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Kjære leser,

I denne boka finner du en samling tekster som er skrevet av blant annet kunstnere, teoretikere, filosofer og dramaturger. Tekstene byr på ulike vinklinger, språk og innganger knyttet til det kunstneriske programmet på Black Box teater. Disse ble første gang publisert i sesongkatalogene og festivalavisene fra vårsesongen 2017 til vårsesongen 2018. Noen tekster går i tett dialog med tematikker i en forestillingsprosess, eller følger, undersøker og gir innsikt i kunstnerskap. Andre igjen byr på perspektiver om det offentlige rom, politiske og filosofiske diskurser som engasjerer og utfordrer. Vi håper at tekstene både samlet og alene beriker og inspirerer til et nysgjerrig og utvidet språk om kunsten og verden omkring oss.

God lesning!

Dear reader,

In this publication you will find a collection of texts written by artists, theorists, philosophers and dramaturgs. The texts offer differing points of view, discourses upon and a context for the artistic program at Black Box teater. They were first published in our season catalogues and festival newspapers from spring season 2017 till spring season 2018. Some texts suggest a dialogue with the themes or subject matter that is explored during the performance process, or follow, investigate and provide an insight into a particular artistic practice. Other texts draw different perspectives on the public space, and to political and philosophical discourses that engage and challenge. We hope that the texts, both individually and as a whole will enrich and inspire a curious and expanded language about art and the world around us.

Enjoy the read!

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Del I. / Part I.

Perspektiver og kunstnerskap.
Viewpoints and artistic practices.

Marlene Monteiro Freitas:
Choreographing Openness
Alexandra Balona

“Contradictory thoughts do not try to eliminate one another, but continue side by side, and often combine to form condensation-products, as though no contradiction existed.”

– *The Interpretation of dreams*,
Sigmund Freud

Guintche (2010) is a concert, a drawing, a dance, a circus show, a wax figure.

Of Ivory and Flesh – Statues Also Suffer (2014) is a dinner, a reality show and a ballroom that gathers the petrified, the statues, the musicians and the dancers, the humans, the animals and the hybrids, visible and imaginary, real or phantasmatic.

To approach Marlene Monteiro Freitas' choreographic worlds is to relate to theatrical scenes that are always open and never self-enclosed, that (dis)organize themselves through uncanny and contradictory dynamics. Where the relations between the visible and the invisible, cause and effect, perceiving and thinking—and from there, writing—can no longer be taken for granted as unified discourses, but as unstable, oneiric ensembles.

In fact, the work of this Cape Verdean-born dancer and choreographer can hardly be translated into words, as it is not contained within the realm of language. Hers is an artistic search for intensity, strength and atemporal “pathos”, rather

Marlene Monteiro Freitas: Choreographing Openness was commissioned by Black Box teater for the 2017 fall season program, to accompany the presentation of Freitas' creations *Guintche* and *Of Ivory and Flesh – statues also suffer*, in collaboration with CODA festival.

Alexandra Balona is a researcher and independent curator based in Porto. She is a PhD candidate in Culture Studies (EGS & Lisbon Consortium), and curated *Migratory Images – Thinking Lab in Performing Arts* (Rivoli TMP, Porto).

than transmission of a meaning or intellectual concept. But this “pathos”, as a condensed force or emotional condition engrained through time in images and gestures, is disrupted through strategies of metamorphosis and the contradictory simultaneity of kaleidoscopic montages of images, figures, music, and bodily movement.

In Freitas’ works, a deeply embodied, insular heritage of music, rhythm, and dance practices is combined with an array of eclectic references from visual art, cinema, music, and theory. But they also draw on the aesthetic licentiousness, irony and “becoming other” of the utopian ritual of Carnival – “the festival of joyful otherness” (Coderch and Stoichita, 1999: 15), and references derived from Freitas’ archive of everyday life.

To experience Freitas’ work is to enter an open and unconfined space, undefined and uncertain, where familiarity and strangeness co-exist. As with Carnival, one witnesses not the destruction of opposites but their structuring. By the same token, Freitas seems more attracted to the tension between these polarities, than to emphasizing their opposition.

She usually begins each work with extensive research, an on-going atlas of references that informs her movement research, together with a musical pre-selection. Music is a crucial tool as it allows the choreographer and the performers to access specific working areas, intentions and imaginaries. It is precisely from Freitas’ relationship to music and composition that relevant choreographic ideas arise.

***Guintche*, or the incoherence of all matter**

“Guintche” can take several forms. However, notes Freitas, between all these forms there is no resemblance, only the same intensity, the same nature (Freitas, 2013). Indeed, “guintche” was a jazz concert, which produced a particular affectation, registered in a drawing. “Guintche” is also a word in Cape Verdean creole with various meanings: a bird, a prostitute, or it can be used to refer to someone who moves from one event to another without logical or coherent choices.

Guintche, the dance, is in fact the embodiment of incoherent oppositions and immeasurable excess. Propelled by an exultant force, Freitas embodies the potentiality of simultaneous contradictions, the fury and strangeness that challenges not only the duration of her movement, but also a rational comprehension of *Guintche*'s figure.

Her body is divided in two: the lower limbs rooted in the ground follow the repetitive mechanics of her hip movement, with a rhythm reminiscent of Cape Verdean dances. The upper limbs and face express a kaleidoscopic array of modes and states that recall bird-like gestures, animalistic and clownish postures, bringing together fear and parody, irony and indifference, cannibalism and eroticism. Freitas’ expression is focused in her eyes, the proper locus of the subject’s identification, and mouth, one of the most symbolic body openings. Thus, these polymorphic distortions aim at disorganizing the stability of a (more-than-human) self.

“This wax figure”, Freitas reflects, “melts, solidifies, hides, changes form (...) and the sequence of transformations produces distinct images: circus, cannibalism, ectoplasm, rituals, gymnastics, puppets” (Freitas, 2013). However, *Guintche* always retains its matter due to its imponderability and counter-intuitive structure.

Circus music with drums sets the tone, and the piece unfolds in two parts, with Freitas dwelling in that indomitable split movement before, at a slower pace, she starts wandering through the space in what could be recognized as circus entertainment scenes. With clumsiness, mechanical puppet movements and virtuosic gymnastics, Freitas embodies transitional and contrasting figures that recall desolation and hopefulness, comedy and sadness, indifference and fragility.

An atlas of eclectic references have informed *Guintche*: Goya's drawings, Franz Xaver Messerschmidt's sculptures *The Character Heads*, the film *Les maîtres fous* by Jean Rouch, and the “becoming other” of Carnival, among others. *Statues also die*, a 1953 documentary by Chris Marker and Alain Renais that traces not only the uprooting of African art by the colonial power but also its annihilation, is another reference. The transformation of art from living symbols within a culture, to objects deprived of life by the Western context of museology and consumption, points ahead to *Of Ivory and Flesh – Statues Also Suffer*. Subjected to colonial power, the figure of the black slave progressively acquired other roles, as

Marker and Renais point out: “the black puppet” for entertainment, and in modern Western context, “the black sportsman” or the “black boxer”. In the bareness of *Guintche*'s scenography, one notices a punching bag hanging from the ceiling. A remark, not particularly to Cape Verde's heritage as a former Portuguese colony (as Freitas' work does not inscribe itself in a post-colonial critical discourse), but perhaps to symbolize strength and struggle, which nevertheless returns the gaze to the spectator.

