter people's lives in various way. The stories started as simple, innocent failure stories and then turned into lies, where some would evade the failure moment and start fantasizing about winning instead.

This scene, surprisingly, turned into one of the hardest scenes to make work. I will not go into the long and circling conversations about the meaning of this scene that we had in the room, a meaning which felt crystal clear to me but did not reach the actors. It brought together many of the disagreements the actors had with the process, for example regarding using their own personal material, performing 'as themselves', saying the text in their own words instead of from a fixed script. They felt lost in their only motivation being to tell stories and listen to each other, and the scene didn't start working until we created a game where, when the last storyteller started lying, the others would start leaving the space whenever he wasn't looking. This game then created a resistance for the actors to react to the text with, even if there were no psychological bonds between them as characters and no dramatic motivation.

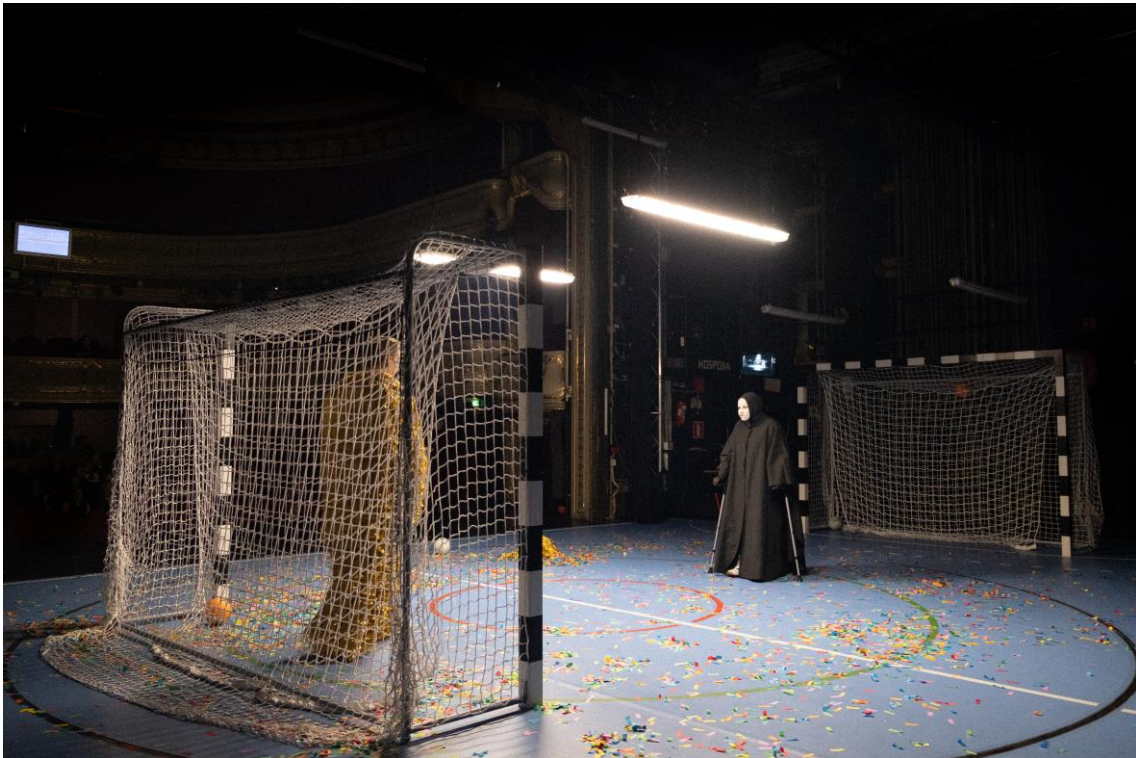
Perhaps because we were at a point of high stress, I felt like there was a lack of interest in reaching a common way of speaking about meaning, which revealed for me something of the larger context of our artistic differences and artistic language. That there were certain tools missing for all parties to communicate successfully and this scenario brought that into an honest and unforgiving light.

### 6.3. CONCLUSION vol. II

To conclude this chapter about what an actor can do to prepare for a process-based performance, here are some suggestions:

- ❑ Be ready to get lost and trust the process. If you find that trust is wavering, address that with the director to make it possible to find a way back into trust again.
- ❑ Forget the character and focus on the theme.
- ❑ Get curious and familiarize yourself with the methods and style of the director in question. Taste is hard to communicate and knowing something about their aesthetic can be helpful and suggestive of what kind of end result they might be aiming for.
- ❑ Familiarize yourself with other types of devised work, either by going to see performances or watching them online. See if you can find some works that inspire you and that you can have as a reference point when the process starts.
- ❑ Take care of your own needs. Every actor is different and can thrive within different margins, and it's hard for a director to guess the needs of everyone in the group. If the process is confusing to you or if you feel like you're lacking tools, be open about that with the director or whoever is leading the process. Nothing can be fixed if it is not addressed.
- ❑ If this isn't for you and it's not giving you anything, just quit.