Of ivory and flesh, or the metamorphic potentiality of art

Masks and statues populate Freitas' *Of Ivory and Flesh – Statues Also Suffer*, in a delirious ballroom of transitional figures: half-petrified, half-humans, half-animals. A fictional space that does not follow, nor is it limited by, any rule or convention, not even that of life and death. The materiality of objects and images becomes animated through choreography, disrupting the dialectic of animated subject and unanimated object. Expression and transformation are once more focused in the performers' mouths and eyes, with grimaces that evoke strangeness, rigidity and the animalistic.

The dark space illuminated by strobe lights, and the shiny blue costumes, contrast with the ivory of the performers' painted faces. One should not expect any direct reference or coherent message, but again, a montage of oppositions in continuous metamorphic processes. Music plays

a key role in this choreographic montage, starting with Omar Souleyman's techno-dabke, interrupted with moments of silence, buzzers and live cymbals. Arcade Fire's "My body is a cage" underlines the realm of the petrified, Monteverdi disrupts the ensemble, and Nina Simone's "Feelings" appears, unexpectedly, as an encore. Strangeness, impurity and intensity, the key words of Freitas' work, are confirmed once more.

In the Pygmalion myth of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, the sculptor falls in love with his own *oeuvre*, a female ivory statue, which the Gods decide to endow with life. The statue has no real referent; it is not a mimetic object but the source of Pygmalion's own imagination and artistic mastery. According to art historian Victor Stoichita, Pygmalion's myth can be read as "a parable about the origins of simulacrum in the transgression of art representation, suspension of mimesis and in the deviations of desire" (Stoichita, 2011: 12).

This simulacrum, as an embodied image, a phantasm in-between reality and imagination, touches upon the magical capacity of the aesthetic and artistic work. In the original myth, the transitional process from ivory into flesh had an intermediary stage, in which wax was the symbolic material – the precise matter that granted *Guintche* its metamorphic potentiality.

In Marlene Monteiro Freitas' work, choreography is an artistic process that opens space for the unpredictable and the contradictory to be staged as if there were no contradictions at all. Her

work has uncontrollable life and force, an illusionist quality that challenges the boundaries between the rational and irrational, conscious and unconscious, and an audaciousness that follows its own singular path.

Against Cultural Appropriation
Karmenlara Ely

Burying myself alive

I have a recurring dream, a nightmare. A secret grave chamber is found underneath the stage of a theatre, under layers of construction. Boxes of trash, liquor bottles, oil barrels, plastic toys, relics and, horrifyingly, body parts of people both long and recently dead collected in crates and garbage bags, their severed limbs in a pile. Some are still breathing, but I cannot allow myself to look. My relatives are there, and strangers. Like a garbage dump, the architecture rots with the purpose of burying things out of sight for generations. If dreaming can be described as an agency, then this nightmare dreams me through its repetition. In the dream I am incapable of rage, only shame. *How can I hide from this archive of violences? If I just sleep forever, will it disappear?* It is as though I myself have done the killing: dismemberment of bodies in a museum of hurt, a library of abuses, trinkets and crimes six feet under the stage. It is as if I too, am one of the victims.

Even though it's impossible to have done this crime, I have. And I am.

In search of a home in the theatre, and in the street, I have performed, masqueraded, stolen, even eaten of these sins, both unspeakable and sacred. The grave chamber in my dreams breathes shame because it is both epic and real. It is a living archive, not just of me, but everyone who came before me, all that I have lost and gained through them. Loss is the American archive I have inherited through my relatives from both indigenous and

Against Cultural Appropriation was commissioned for the 2017 fall season, as this issue was explored in several shows throughout our year-long program.

Karmenlara Ely is Professor and Artistic Director of Acting at Østfold University College/Norwegian Theatre Academy. She collaborates internationally on theatre and performance works, most recently with New York-based artists Muriel Miguel/Spiderwoman Theater and composer Sxip Shirey, and Trinidad-based author/director Tony Hall.

European roots, with their own competing narratives of historical trauma and survival. The archive is my material, and yet I do not own it, it escapes me, and I am unequipped to represent it. Through performance I have met elders, artists from various geographies, both at home and abroad, whose vision I have served, danced with, and learned from in redefining belonging. Learning to dance with the dead, the living, the shame. The privilege. Healing. I own nothing, claim nothing, except my gratitude. My work is to serve those relations through artistic practice. I learn by listening that I alone have created nothing but am responsible for everything. And that every landscape a theatre is built on might be on fire with bodies inside. Because I cannot sleep forever, I am left with thinking.

The trouble with Modernity

The first performances on American soil were the performances of the over 500 tribes of First Nations people who inherited and shaped the land called Turtle Island, in the face of genocide and colonization. The first American stage constructions were slave auction blocks, performances were forced. All architecture – for theatre or commerce, has since been built upon the graves, archives and eternal voices of our relatives who endured. There are no theatres in the Americas without this subtext, especially for African diasporic and Native peoples. As a guest in this country, I wonder, what are the contemporary theatres of Norway, or Scandinavia and even Europe built on? What

economies are hiding under the floorboards? How do they shape cycles of repetition we are calling tradition or innovation: “post-dramatic” or even “post-contemporary”? Who is silenced, there? Who is responsible? Do we seek our sources of tragedy outside the stage, or is it always already there? And most importantly: Whose testimony do we consider expert in answering these questions today?

Our institutions are haunted by Modernity, deeply hungover from its fantasy, which arguably began over 500 years ago. *Artist as genius* is really the *artist as appropriator, artist as pioneer, as map-maker, artist as explorer*, masked. The archetypes of the Modernist genius, the solo inventor, the cowboy on the horizon, artist as brand, has constructed us together, America and Europe. Both continents are intertwined precariously with the rest of the world through a shared economy built out of slave labor, genocide and trade of stimulants and people. The artist, when imagined as hero, genius, messiah, hipster – is doomed, against their own best interest, to repeat colonizing gestures. Appropriation cloaked as innovation risks erasure and silencing of alternative art-futures. Art-futures that we cannot yet imagine from our position, because of this blindness.

Appropriation continues the Doctrine of Discovery

Cultural appropriation at its worst re-performs genocidal gestures, because it imagines a world where the native expert is disappeared. Appropriation

avoids citation, self-reflection and critical dialogue. Yet these reflections, especially citation, are the real content of all material processes rooted in community, both indigenous and otherwise. Appropriation refuses attention to the nightmare, the mass graves of Modernity and the future of living resistance. There are vibrant editorials written recently on the appropriation debate that identify its problematic. Older, but more foundational is “Working Through Appropriation” by Trinidadian author Richard Fung, writing in Toronto in 1993:

“The primary dictionary meaning of the verb appropriate is ‘to take and use as one’s own’...there are no unique, pure cultures today; people have steadily learned the ways of others and taken them as their own... most of what we think of as culture involves some degree of appropriation. Foods, religions, languages and clothes all betray contacts with a larger world, which includes our closest neighbours, as well as distant imperial centres. There are no clear boundaries where one culture ends and another begins. But while some of this fusion may be celebrated as exchange, a larger proportion is the result of domination...The critique of cultural appropriation is therefore first and foremost a strategy to redress historically established inequities by raising questions about who controls and benefits from cultural resources” (16–24).

For 16 years, the United Nations has been working on a law that would protect the rights of indigenous communities from this exploitation. Author/artist Murielle Borst-Tarrant (Kuna/Rappahannock) is a member of the *United Nations’ Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues*, studying the historic legal construct *Doctrine of Discovery*. The foundation of the *Doctrine* over 500 years ago promoted international control, dominance and appropriation of indigenous peoples and lands based on the claim that those who are not Christian are not human. The following is from Borst-Tarrant’s paper given at *International Day of World’s Indigenous Peoples, 2011*:

“The neo-classical design of the non-indigenous Western framework is perceived as a cultural norm. We need to promote reform in the arena of arts policies and cultural advocacy to indigenous methodologies and cosmologies that are the central core of indigenous arts practices rooted in indigenous cultural knowledge. The challenge lies in asserting that indigenous peoples have the right to maintain, control, protect and develop their own cultural heritage, including the visual and performing arts.”

Neo-liberal voices silencing native arguments against cultural appropriation as merely “political correctness” or “cultural policing”, violently reassert the ethic of the heinous *Doctrine*. It reveals a

stronghold of outdated institutional artistic privilege, which historically has a position of unchallenged, unrestricted access in the name of innovation. There is a tendency in neoliberal society to conflate cultural appropriative acts and cultural backdropping with “cultural exchange”, but no equity or dialogue is involved. The *Doctrine* is a centuries-old licence to pilfer the culture of marginalized communities without consent, a right which defined Modernity. We must tear it down. Look instead to the powerful, critical artistic works, witty re-appropriative acts and activisms of community leaders as equal partners in the international artistic landscape. To quote Thomas Talawa Prestø, Artistic Director of the Tabanka Dance Ensemble, “If you have nothing of your own to say, be silent and step to the side so someone with something to say may speak. Using our cultures to silence our voices and superimpose your own is old, it has been done, and has nothing to do with contemporaneity.” Under every stage are living archives in various stages of vibrant decay, mourning, renewal, revolt and healing.

It's not about morality

Blindness to the violent impact of the *Doctrine* on the international art scene is not from a lack of moral political compasses. Our marketplace is far too much in love with Victorian morality and the image of an educated and “socially engaged artist” as hero. We lack equitable relations. We lack weakness and anonymity. Willingness to give space, time and flesh to uncomfortable spaces. To

allow ourselves to be beginners. Relations, with actual risk, critical encounter and dialogue, stand in opposition to appropriative acts. The term “weak actor” comes to mind (perhaps the opposite of the hero or protagonist) as it is used in the research of Tuija Kokkonen. She presents, in her PhD research at UniArts Helsinki, a theory of post-human performative action emerging from practices binding “weak actors” and non-human actors as co-performers in an ethics of hospitality to “create a new kind of polis”. I like thinking with the idea of the “weak actor” instead of the innovator. It is a way to think critically about appropriation, because a “weak action” exists through acknowledging interdependency and intimacy. Camilla Eeg-Tverbakk's PhD dissertation proposes an equally compelling live form for practicing ethics, which she calls *teater ting*. Eeg-Tverbakk rethinks the impact of appropriating the testimony of others, and the imminent sovereignty of “things” in documentary work. She calls for an “ethics of the unknown” with care and acknowledgement of agencies, dreams, experiences “I am not able to grasp and comprehend from my perspective” (2016). Both of these contributions are examples of thinking hospitable to an alternative art-future emerging from Nordic artistic research.

Post-Modernity is still Modernity

All work begins and end with relations, therefore the work and the questions of accountability are never finished. The nightmare is a call. Identifying

who we are in the work and what relations we are making is foundational ethics as ground. If I find myself faced with material from an archive outside my experience, it's a call to put myself in question with a living expert from the tradition, and risk finding out I have nothing to give. To risk belonging, to risk the nakedness of community, to risk losing. We are in a time of resistance, change and dreaming new art-futures where diasporic and indigenous peoples are the emerging leaders. Our future lies in the yet unlearned vocabulary and methods that destabilize modernity and its psychic hold on us. Our attachment to the "new", the so-called *avant* and its cynical relationship to territory, production, and consumer capitalism is failing us. *The empty white or black box has a trash heap just outside the window*. Can we artists, at our best, practice a slower ethics? Are we able to be beginners? Artists are capable of decentralizing power, rather than heroically imitating the desires of institutions to grow as a brand. As a theatre educator, I know that unless I am part of a destabilizing and decolonizing process myself, I am doing nothing but rushing towards an aestheticized nowhere, an architectural nightmare.

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Where is the Theology?
Brenda Dixon Gottschild

Where is the Theology? was commissioned by Jaamil Olawale Kosoko to accompany his piece *Séancers*, presented at Black Box teater as part of the Oslo Internasjonale Teaterfestival program 2018. This essay is re-published by Black Box teater with the permission of the author.

Brenda Dixon Gottschild is an award-winning author, Professor Emerita of Dance studies at Temple University, and a freelance writer, consultant, performer and lecturer. Among her many honors for leadership and scholarship, she was awarded a 2017 Pew Fellowship in the Arts. Her books include *Digging the Africanist Presence in American Performance: Dance and Other Contexts*, *Waltzing in the Dark: African American Vaudeville and Race Politics in the Swing Era* (awarded the 2001 Congress on Research in Dance Award for Outstanding Scholarly Dance Publication), and *The Black Dancing Body – A Geography from Coon to Cool* (awarded the 2004 de la Torre Bueno prize for scholarly excellence in dance publication).

Circling. In Africanist¹ spirit tradition, the circle is the architecture that predicates existence and encompasses our being/nonbeing. Birth, earthly life, physical death, and afterlife are concentric, overlapping, contiguous spheres of ongoing endeavor. Overlap is key here: literally and metaphorically, practically and conceptually, the circle is non-linear, represents multidimensional space, and bridges dimensions, divides, and borders of human understanding.

Crossing. Crossings. Crosses. Crossroads—the cosmic X—is a potent signifier in Black theologies. So much happens where roads of all kinds, physical and metaphysical, intersect. Legend has it that musical genius Robert Johnson sold his soul to the devil at a crossroads in Mississippi. In global Yoruba practice this meeting place is potent enough to have a designated guardian. Eshu, in Nigeria; Exú, in Brazil (Candomblé); Echú, in Cuba (Santería); Legba, in Haiti (Vodun)—all are names for the deity of the crossroads. The cross is not linear. It intersects netherworld and earthground, shares horizontality and verticality, past, present and future. It exudes magic: The X can be a hex. Go to the crossroads to barter and parley with the paranormal and/or converse clairvoyantly.

An X spans the floor of the performance space for *Séancers*. Poised at this crossroad, near

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1 African and Diasporic African, including African-American.

the beginning of the work, Jaamil Olawale Kosoko slowly completes a full circle around a pond of white tulle. It's a powerful, fleeting moment, but one that I remember. Who is he—a Yoruba priest?² Seeker of the coolest partner on the dance floor? Under-the-radar/over-the-top voguer? Alter ego performance artist? All of the above? Yes—a resounding “Yes”—and more. Let us call him a “latter day saint” personifying Africanist theologies in his passionate pursuit of truth through a Black lens, in a Black space.