## 7. SURVIVAL KIT FOR DIRECTORS



Julia Korander as Döden and Samuel Karlsson as Antonius Block in FÖRLORARNA (2024)  
Photo: Riku Suvitie

### 7.1. CONDITIONS FOR PLAY

In this chapter, I will focus on the director's role as the keeper of the playground and facilitator for play. Having gone into details about acting in the previous chapter, here I will take a step back and focus on defining what the conditions of play are and how they can be maintained when thinking of energy and time management.

#### 7.1.1. ENERGY AND CREATIVE JUICE

To begin with, it's worth looking at a base condition for play in the rehearsal room which is simply to have the energy to play and stay in an active listening mode.

The three days of rehearsals in January and the three-week rehearsal period in May were planned as workshop weeks where we would touch upon the topic from many different angles and produce material in diverse ways. This is usually my favourite part of the process, when exploration is the goal and there is no demand for creating finished scenes or limiting oneself to realism, but rather to play freely and seek

new ways to get inspired. It's a part of the process that takes a lot of energy and listening, actively staying in an open and explorative mode.

This creatively demanding work proved difficult for some of the actors. After a few days of rehearsing, they told me that they were all exhausted from the past year of performing on stage in many different and taxing productions, and didn't feel like they had the energy to contribute or space to learn new methods or even enjoy this type of creative work. When asked about their feelings, they talked about being more used to something lighter during these weeks in May. Learning a song, doing some light choreography, something that didn't require so much brainwork. Being asked to produce material and to learn new methods was starting to feel more exhausting and counter-creative than freeing and fun. Maybe like being asked to learn a new, complicated board game at 11pm on a Friday evening with somebody else is explaining the rules. This was felt increasingly throughout the weeks in May, although most of the actors tried their best to be present and stay positive. I felt this very heavily, as the rest project depended on the work done during these workshop weeks, the plan being that we would create the script from the material produced during this period.

Here we also come back to the theatre's rigid schedules, where we would often rehearse on Saturdays when the actors would rather be (explicitly stated in a feedback session) spending time with their children in the sunny spring weather of Åbo. Perhaps go to a mökki. Jump in the ocean. They were not being unprofessional about it when devising and did deliver to the best of their abilities, but this type of process relies so heavily on people's curiosity and energy. Being forced to search for that kind of playful mood when feeling exhausted is unnecessarily challenging. When faced with this problem, I wanted to try to plan in one rest-day every week for the actors during the upcoming fall period. This wasn't really an option with the theatre as their tendency was then to fill free time with something else, but we did manage at least one rest-day every two weeks. Every time we came back from a period of rest, wonderful things would happen in rehearsals and people would be much more open and receptive to playing and be more curious.

To get into the mood for playing each day, we always started with a check-in round where everyone could share whatever they needed before leaving their personal life outside of the rehearsal room and stepping into the process. The rules of the check-in were to talk for maximum 1 minute, and it was forbidden to interrupt or ask questions from the person speaking. It's an exercise in focus, listening and giving space, while also giving people a conscious chance to share something personal if there

is a need for that. Doing these check-ins has been a wonderful thing for me in most processes when working with people I'm relatively close with. However, even if many wonderful things appeared in this setting and internal jokes emerged that made the day start in a light and caring way, I wouldn't repeat that again in an institutional setting. I feel like for some people it was an uncomfortably personal request, and others fell into long periods of chatting rather than treating it as an exercise and a formal start of the rehearsal. I would rather go straight into what we always did next, which was physical warm up, either as a competitive game or a routine with balls, depending on whatever was planned for that day's rehearsal.<sup>19</sup> Director Una Þorleifsdóttir's (2024) key advice in how to secure and maintain the energy of play in the rehearsal room was this:

One thing I use a lot is to create a game that is based on an existing sport, with three rules. One that works with the game, one that works against the game and one that is just funny. Then we for example play football but it is forbidden to touch the ball with your feet, you have to use your nose. And then if I score for my team, everyone has to sing a song.

Automatically, a joke has been created and everyone has started moving. And if I am working in a large group, there is always one person who is in charge and decides the game. Comes up with the rules and organizes it. There is about half an hour that goes into this. Then it's over and then just boom, we get to work.

Making up something stupid, simple and fun that everyone can participate in and be unserious together for a while. We did play a lot of games during FÖRLORARNA and they were in themselves often intended as exploration for potential scenes, that being the theme of the performance, but I think having this element of play every day of the process can be instrumental in maintaining an open and creative mood and in getting people out of their heads and into their body.

Regarding the director's own energy, I sometimes found it a challenge to find ways to stay in a playful mode myself to be receptive to the material being produced in the playroom. There were several obstacles that presented themselves over the course of the process that threatened to destroy my own creative mood: endless marketing and communication meetings, feelings of insecurity towards some of the

---

<sup>19</sup> Diary entry: "May 7th: We ran back and forth a few times (then I remembered that I'm not allowed to run because I just gave birth (exactly 8 weeks ago in 4 minutes <3))."

actors and having no free time to take care of my physical and mental needs between rehearsals.<sup>20</sup> Finding ways to balance my own energy was often the last thing that I took care of, adding to the stress and making it harder to think.

Taking care to make enough space in the day for play to get everyone out of their heads and into their bodies is important. But then again there is only so much a director can do to keep up other people's energy. Even if it's such a crucial element for the playful environment, it can't be fully controlled and everyone is an adult who is responsible for themselves. As professional theatre workers, each individual is responsible for caring for their own body and making sure they have enough physical and mental energy to be able to contribute to the rehearsal in question. Therefore, I will not go further into the topic of energy.

### 7.1.2. FREEDOM

Roger Callois talks about play as something that is done “without obligation” and that the “game which one would be forced to play would at once cease being play. It would become constraint, drudgery from which one would strive to be freed” (Callois, 1958, p. 6). That implies that it is already a contradiction to ask someone to play when they are at work, getting paid for it and technically can't say no. Careful thought needs then to go into maintaining these conditions, as the circumstances are in some way already playing against the objective. The most careful consideration must go into reminding the actors of the meaning of the play, which in FÖRLORARNA's case was to celebrate the aspect of unproductive play within the competitive and capitalistic environment of sports. As mentioned before, the question of taste and tools plays a part here as for me, taking away the structures means freedom to move beyond tradition and for others it might mean a lack of direction and unclarity. When does taking away structures mean worse

---

<sup>20</sup> This was of course very connected to having a small baby at home and every free moment going to taking care of her and not being able to do things for myself, like go to the gym or just chill to recover from each day's rehearsal.

Since mostly working split days and meetings being often placed at the end of rehearsals, I would have around three hours a day to get home and they were mostly spent on feeding Eyja and being present with her. I sometimes managed to nap, take a walk or watch an episode of the Netflix series *America's Sweethearts* to shut off my brain. This was too little personal time, and I felt how heavily I rely on physical activity to process what I'm doing at work. As mentioned before, often people from the artistic team would help out with Eyja, which was invaluable in a setting where my whole network was in Iceland. It serves as a reminder that responsibility of caretaking can be shifted from the mother to those around and that multiple people are fully capable of taking care of children regardless of their blood relation to that child.

condition for freedom of play? When does the chaos feel restrictive and impede curiosity and playfulness?

As mentioned earlier, we did a mind-map exercise in the beginning of the process where all associations with the topic was organized into islands. The associations were welcome to be either topics that the participants were excited to explore adjacent to the one of handball, memories or personal associations or simply ideas of scenes they would want to perform themselves regarding the topic. Through this, you could see which islands were large and which small, what topics had the most resonance and where people associated completely different things to the topic. One element that came through repeatedly was the wish to play a real game onstage. There seemed to be a general interest in exploring that further, and we set out to build the performance largely around this idea. Consequently, a big part of the process went into researching game theory and creating our own games, playing with different elements and compositions and experimenting with bending rules, cheating and creating our own rules.

When going deeper into this scene, I found that as soon as games were performed by the actors when in full character, the element of realness was completely lost and consequently the real stakes that made the scene interesting and engaging for the viewer. Feeling that when they added character to the scene, their intentions within the gameplay became muddled, divided between the real task of the game and their intention as their chosen character, and that it was impossible to invest in the same way as a viewer. This, however, took away the instrumental tools for performing for some of the actors. I wanted the play to feel and be as real as possible, but by taking away the possibility for them to perform it through character, I was simultaneously ruining the play and playfulness that they felt the game gave them through *their* play of mimesis.