Like Kosoko's previous works, including *Black Male Revisited* (hereafter referred to as *BMR*) and *#negrophobia*, his concern in this movement-music-visual theater discourse is our endangered Black identity which must be nurtured and nourished with a mojo strong enough to fend off the constant threat of “imperialist white supremacist capitalist patriarchy.”³

Audre Lorde. Ruby Sales. African-American women representing African-American cultures. Two approaches—one perspective. The poet-activist and the theologian-activist, both working in the tradition and spirit of making a place for a Black space that, on the American continent, has been appropriated, stolen, raped, bartered, bought and sold, desired and demeaned—but we are still here. As Junot Díaz said, “I’m a child of blackness. Blackness was not meant to survive, and we have survived. And we have thrived. And we’ve given this world more genius than we have ever received.”⁴ Díaz speaks of “radical hope as our

best weapon.”⁵ This is the territory that *Séancers* traverses. Kosoko is also holding words from *Kara Walker: Narratives of a Negress*: “Nothing can come between a man and his ego except a woman, black, with history on her side...”⁶ May I live to see the day! I delight in the majesty of those words, the nobility of the sentiment, and I long for the time when this radical hope actually comes true.

Séancers—a collective, cultural memoir; an Afrofuturist magical mystery tour in which Lorde's and Sales' work are front and center. The first words spoken are from Lorde's poem, “Power”: “I have not been able to touch the destruction within me.” With the help of these two womanist, sisters, mothers, lovers—priestesses, if you will—Kosoko tilts the balance away from the destruction embodied in his birth mother, who appeared in his two

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- 2 In Haitian Vodun, when two priests (houngans) or priestesses (mambos) meet at the beginning of a ceremony, they circle each other in mutual acknowledgment and respect.
- 3 This phrase attributed to bell hooks. See George Yancy, opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2015/12/10/bell-hooks-buddhism-the-beats-and-loving-blackness
- 4 Krista Tippet on Being with Junot Díaz, Sept. 14, 2017, onbeing.org/programs/junot-diaz-radical-hope-is-our-best-weapon-sep2017
- 5 www.newyorker.com/magazine/2016/11/21/under-president-trump-radical-hope-is-our-best-weapon
- 6 Jaamil Kosoko performance program, Philadelphia Performance Garage, July 27, 2017, quoting from *Kara Walker: Narratives of a Negress*.

previous pieces, toward a vision that offers life after whiteness—life beyond the “free, white, and 21” recording that pierces the action (a brilliant sound design by composer Jeremy Toussaint-Baptiste).

Kosoko’s performance spaces are rife with the props he uses to represent his worldview, a perspective revealed to us through his repurposing of odd throwaway items. Blowup figures, wigs, fabric, antiquated children’s toys take on haunting connotations as he deploys them in exploring “... the fatal axis where Blackness and queerness collide. Fatal because the coupling of these two identities often times equates to premature Black death.”⁷ A toy horse head becomes a stereotype of Black male hypersexuality. It appeared prominently in *BMR* and *#negrophobia* and is one of the lesser props making an appearance, but not alluded to, in *Séancers*. It’s as though this and other threads of Kosoko’s past are always with him; but the forces that drove *#negrophobia* and *BMR*—the “stoned... suicidal mama,”⁸ the murder of his brother, the words of James Baldwin—are transmogrified through the spirit power of Lorde’s poem of outrage and Sales’ homily of love. Channeled through the “unapologetically Black”⁹ bodies of Kosoko and Baptiste, Lorde’s and Sales’ combined energies equate, respectively, as the Yoruba deities Oya (goddess of the wind, powerful sorceress) and Yemoja (the divine mother).

Séancers is “unapologetically Black”—to borrow critic Wesley Morris’ marvelous phrase.¹⁰ We are ushered into a Black space that is séanced,

parametered, and nuanced by Lorde’s and Sales’ words and Kosoko’s body. Being unapologetically Black and alternative, is part of the Black millennial culture of empowerment—from Black Lives Matter to BlackGirlMagic to innumerable social media hashtags and Facebook pages (like “binders full of women and non-binary people of color in academia”; “binder full of people of color in the art world”; “Black women who meditate,” and more). Black. Being Black during the Obama years, when the deep-rooted disease of white supremacy spread its viral poison in response to a Black president. Black. Being Black in the “unapologetic” era of a new white supremacist regime in the White House, giving Kosoko’s work—and Lorde’s and Sales’ words—a renewed urgency, entitlement and agency. Black. Being Black “. . . in a country that for so long has refused to see our full selves, we can see one another. Why should anybody have to apologize for that?”¹¹ We won’t. Not any more!

7 Calvin Warren, “Onticide” quote by Jaamil Kosoko, email to Brenda Dixon Gottschild, July 26, 2017.

8 From “mama: a litany,” in Jaamil Kosoko, *Notes on an Urban Kill-Floor, Poems for Detroit*, POVISMO/PRESS, 2011, pp. 22–23. Kosoko recites this poem in *#negrophobia*.

9 See notes, below.

10 Wesley Morris, New York Times “T” online magazine, July 25, 2017.

11 *ibid.*

Lorde's poem talks about poetry, rhetoric, power, brutality, repression, and the interplay or disconnect between these contending forces. Sales offers a counter-narrative, ending on a question about white endeavor. She comes from the Black Southern activism that she describes as "...both a counter-culture and counter-narrative, all deeply rooted in the work that began in the fields during slavery."¹² Choosing these two texts encompasses a broad swath of Black intellectual, theoretical, political, theological, aesthetic endeavor. Kosoko allows Sales' words of homiletic wisdom to penetrate his being. The spirit of her message envelops him—her spirit enters and embraces him and speaks through him. He mouths her words as his body reverberates their power. He incarnates her. Yemoja has entered and is speaking through him, questioning the place and space for a theology, Black or white. The Ruby Sales monologue ultimately puts the burden of racism where it rightfully belongs—in the lap of white folks. It is a teaching moment, a watchful learning. This work is a convergence of Africanist pasts presents futures—an intersecting circularity that spins at the crossroads and invites spirit-speak, as in cosmic questions like "where is the theology?" Axé

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12 "Spiritual Activism, A Conversation with Ruby Sales," Harvard Divinity School, April 10, 2017, published April 17, 2017, <https://youtu.be/7fElaln0lj4>

A City, a Site
Hild Borchgrevink

While the word “public” refers to people, the corresponding Norwegian word *offentlig*, as does its German source, literally refers to an open space. A black box theater can contain both. It is a physically and often economically delimited space, yet also intrinsically public; a producer of publicness by gathering us, the audience, for a shared experience.

However, several performances during this year’s Oslo Internasjonale Teaterfestival (OITF) take place outside the black box. As we shall see, their contents to a certain extent bleed into each other, perhaps due to the ways in which they activate the city as context. What happens to live art and performance when they leave the black box for the city? How can a performative situation be established and negotiated outside the walls of a theater, and how do performative artistic expressions relate to processes, layers and changes inherent in the city itself?

In her article “One Place after Another: Notes on Site Specificity”¹ art historian and curator Miwon Kwon traces how the concept of a *site* for an artwork is transformed in Western thinking in the last half of the 20th century. From referring to an actual physical and spatial location in a modernist paradigm, sites of art expand throughout

A City, a Site, an Oslo Internasjonale Teaterfestival 2018 commission, was presented as part of the festival seminar program. It provided a reflection on four performances happening in public spaces: *Diorama* by Ingri Fiksdal, *Fare Thee Well* by Dries Verhoeven, *Stranger Within* by Jassem Hindi & Mia Habib and *Radio Oh So Slow* by Tormod Carlsen.