Reflecting on this scenario through Maggie Nelson's writings about freedom, we can look at how "there is freedom *to* and freedom *from*." (Nelson, 2021, p. 80) How freedom means different things for different people and how "dominance can disguise itself as liberation" (ibid, 2021, p. 9), when not carefully thought of for whom the emancipation is aimed. For me, staging the game void of character and constructed drama meant a freedom from obeying old structures of theatre and the audience's expectations, but for them it felt like the structures taken away were the ones giving them the freedom to be creative, to behave in a playful way within the scene and to enjoy it on their own terms, according to what gives them themselves freedom through empowerment and access to their own tools. This became a battle for a few weeks, with

the scene somehow working against itself until we found the right balance where they could spice up their performance if it meant that it didn't affect their intention while playing the game itself.

This was not a big, painful conflict but still a delicate and tricky one, as it felt like we were speaking different languages when talking about play and its meaning. It raised questions of what freedom means and who ultimately gets to decide the game and its rules, there being the intention to create the games collectively but at the same time the need from the institution that one person makes the ultimate decisions. This illustrates quite well the pervading friction within the clash of collective creation and the institution, where the subtle violence of making decisions about someone else is unveiled. Many collectively based processes are designed to escape just that - the violence and the oppression of the single decision maker, this being a paradox to the more hidden oppression that comes with the uncertainty when responsibility is too vague and spread out.

### 7.1.3. VIOLENCE

*Every mode of art that produces new modes of perception wages a war.*

-Innes & Shevtsova (2013)

Here I think it's relevant to (briefly) look at the historical avant-garde and the tradition of the 'Total Theatre', since it (perhaps paradoxically) shares many similarities with collective creation processes born later towards the turn of the century that I have been inspired by. 'Total Theatre' is described by Maria Shevtsova and Christopher Innes as where "directors create the work they stage - frequently supplanting the playwright - choreograph the movements, design the setting and plot the lighting, and sometimes perform on stage as well, qualifying them as 'auteurs'... many of these directors are also visual artists; their performances are primarily physical rather than text-based; and they promote a style of 'Total Theatre' that seeks not only artistic unity as in Wagner's Gesamtkunstwerk but also to break through the naturalistic 'fourth wall' and unite performers and audience" (Innes & Shevtsova, 2013, p. 147). They go on to describe how the directors in question (a few famous **dudes**) employed methods of collective creation where the traditional primacy of text and verbal language gave way to physical scores, focusing on direct involvement between the actors and spectators, and the credit

of script frequently given to the collective as a whole. It employed a fragmentary style in structure and focused on the mosaic rather than linear (ibid, p. 157).

I find it relevant to mention this because in some way, this is the complete ideological opposite to the ideas of collective creation processes where the hierarchical author is being abolished but at the same time shares so many aspects in form and process. Blurring the lines of tradition, collectively creating the performance score and believing in the collective as a creative force that can transcend the tradition of script writing, where all barriers and separation of functions are broken down within the theatre institution. Innes and Shevtsova go on to describe how while these directors sought to reject the conformist expression and “rotten status quo” of a commercialized bourgeois society by radically creating new principles of performance, that “the removal of the author and the privileging of the performer *in fact lead to greater directorial control*” (Innes & Shevtsova, 2013, p. 157).

Breaking down all barriers can lead to greater directorial control, even when the intention is to do work which form speaks of redefining and questioning societal and hierarchical structures. The structure of the institution takes over and demands the director to step into authority, taking away the autonomy that had been implied in the name of collective creation. The feeling can arise that the process has the dishonest intention of “producing internal feelings of liberation, despite externally oppressive circumstances” (Nelson, 2021, p. 13); proposing feigned autonomy for the actors in the creation of material while the real power lies with someone else. This could be prevented, again, by more transparent communication about decision making and a clearer consensus within the group about who is making decisions and from what standpoint.<sup>21</sup> There is violence inherent in decision making, it means actively choosing one thing and rejecting everything else, and it must be admitted that it is an inseparable part of creating a unified vision or experience within a performance.

Violence is inherent in the act of changing structures, in forcing people to work and perform differently and in forcing an audience to view things in a new manner. It should then perhaps not come as a surprise that entering an institution with the intention to do something different can cause painful clashes and friction. The question is how to be open and honest about this hierarchy and what it means in a collective process, when there is actually space to keep playing by everyone's rules and

---

<sup>21</sup> Here, a small part of me wonders whether this is a concern that a man (older, taller, with a deeper voice and higher social status) would even be bothered by at all and what difference there is in the implicit trust in decision making that comes with gender.

when that power is handed over to the director and we start playing their game. The solution we found in the scene mentioned above was to try to find a compromise, to give back enough of the actors' own tools for them to be able to perform the scene joyfully while the outer structure of the scene remained according to my rules.

The approach that worked well was being open to compromise while ensuring that the intention remained clear, avoiding defensiveness or overly forceful assertions of the vision. As a director it is crucial to protect the actor's playfulness, as it is a delicate element that requires care and is instrumental in the creative process. Additionally, staying mindful and not naive about the responsibilities and implications of decision making proved essential.

#### 7.1.4. TRUST

*And I'll fly with you*  
*I'll fly with you*  
*I'll fly with you*  
 -Gigi D'Agostino (1999)

When working on FÖRLORARNA, I experienced trust from many and the lack of trust from others, as well as myself trusting people to varying degrees. I noticed a lack of trust from some actors when it came to rehearsing the more improvised or game-based scenes, this being perhaps equally related to a difference in taste when it came to style of theatre and to them not knowing me or my previous work. This was a new experience for me, being in the vulnerable position of having to repeatedly ask people for their trust and try to convince people that what we were doing on stage was artistically interesting to the viewer, explaining the same things over and over and sometimes not feeling heard or believed. This again created distrust in myself towards these same actors, not feeling like they were genuinely trying to listen or playing along, suspecting them of intentional sabotage and then feeling meaninglessness in continuing the collaboration.

All these moments of distrust stem from insecurity, which is an area that must be expected to some extent when explicitly aiming for uncertainty. Kristín Eysteinsdóttir suggests creating space for the moments when insecurity sets in for the actors to be open and honest about their insecurity with the director and to which the director can then answer that: "You are allowed to be scared. These are natural feelings.

Because I don't know where we're going either. I'm searching. Should we search together?" (Kristín Eysteinsdóttir, 2024). Aiming to create the sense that the search is mutual, and that the uncertainty is our friend. Una Þorleifsdóttir suggests, when an actor doesn't trust that what they're doing onstage is interesting, to simply ask "But will you do it for me?" (Una Þorleifsdóttir, 2024). If the actor has trust in you as an artist, then that should be enough. If they still don't trust the scene, despite the reassurance of it being interesting to the outside eye, then there must be a pause and a stop to dig a moment from where this insecurity and distrust is coming from.

The worst moments of distrust that I experienced during the process were when some actors were being quite openly hostile when approaching the premiere, at which point it was hard not to give in to feelings of resentment and frustration, wondering what of this was their own insecurity talking and what was simply personal dislike against me as a director.<sup>22</sup> This made it a challenge to keep up my own self-esteem to have the strength to continue working and threatened to head towards a toxic and sabotage-like environment in which calm and open discussion about the problem did not feel easily accessible. I was so tired at this point in the process that I decided not to go into the conflict but to just continue working on scenes and focusing on what needed to be done, annoyed by what I experienced as their childish and unclear behaviour. I don't regret not entering this conflict on the spot, but I do think that some discussion about this distrust would have needed to take place earlier in the process. When asking Una Þorleifsdóttir about how she deals with discontent actors and passive-aggressiveness in the rehearsal space, she talks about making a point of never giving into conflict when actors are trying to provoke or pick a fight. She feels that it creates more distrust against the director as a stable and trustworthy human being and that it's a complete waste of time. Some of this also comes down to language, as nuances in communication got lost in translation and it was sometimes hard to understand the social dynamics going on, not necessarily knowing what was to be taken seriously and what was simple tiredness from over-worked people. These moments were unpleasant and again brought about the shame of being personally disliked in a work-environment, which raises the question of pleasing.

When are you as a director being true to your own artistic vision and when are you giving into pleasing the people around you to maintain their comfort? In an act of disobeying the common preconception of women as the caretakers of a pleasurable

---

<sup>22</sup> Or simply me as a person/young woman/foreigner, opening the doors to an endless spiral of self-criticism.

atmosphere, it would be dreamy to resist giving into people's complaints in the trust that they would take care of their own needs and to throw to the wind the vanity of being liked and appreciated by the people around you. To resist the urge to please and to be liked, remembering, as Una Þorleifsdóttir (2024) says, that "the point is not to end up in a dinner club together in 10 years" but to get work done. This is a tricky area as a pleasurable atmosphere does serve the creation of the process and if actors get into a sabotaging mode, the creative environment suffers. But there is a balance to where the responsibility falls on the director and where people are responsible for addressing their own discomfort and take the initiative to have constructive conversations about it. During this specific moment, maybe the actors didn't feel like there was room for openly addressing their insecurities or concerns, resulting in the outlash of frustration instead. This suggests that more care should have needed to be taken by me to keep the space open and to make sure that everyone felt listened to, while keeping in mind that everyone is an adult responsible for taking care of their own needs as well.