Hild Borchgrevink is a critic, writer and artist. She holds a master of fine arts degree in art and public space from Oslo National Academy of the Arts and has previously studied musicology in Oslo and performative criticism at Uniarts in Stockholm. She has worked as a concert organizer and producer in the field of contemporary music. From 2012–2017 she was editor of the online journal Scenekunst.no. Borchgrevink has been awarded a government work grant to pursue her practice as critic.

1 Miwon Kwon. “One Place after Another: Notes on Site Specificity”. *October*, Vol. 80. (Spring, 1997), pp. 85–110.

the 1960s and 70s and begin to encompass immaterial, processual, nomadic, phenomenological, social and discursive qualities, although this development is never linear. Site-oriented art is also informed by a growing range of non-artistic disciplines. This expansion is not limited to art itself but also affects the public, who are challenged to broaden their usual visual, linguistic or cognitive focus into a more phenomenological one. The location of meaning in an artwork is also on the move from being considered intrinsic to the work to being derived from its context, to the point where context itself might be considered the core.

Implicit in this development is the exodus of art from institutions. In visual arts, this institutional critique is often conceived as a performative shift and labelled theatrical – a word that becomes less useful once entering the perspective and history of the performing arts. But both in leaving the institution and in broadening the concept of site, there are significant parallels between white cubes and black boxes.

Mobile auditoria

Middelalderparken, Oslo's medieval cradle at the river mouth of the Lo valley, is the planned site of the Oslo version of director Tormod Carlsen's series of projects *Radio*. At first sight, the *Radio* performances take place in a small, mobile black box, a theatrical spaceship that in principle is able to land anywhere, apparently modernist in

its autonomous independency of context. Last autumn, Carlsen's radio shows landed on an abandoned ferry quay in Fjaler on Norway's west coast (*Radio Fjellom*, Teaterfestivalen i Fjaler) and on a more industrial quay in Bergen (*Radio B-town*, Meteor). In the latter case, it landed with its back to the ocean and its front directed towards an unspectacular street crossing, located close to the possible future site of Bergen's temporarily homeless independent theatre stage, BIT Teatergarasjen. In both these *Radio* versions, the audience entered the box to sit down on benches in a standard auditorium setup, facing what initially appears to be the traditional fourth wall of the stage. In the course of the performance, however, reality replaced representation in a fascinating way. This gesture of replacement elicits among other things a history of scenography – the perspective stage and the landscape backdrop – and challenges the physical delimitations of a theater space, revealing the black box as heavily influenced by its context.

In 2004, Black Box teater made its own spaceship leap. It left its original location in a shopping mall at Aker Brygge and moved into a refurbished chocolate factory in Rodeløkka, part of the gentrification of one of Oslo's former workers districts. The year of establishment included in the theater's new logo (Oslo 1985) involuntarily evokes a resonance in me of the commercial hubris of the 1980s and 90s that one had to pass through to enter the black doors of the theater at Aker Brygge.

By moving, Black Box teater also crossed the river that divides the center of Oslo into two parts. This division is still, not least in the minds of its citizens, a geographically, socially and economically distinct border. Although differences have gradually been ironed out in central areas of the city, contrasts still prevail. Consider the contrast within the dance field for example, between the many self-organized, independent, young hip-hop dance crews practicing in the northeastern suburbs of Groruddalen, and the large group of young dancers training in the professional educational system of the Norwegian National Ballet at its waterfront home in the opera house. At any rate, the physical move of Black Box teater from west to east enacts an important part of Oslo's geographical and social layout. On one level it also represents a dematerialization, making it necessary to understand Black Box teater not only in physical and architectural terms but also in a more immaterial way, as the line of activities that connect its first location with its second.

As a geographical site, Middelalderparken allows for gazing in many directions: back in time to the establishment of the city of Oslo around year 1000; down below the layers of soil that have been carefully removed to reveal the ruins of a medieval church; into the future towards the hectic development of the neighboring waterfront area and the large-scale institutional attraction it has set it in motion: a new opera, a new Edvard Munch museum, a new public library.

When thinking about mobile theaters and performing arts in this area, and the interaction between cities and performing arts, it is tempting to take a wider, national perspective and touch on the story of the theater ship M/S Innvik. Its last haven happened to be a quay at the waterfront facing Oslo's new opera house. Until 1987, M/S Innvik had for 20 years called at rural societies in the fjords on the west coast of Norway. It arrived complete with a small stage and auditorium, as well as professional actors and theater technicians who lived in the cabins of the boat. The idea of housing a theater in a boat was conceived by the regional theater in the county of Sogn og Fjordane, both for practical reasons and to align with the cultural policy of the period which aimed to spread high quality performing arts from the geographical center to the periphery. Coincidentally, M/S Innvik retired more or less at the same time as Black Box teater was established, one conception of theater seemingly replacing another. As the Norwegian population grew more heterogeneous, the boat came to serve a new group of citizens: From 2001 to 2010 it became the home of Nordic Black Theatre, a multicultural theater and theater school. Because of its location by the quay, M/S Innvik obtained rights to give input to the redevelopment of the waterfront area. As a result, some of the people running Nordic Black Theatre ended up advising the public art program that accompanied the waterfront refurbishment, through which a number of temporary, performative projects have been presented.

Landscapes and layers

When leaving the institution, the idea of a pure, idealist space gives way to the materiality of a landscape. Westwards across the Oslo fjord from Carlsen's *Radio Oh So Slow*, choreographer Ingrid Midgard Fiksdal has chosen the public beach Huk as the site for a version of her work *Diorama*, in which landscape becomes scenography. As Fiksdal elaborates in the presentation of the piece on her website, the word "diorama" can refer to a three-dimensional model of a landscape, often displayed in museums of natural history. The word also has a theatrical reference in the diorama theater invented by Louis Daguerre in France in 1822, a theater space in which landscape paintings are transformed through manipulated light, sound effects and live performers. Fiksdal's *Diorama* premiered in the fishing village of Brixham in England in 2017, where it took place by an outdoor pool with a view across the sea. Fiksdal's choice of the beach as site is simultaneously both specific and generic.

Fiksdal's recurrent use of multi-layered textiles that completely cover her performers' bodies, may open a paradox for a local audience familiar with Huk. During the summer, a section of the beach is reserved for naturists, which itself is some sort of performative position that makes any accidental passer-by very conscious of how ordinary clothing is also a convention. The public access to Huk is all about layers too. It is a consequence of a protected area that was established there in 1988 to preserve Oslo's geologically unique seashore

sediments. These sediments had petrified about 470 million years ago, and their preservation keeps alive an awareness of the slow-moving, geological time that surrounds us.

Shifting perspectives

The name Huk is a simplified version of the Dutch word for corner or angle. The name was allegedly projected onto the stone formations of the beach in the late 16th century, as Dutch seamen tried to sort out the landscape from their vantage point at sea without the aid of a map. At OITF in 2018, the Dutch artist Dries Verhoeven's project *Fare Thee Well!* projects its gaze towards a more urban landscape, from further afar. The project reveals how the immediacy normally implicit in vision and observation, human sight as the basis of objective knowledge and scientific evidence, is always a temporal phenomenon. The artist invites his spectators to look through telescopes directed two kilometers away, where a text is moving on the walls of a city building or some other physical surface. Passers-by can also see it, though upside down. A telescope directed towards the universe looks back in time. Verhoeven's telescopes show how distance might be a prerequisite for understanding. The written words, accompanied by melancholic music from the baroque era, encourage the viewer to say farewell to things that disappeared a long time ago or might disappear at some point in the future. How is it possible to pay attention to things that we are about to forget?

Defining strangers

In choreographer Mia Habib's *Stranger within*, co-created with Jassem Hindi, the explosion of the site becomes apparent in the project's processual character, its collaborative creation and potential multitude of materials, formats and locations. It builds on a preceding project called *We Insist*, which has been on the road since 2007, as performances, workshops and visual installations created with artists from all over the world. In the presentation of *Stranger within* on Habib's website, the creators explicitly declare themselves as double outcasts of a sort, who work "outside of institutional networks [and] conventional performance spaces" as well as "on the fringe of public spaces". An important idea in the project seems to be a reversal of the conventional hierarchy between performer and spectator. "Instead of being the hosts of a performance," the artists write, "we will be the guests of a social network, holding on to a myriad of possible material to perform with."

In the visual field of art and public space, one sign of the dematerialization that occurs when artists challenge modernist practice, is that the presence of the artist replaces the presence of the conventional art object. The risk inherent in this move is the commodification and trade of this presence. Again, this shift is less clear in the performing arts, since the artist's presence, or at least her negotiation of that presence, could be said to *be* the art object. Setting out to

challenge this presence is a bold move. To find out how this shift is actually carried out, the audience has to be present in the private apartment in Oslo's Tøyen district where *Stranger within* will take place.

Tøyen has an ambivalent connection to the site of other projects during the festival. For one thing, the original Munch museum has been located in Tøyen since 1963 but is now moving to a new landmark building near the waterfront. In exchange for depriving Tøyen of the new museum, the city council promised to strengthen economic support for the Tøyen area. Public squares have since gotten a makeover and the former post office has become a local pub. What were formerly municipal apartments have also been renovated as part of this deal, forcing some inhabitants to move. In a recent television documentary, the manager of a local football club for youngsters with mixed cultural backgrounds revealed that no economic support had come their way. Immaterial social activities still lose the fight for political attention to tangible buildings and monuments.

In this context, what does it mean for artists to proclaim themselves strangers? What does the notion of an apartment as a peripheral public space mean? Habib and Hindi label their work micro-political and micro-economical, but also state that their language is formal, not political. How can performing arts connect to the political struggles surrounding it?

Resistance or adaptation?

All of the projects mentioned above, *Radio Oh So Slow*, *Diorama*, *Fare Thee Well!* and *Stranger within* are conceived as series. They may be revisited and repeated in a potentially endless number of locations and contexts, each feeding into the content of the artwork. The different sites in a series are thus connected intertextually, rather than spatially, and are perhaps better represented by an itinerary than by a traditional map. In this way of working, the consistency of an artist's engagement with her themes or projects itself becomes a site.

Miwon Kwon discusses whether the performative is an effective way of resisting commodification of the “critical” dimension in art practices, in a time when capital and power also embrace the nomadic, temporary and precarious. To what extent do site-specific performances generate publicness, challenge an environment, challenge the performing arts as such? And to what extent are they imperatively necessary ways of organizing artistic work in order to survive as an artist in a “festivalized” art market and community? And what does it mean to live arts and performance if it is both?

Del II. / Part II.

**Av og om assosierte kunstnere.
By and about the associated artists.**

Siden 2017 har Black Box teater samarbeidet med norske og internasjonale assosierte kunstnere.

Since 2017, Black Box teater has collaborated with Norwegian and international associated artists.

- Hildur Kristinsdottir (2017 & 2019)
- Tormod Carlsen (2017–2018)
- Mårten Spångberg (2017)
- Mette Edvardsen (2018–2019)

**Indirekte målgruppetenkning –
et intervju med Hildur Kristinsdottir
og Eirik Willyson**
Venke Marie Sortland

«Vi i Klassikere for kids er jo mest opptatt av oss selv», svarer scenekunstner Hildur Kristinsdottir på spørsmålet om hvilke strategier de har anvendt i arbeidet med trilogien Faust for kids, Til fyret og Forbrytelse og straff, der kanoniserte verk fra litteraturhistorien blir til samtidsteater for barn og ungdom. Dette betyr ikke at Kristinsdottir, som står bak prosjektet med god støtte fra litteraturviter og dramatiker Eirik Willyson, avfeier målgruppetenkning som irrelevant, men heller at hun vekter kunstnerisk integritet høyere.

Jeg møtte Kristinsdottir og Willyson for å snakke om formidlingsstrategier, dannelse og idealet om deltakelse i teater for barn og unge. Kristinsdottir begynner med å fortelle at ideen om Klassikere for kids ble født omtrent samtidig med at hun selv ble mor. Egentlig var planen å jobbe med mer feministisk utagerende politisk teater:

– Jeg dokumenterte min egen graviditet for å undersøke fødselsnostalgi i Norge og sammenligne den med realitetene som afghanske kvinner i flyktningleirer føder under. Men så fikk jeg en veldig dramatisk fødsel selv, og droppet dermed prosjektet. Jeg klarte rett og slett ikke å holde den nødvendige meta-distansen. Under graviditeten måtte jeg søke vanlige jobber for å få fødselspermisjonsrettigheter, og mer eller mindre tilfeldig endte jeg opp som 100 % kontaktlærer for en sjetteklasse. Elevene på denne østkantskolen gjorde veldig inntrykk på meg – noen av dem kunne knapt lese.

Etter fødselen fikk Kristinsdottir boken som skulle danne grunnlaget for Klassikere for kids, Hva

Indirekte målgruppetenkning – et intervju med Hildur Kristinsdottir og Eirik Willyson er et intervju med de to kunstnerne bak serien *Klassikere for kids*, bestilt til høstsesongens program 2017.

Venke Marie Sortland er skapende og utøvende danseskulptør, og skribent. Hun arbeider primært med situasjons- og målgruppespesifikke prosjekter, der hun blant annet utforsker hva som skjer med kunsten hvis man innlemmer pedagogiske refleksjoner i det kunstneriske arbeidet.

sier du, Oskar? av den danske forfatteren Thomas Thurah, i gave fra en venninne. Boken presenterer tolv store litterære klassikere for barn og unge:

– På dette tidspunktet hadde jeg verken sett for meg at jeg skulle jobbe med teater for et ungt publikum eller med klassikere. Men det engasjerte meg at elevene jeg hadde vært kontaktlærer for sannsynligvis aldri kom til å lese verkene Thurah presenterer.

Vil gi publikum motstand

Klassikere for kids *springer ut av en sosialpolitisk idé om å gjøre kanoniserte verk tilgjengelig for alle barn, uavhengig av foreldrenes bokhylle. Men det å sette opp gamle tekster er ikke i seg selv viktig for Kristinsdottir:*

– I løpet av trilogien har våre kunstneriske ambisjoner stadig blitt større. Vi vil utfordre hvordan en historie kan fortelles, og vi vil at publikum skal jobbe hardt for å forstå hva som foregår på scenen.

Eirik Willyson bemerker at når det unge publikummet er bittelitt redde, aksepterer de lettere en slik motstand:

– Barn og unge lever seg veldig lett inn i teaterillusjonen. Når man er på kino vet man at filmen befinner seg på lerretet – den kommer aldri nærmere. Teateret har ikke denne begrensningen. Alt kan skje i teaterrommet.

HK: Vi får stadig høre at unger verken kan sitte stille eller konsentrere seg, men spenningen i forestillingene våre muliggjør at vi kan strekke

scenene kjempelangt. I *Forbrytelse og straff* går det nesten 45 minutter før hovedpersonen, Raskolnikov, sier et eneste ord.