Can trust be regained if it has slipped away? In the case of these few specific actors, I felt like there was apparent distrust in the process from quite early on, coming out in different ways through their reactions to the exercises and what kind of energy they brought into the space. I did my best to frequently talk about the process during rehearsals and to ask if there were concerns and to respond to whatever topics that were raised, but in hindsight there could have been need for more individual attention. These talks were usually group talks, and that is perhaps a vulnerable place to admit insecurities or to have to formulate thoughts on the spot. Director and professor Saana Lavaste mentions that when working on *Läkaren* in Svenska Teatern in 2023, she made a point of planning all costume fittings in the same day so that she could plan individual interviews with every single actor towards the middle of the process. (Saana Lavaste, 2024) This could have been a helpful thing to do, in order to break up the group dynamic for a while and to give each actor a chance to reflect, be open about their feelings and to have a moment to be listened to in a safe space.<sup>23</sup> Maybe it should also be over-emphasized throughout the process that it's okay to talk about vulnerabilities and to raise the topics of insecurities whenever they arise, not allowing them to brew and turn into aggressions.

---

<sup>23</sup> Perhaps an especially smart thing to do for a new mother. As I always had to run home straight after rehearsals to breastfeed, there was very seldom time for individual communication with the actors.

Everything comes down to trust. Staying with the unknown together means trusting the artists and trusting the process. It means for the theatre as a workplace to trust its artistic leader, for the artistic leader to trust the artistic team leading the process and to trust that there are functioning methods at work that will deliver a performance. It also means for the director to trust the actors to listen and trust that they are present at rehearsals with the intention to work together and not employ sabotage to the process when insecurity sets in.

It means creating an environment where it is accepted to say: "I can't." This is important to state, especially regarding the surrounding departments in the house, who may feel unsafe in the face of uncertainty. To build trust as far as it is possible by giving enough answers and then leaving them with the knowledge that they are not under anyone's heel, that everything is always open for discussion and that there is understanding for the need of shifting margins.

## 7.2. CONCLUSION vol. III

Things that could make a devised process within an institution run smoother from a directing point of view:

- Plan rehearsals so that there is enough resting time for actors
- Plan rehearsals so that there is enough time for you as a director to work in between rehearsals
- Decide enough but not too much
- Be transparent about all decision making and how material gets chosen
- Give time for discussions about meaning and intentions of the scenes
- Be conscious of where you place yourself in the hierarchy and how your decisions affect the material brought in by the actors
- Find ways to compensate for whatever tools are taken away from the actors
- Make space for individual interviews with the actors, where they can be transparent about their needs and where there is a safe space to be open
- Take care of your own energy

## 8. MEETING IN THE MIDDLE



Daniela Franzell, Ingemar Raukola, Jerry Wahlforss and Samuel Karlsson in  
FÖRLORARNA (2024)  
Photo: Riku Suvitie

Having listed different ways to prepare and perform during a devised process for the different agents involved, I want to make suggestions of where we can meet in the middle and what can be seen as shared responsibilities.

- ❑ When entering a collaborative process like this, is it instrumental for all parties involved to stay in a mode of active listening and make a conscious effort to communicate carefully, especially when stress is high.
- ❑ Make friends with uncertainty. It's ok not to know and it's ok to say "I can't". Remember that the intention is to search together.
- ❑ Suspend tradition for a moment, in the hope that it will bring something new and unexpected to the artistic process and in the knowledge that another musical is surely waiting just around the corner, where everyone can go back to their comfort zone.
- ❑ The director can plan some activities to turn on the creative vibes and get people started in the day. But to maintain an overall healthy creative work

energy, the house should be responsible for not over-working their actors. If that base security isn't present, then there is little that a fun morning routine can do.

- ❑ Use the resources available to prepare everyone involved for a process like this. This can be an enjoyable process of sharing and exploration, watching shows together and exploring new approaches to theatre, re-visiting set frames of working and shaking up traditional duties within the workplace.
- ❑ Let's end with using sports as an analogy: see it as a team effort. There is no 'us' and 'them', but we are all on the same team trying to make the process work and reach a common goal. Adopt the identity of a team player, stay in a supporting and listening mode and work together to keep spirits high.