Målgruppen i bakhodet

I utvalget av trilogiens verk var deres status i litteraturhistorien viktigere enn om de passet for barn og unge som målgruppe forklarer Kristinsdottir:

– Vi har heller ikke ønsket å ha målgruppen med som fokusgruppe i prosessen, jeg er redd dette kan få oss til å bli «pleasing». Vårt første møte med barna er under prøveforestillingene noen dager før premiere – da får vi sett hvordan uttrykket fungerer og om vi trenger å gjøre noen justeringer.

– Vi i *Klassikere for kids* er jo mest opptatt av oss selv, av å strekke oss som kunstnere. Vi lager forestillinger som vi selv liker. I prosjekter der materialet er basert på barn og unges erfaringer eller livsverden kan det selvfølgelig være bra å ha fokusgrupper. Men jeg synes ideen om at barn og unge er smartere enn oss som jobber profesjonelt med kunst er rar. Nationalteatret ville aldri spurt tre tilfeldige voksne de fant på Karl Johans gate om regitips.

– Jeg greier ikke helt akseptere tanken om at dere «bare» har barn og unge i bakhodet når dere jobber. Er det ikke noen metoder eller formidlingsstrategier som dere bevisst velger med tanke på målgruppen?

HK: Vi snakker mye om erfaringer fra egen barne- og ungdomstid. Samtidig prøver vi å unngå og forutsi hva målgruppen liker eller forstår.

– Språket i forestillingene er enkelt, og uttrykket er visuelt. Men hvis jeg skulle gjort det samme prosjektet for voksne kan det godt hende at teksten hadde forsvunnet helt. Lyden og musikken er forestillingenes mest komplekse lag, noe som fungerer veldig bra for målgruppen – bedre enn for mange voksne. Vi leker med en lydbasert historiefortelling der vi blant annet gir assosiasjoner til ting som ikke fins på scenen.

EW: Jeg er imponert over hvor mye ungene får med seg, i *Faust* hører de for eksempel at Gretchen dreper katten selv om det ikke er noen katt på scenen. Når vi spiller for skoleklasser blir lærerne ofte overrasket over hvor gode elevene er til å lese symbolikk og skape sammenhenger selv om forestillingen ikke har et tydelig narrativ.

– *Hva tenker dere er forskjellen mellom barn og voksnes måte å være publikummere på?*

HK: De har først og fremst ulik referansebakgrunn. For eksempel synes de fleste voksne at *Til fyret* er poetisk, trist og kompleks, og mange feller noen tårer, mens det hender at ungdommene ler og synes at forestillingen er komisk.

– Et voksent publikum tåler at man slurver litt, at skuespillerne gjør noe som bryter illusjonen eller ikke passer inn. Barna vil se oss jobbe hardt, at vi blir møkkete og slitne. Barna synes heller ikke å like at vi har en meta-tilnærming til det vi gjør på scenen. Voksne skuespillere som tøffer seg fungerer altså ikke – vi må være ærlige i det vi gjør.

– *Trenger barn og unge forkunnskaper for å se samtidig scenekunst?*

HK: Jeg synes det kan virke mot sin hensikt å lage forestillinger som målgruppen opplever som lukket eller fjernt fra deres referanseramme. Man må huske at de aldri selv velger å gå i teateret. Men jeg synes samtidig det er viktig at barn og unge får tilgang på samtidsteater. Alle teaterhus bør ha noe som er rettet mot et ungt publikum, forestillinger som barn og voksne kan se sammen.

Humanistisk dannelselse

I sin egen omtale av Klassikere for kids beskrives prosjektet som et idealistisk dannelsesprosjekt. Dette innebærer noe mer enn å tilgjengeliggjøre verkene og samtidsteateret som form – Kristinsdottir og Willyson synes nemlig også å være opptatt av en humanistisk dannelsesstenkning, der det å møte eksistensielle problemstillinger gjennom blant annet kunst er essensielt:

HK: I møte med slike spørsmål stiller barn, ungdom og voksne ganske likt. Temaer som døden, eller det å være god eller ond, kan skape fruktbare samtaler på tvers av generasjoner.

EW: Det å komme i berøring med kulturens og tenkningens historie er en essensiell del av en dannelsesprosess. *Klassikere for kids* gir en inngang til dette gjennom å vise hvordan folk har levd og tenkt før oss, og at denne livsførselen og tenkningen fremdeles virker inn på oss.

HK: I *Faust* spør barna ofte hvorfor djevelen går i hvitt. Da svarer jeg «hvilken farge skulle hun ellers gått i?» Jeg prøver å få barna til å reflektere over hvorfor de tenker som de gjør.

EW: Det er mye dannelse i det å snakke om hvordan vi skaper mening gjennom andre uttrykk enn ord og tekst.

HK: Når vi spiller for skoleklasser har vi alltid samtaler med publikum etter forestilling. Dette gjør vi for å avmystifisere noe av opplevelsen. I forbindelse med *Til fyret* utvidet vi prosjektets idehistoriske aspekt gjennom å lage en liten forfilm som gir en grunnleggende og lettfattelig introduksjon til forfatteren, Virginia Woolf, og hennes litterære virke.

EW: Forestillingene er først og fremst kunstverk i seg selv. Det vi gjør rundt, tilleggsbitene som samtale, tekst og film, er i større grad verktøy for litteraturformidling.

Deltakelse som ideal i scenekunst for barn og unge?

– *Dere snakker om å aktivere publikum, men i forhold til mange andre former for deltakende teater er ikke forestillingene deres særlig interaktive...*

EW: Forestillingene aktiverer målgruppen primært emosjonelt og intellektuelt. I andreakten av *Forbrytelse og straff* får publikum spise popcorn og spille på instrumenter, mens utøverne prøver å lure dem inn i samtaler om tematikken eller hva kunst kan være. Jeg tror ungdommene synes denne akten både er jævlig klein og ganske kul.

HK: Vi voksne glemmer hvor kleint det er å være ungdom! Første gang vi prøvde andreakten, på en skole i Sarpsborg, fikk jeg en åpenbaring. Førsteakten hadde gått veldig bra, men da vi

prøvde å få elevene opp på scenen ble de helt stive selv om vi dansa, jobba og prøvde alt vi kunne. Likevel hørte jeg ungdommene, på vei ut, si til hverandre at forestillingen var det råeste de noen gang hadde sett. Dette fikk meg til å huske hvordan jeg selv hadde det som ungdom; selv om jeg syntes det var døds Kult på ungdomsklubben sto jeg jo der helt stiv i utkanten av dansegulvet.

– Mange voksne vil at vi skal kutte andreakten, de mener den ødelegger forestillingen. Men vi vil vise ungdommene at også dette kan være teater.

– Men barn må ikke alltid aktiveres gjennom deltakelse. Jeg tror barn, i likhet med voksne, synes det er deilig å sitte i salen.

For ambisiøst for Den kulturelle skolesekken?

– Klassikere for kids *hylles av dem som jobber med scenekunst for barn og unge i Norge. Likevel turnerer ikke forestillingene nevneverdig mye i Den kulturelle skolesekken. Er Klassikere for kids for ambisiøst for Skolesekken?*

HK: Min oppfatning av DKS-mandatet er at profesjonell kunst av alle slag skal inn i skolen. Men i realiteten er det de oppsatte rammene som definerer hvilken kunst som får plass. *Klassikere for kids* har turnert en del med Østfold DKS, men der er det litteraturavdelingen som har kjøpt oss inn, ikke scenekunst.