Daniela Franzell, Jerry Wahlforss, Samuel Karlsson and Sarianna Sormunen during Roskiboll in FÖRLORARNA (2024)  
Photo: Riku Suvitie

## 9. FINAL WORDS



Photo: Pette Rissanen

In this thesis, I set out to clear my brain fog after a taxing process during a complicated era in my life and to map out ways to facilitate contemporary theatre making on the stages where the best resources are found. It was a reflection on how to make space for the territory of uncertainty within theatrical institutions, trying to find ways to accommodate this essential quality of process-based theatre making while working within traditional institutional frameworks.

It has been an attempt to make friends with my own problems and how to heal from the difficulties that arose during the process, wanting to find joy in studying the past events and remembering also what went well, which in fact, was a lot. The process of writing has been coloured by the anxiety of facing my own failures and healing conversations with wonderful and wise people, all the while exploring the balance of academic writing and emotional oversharing.

Trying to find ways to grow from the difficult moments of the past months, I have wanted to honestly reflect on my own work and have found some answers about how to make things go better when directing a devised process while

simultaneously spiraling into some paradoxes to which I have no answers and I genuinely hope that someone else will take on themselves to explore further. Ultimately, that is my wish: That there will be space for others to keep experimenting, questioning and playing. Because the only way to fail at play is simply by *not playing*.

## REFERENCES

### PRIMARY SOURCES

- Bogart, Anne (2001). *A Director Prepares*. Routledge Taylor & Francis Group.
- Bourdieu, Pierre (1984). *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*. Harvard University Press.
- Callois, Roger (1958). *Man, Play and Games*. University of Illinois Press.
- Innes, Christopher & Shevtsova, Maria (2013). *The Cambridge Introduction to Theatre Directing*. Cambridge University Press.
- Karl Ágúst Þorbergsson. (2021). Leit að formi: Tilraunir í sviðslistum í upphafi 21. Aldar. *Skírnir*, vol. 195, p. 222-247. Hið Íslenska Bókmenntafélag.
- Kirby, Michael (1995). On Acting and Not-Acting. In Auslander, Philip (Ed.), *Acting (Re)Considered: Theories and Practices* (pp. 43-58). Routledge Taylor & Francis Group.
- Lehmann, Hans-Thies (2006). *Postdramatic Theatre*. Original: *Postdramatisches Theater* (1999). Translated by Karen Jürs-Munby. Routledge Taylor & Francis Group.
- Mitchell, Katie (2009). *The Director's Craft. A Handbook for the Theatre*. Routledge Taylor & Francis Group.
- Nelson, Maggie (2021). *On Freedom: Four Songs of Care and Constraint*. Penguin Random House.
- Rau, Milo. (2018) *Globaler Realismus. Global Realism*. Ghent: NTGhent & International Institute of Political Murder.
- Steinunn Knútsdóttir (2016). *Lóðrétt rannsókn: Ódauðleg verk Áhugaleikhúss Atvinnumanna 2005-2015*. Icelandic University of Art.

Solnit, Rebecca (2010). *A Field Guide To Getting Lost*. Canongate Books.

Sontag, Susan (2018). *Notes on 'Camp'*. Originally published in *Against Interpretation and other Essays*. (1966). Penguin Random House.

Thomas, James. (2016) *A Director's Guide to Stanislavsky's Active Analysis: Including the Formative Essay on Active Analysis by Maria Knebel*. Bloomsbury.

## PERSONAL INTERVIEWS & COMMUNICATION

Aðalbjörg Árnadóttir (personal interview, Reykjavík 16.11.2024)

Daniela Franzell (personal online interview, 16.11.2024)

Ellinor Hellström (personal online communication, 30.12.2024)

Friðgeir Einarsson (personal interview, Reykjavík 16.11.2024)

Hallgrímur Ólafsson (personal interview, Reykjavík 16.11.2024)

Kira-Emmi Pohtokari (personal phone interview, 30.12.2024)

Kristín Eysteinsdóttir (personal interview, Reykjavík 03.12.2024)

Magnús Geir Eyjólfsson (personal interview, Reykjavík 15.11.2024)

Minna Lund (personal online communication, 02.01.2025)

Saana Lavaste (personal communication at lunch, 13.12.2025)

Saga Kjerúlf Sigurðardóttir (personal interview, Reykjavík 16.12.2024)

Una Þorleifsdóttir (personal interview, Reykjavík 03.12.2024)

## LYRICS

Scooter (1999). Maria (I Like it Loud) [song]. On *The Stadium Techno Experience*. Original version: Marc Acardipane (1997). Sheffield Tunes.

Gigi D'Agostino (1999). L'Amour Toujours [song]. On *L'Amour Toujours*. ZYX.

## PHOTO CREDITS

1. Front page: Samuel Karlsson as Mascot in FÖRLORARNA (2024). Photo: Riku Suvitie
2. Julia Korander in FÖRLORARNA (2024) Photo: Pette Rissanen
3. Daniela Franzell, Jerry Wahlforss, Ingemar Raukola and Samuel Karlsson in FÖRLORARNA (2024) Photo: Riku Suvitie
4. From the set of FÖRLORARNA (2024). Photo: Hallveig Kristín Eiríksdóttir
5. Samuel Karlsson in Warm Up scene in FÖRLORARNA (2024) Photo: Riku Suvitie
6. From the set of FÖRLORARNA (2024). Photo: Hallveig Kristín Eiríksdóttir
7. Samuel Karlsson as the Mascot in FÖRLORARNA (2024) Photo: Riku Suvitie
8. Samuel Karlsson during the process of FÖRLORARNA (2024) Photo: Hallveig Kristín Eiríksdóttir
9. Julia Korander and Samuel Karlsson as Döden and Antonius Block in FÖRLORARNA (2024) Photo: Riku Suvitie
10. Daniela Franzell, Ingemar Raukola, Jerry Wahlforss and Samuel Karlsson in FÖRLORARNA (2024) Photo: Riku Suvitie
11. Daniela Franzell, Jerry Wahlforss, Samuel Karlsson and Sarianna Sormunen during Roskisboll in FÖRLORARNA (2024) Photo: Riku Suvitie
12. From the set of FÖRLORARNA (2024). Photo: Pette Rissanen

## ARTWORKS

*Álfahöllin* (2017). [Performance] Þorleifur Örn Arnarsson. Production: National Theatre of Iceland.

*Club Romantica* (2019). [Performance] Friðgeir Einarsson. Production: MurMur in collaboration with Reykjavík City Theatre.

*Eltum veðrið* (2024). [Performance] Ensemble of the National Theatre of Iceland. Production: National Theatre of Iceland.

*eyður* (2020). [Performance] Marble Crowd. Production: MurMur in collaboration with National Theatre of Iceland.

*FÖRLORARNA* (2024). [Performance] Hallveig Kristín Eiríksdóttir. Performers: Daniela Franzell, Julia Korander, Ingemar Raukola, Jerry Wahlforss, Samuel Karlsson. Dramaturge: Per Ehrström. Scenography, costume and videodesign: Riku Suvitie. Sound design: Tuuli Kainulainen. Lights: Antti Nietmaa. Production: Åbo Svenska Teater.

*Njála* (2016). [Performance] Þorleifur Örn Arnarsson. Production: Reykjavík City Theatre and the Icelandic Dance Company.

## SECONDARY SOURCES

Boal, Augusto & Epstein, Susana. (1990) *The Cop in the Head: Three Hypotheses*. TDR (1988-), 34(3), 35–42. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1146067>

Egill Heiðar Pálsson (2022). “Two Methods, Same Origins, Different Outcomes” in *Looking for direction: Rethinking theatre practices and Pedagogies in the 21st century* (pp, 54–94). Uniarts Helsinki Theatre Academy.

Etchells, Tim (1999). *Certain Fragments: Contemporary Performance and Forced Entertainment*. Routledge Taylor & Francis Group.

Fuchs, Elinor (1996). *The Death of Character: Perspectives on Theatre after Modernism*. Indiana University Press.

Halberstam, Jack (2011). *The Queer Art of Failure*. Duke University Press.

Kiely, Damon (2023). *Play Directing: The Basics*. Routledge Taylor & Francis Group

Kristeva, Julia. *Motherhood today*. Retrieved on October 5<sup>th</sup>, 2024, from  
<http://www.kristeva.fr/motherhood.html>

Massumi, Brian (2002). *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation*. Duke University Press.

McLuhan, Marshall (1964). *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*. McGraw-Hill.

Rancière, Jacques (2009). *The Emancipated Spectator*. Original: *Le Spectateur émancipé* 2008. Translation by Elliott, Gregory. Verso.

Weston, Judith (1996). *Directing Actors: Creating Memorable Performances for Film and Television*. Michael Wiese Productions.