**Six Paths into Thoughts on
Landscape and Dramaturgy**
Tormod Carlsen

This essay is an adapted and expanded version of Tormod Carlsen's presentation at the seminar "Landscape Dramaturgy", organized by BIT Teatergarasjen and the University of Bergen at Bergen Kunsthall in October 2017.

Tormod Carlsen is a director, theater artist and scholar. Originally trained in circus, he has since studied theater in, among other places, Teheran and Oslo. Landscape is an important artistic approach, and several of his projects can be characterized as long-term investigations of situations and questions that generate new works. He works in different constellations and assumes different roles in projects, institutions and productions, but always with the aim of furthering the development of performative and stage art. Carlsen is an associated artist at Black Box teater (2017–2018).

For the last ten years or so, I have been battling with the term "landscape", trying to encompass it in my art, thinking and personal life. Like so many others who employ this term, I have found great joy and fascination in it and its associative powers. Associations that have generated a lot of curiosity, creativity and meaning. Simply a fruitful way of thinking. But when people ask me what I mean by a "landscape" in regards to theater, I struggle, I do not know where to begin. It is as if the term mirrors what it tries to define. In the same way that a landscape is defined by a scope, with no particular focus point within that scope, I believe the increased use of this term in relation to theater implicitly refers to a body of thought and understandings of the term itself. I began to look for trends and consistencies in the thinking that has inspired me and my engagement with landscape. To explore the thinking the term landscape has generated in relation to theater and how this affects possible conceptions of dramaturgy and my own thinking and practice as well. I came up with six paths into thoughts on landscape and dramaturgy. This essay is an invitation into a landscape of landscape thinking and dramaturgy.

Before I start – I am aware that by developing and advocating for a certain type of theory and thinking based on my own work, I engage myself in the power game of interpretation. As this is not my intention, I have tried to keep a personal and speculative approach, mixing theory with memories and reflections. The paths I draw onto

the map are not meant to be paved roads that you must drive to understand the connection between landscape and dramaturgy. Nor do they cover the vast amount of theory this thinking draws upon or sum up the “central ones”. It is rather a personal attempt to open a terrain of multitudes, giving voice to the possibility of landscape, of thinking landscape dramaturgy.

Path 1: The view.

From landscape speculations to seeing things as landscapes

It starts in a care home for the elderly, in a small village in the western part of Norway. While attending an international boarding school I was required once a week to do what was called “community service”. This meant that I would visit Ludwig, a 96 year old man at the care home, every Monday for four hours. During those hours we would sit and look at the view together. That was how I learned the art of “landscape speculations”; to sit and watch, in this case, the fjord, for hours and hours, often in silence, or with the radio humming in the background, zooming in and out on the landscape. Not fixating any thoughts, just dwelling upon what I was seeing.

Here we need to make a detour and enter the term landscape from a different perspective. Etymologically it is said to be of Dutch origin. It consists of two parts; *land* and *-scape*. The *land* part is the easy one, it is the rocks, the soil, flora and fauna, but might also be the buildings and the

asphalted roads and so on; everything non-human. It is the *-scape* part that makes things difficult. Following the etymology, it is not connected to *scope*, as many people seem to believe. Rather it is connected to the suffix *-scape*, equivalent to the suffix *-ship* in the English language. In other words, the qualities that constitute something, the core of what is enclosed. Personally, I like to mix the meaning, of that which constitutes and the scope, because it points to a key element of landscapes: a landscape could be said to be the concrete world framed by the eye. One of the proponents of social geography, Denis Cosgrove, has suggested that it is “a way of seeing” (Cosgrove 2008:17).

Back to the track. Ludwig and I were looking out a window, hence our landscape was already framed for us. Now what this did was to open up the possibility of zooming in and out on this landscape. Looking at the trees, then the boat on the fjord, the birds, the flowerpot on the windowsill, and so on. We would speculate upon the meaning and significance of what we saw in relation to the whole, the landscape. What we called landscape speculations was a process of continuously defining and questioning our surroundings, inventing stories about what we saw and what we didn't see: How old are those trees? That mountain looks like a troll! If we could listen to all the cell phone conversations that were flying through the air, what would they be about?

Our self-invented term landscape speculation was a way of thinking upon landscapes, giving

its elements meaning. "Landscape has meaning. Rivers reflect, clouds conceal. Water and fire purify and destroy" (Witson 2008:55), declares linguist Anne Witson, pointing to how we often talk about landscapes in a language that is both metaphorical and concrete at the same time. I will add that such a metaphorical and concrete language also points to, and invites one into, the act of landscape appreciation which is an ongoing process of watching and negotiating what you are watching and why it is taking place. You speculate upon, but you also speculate upon what it does to make you speculate. It is a self-reflective way of seeing. A continuous loop between the observer and the observed.

Inspired by my meetings with Ludwig I found joy in using this "way of seeing" on other views as well. Seeing things as landscapes. And I soon recognized that this situation of looking at landscapes somehow corresponded to how I looked in the theater.

By watching, the spectator creates an 'other' space, no longer subject to the laws of the quotidian, and in this space he inscribes what he observes, perceiving it as belonging to a space where he has no place except as external observer. Without this gaze, indispensable for the emergence of theatricality and for its recognition as such, the other would share the spectator's space and remain part of his daily reality. (Feral 2002:105)

In her attempt to define theatricality, the French-Canadian theater scholar Josette Feral approaches the theater and describes the stage in a similar way to how I see a landscape. A space looked upon, but also framed by the onlooker, with the awareness of being positioned and as a way of defining one's own position.

Now, this quality is not exclusive to landscape, theater and theatricality. By naming something we position ourselves in relation to it. This is the geography of language. I grew up with the wounds that defining the "other" as different, unique, exotic, evil, and so on, has created in our communities. And with the critique of it. As well as with the understanding that doing so in our language and formation of identity is unavoidable. As for many kids growing up in the 1990s, this was a lose-lose situation in which you either simplified and misrepresented the other or lost your own identity. This dilemma shaped my political understanding of the world. And to me, seeing things and people as landscapes opened up a more curious and less defined way of approaching the world. Seeing something as a landscape provided a focus; not on what things are in themselves, but what they are in relation to a whole and the awareness that this whole was created by me. It provided a freedom that was also linked to responsibility.

As an activity, looking at landscapes is a dialogic relation between the abstract subject (me) and my surroundings. It is a process of connecting with the land, its history and people by speculating

upon the questions it raises. Looking upon something as a landscape implies a similar movement and curiosity towards the “other”, and the questions they generate within me. When “landscape” is applied in dance and theater today, it is often in this metaphorical way, seeing things as landscapes. My first path leads to an understanding of what a landscape dramaturgy has meant to me; namely, an attentiveness to the questions posed to me by whatever I am looking upon. Rather than suggesting a methodology it is a term that suggests an attitude and way of seeing.

Path 2: From landscapes of drama to the power of surroundings

It starts at school. As a theater directing student at Oslo National Academy of the Arts I found myself in a situation where I had to engage in classical drama analysis. The trick was of course to reveal the motivations and conflicts between the characters in the play. I found this extremely difficult. “What would you do in this situation?” Or “what would you feel in this situation?” These were the questions we were taught to ask. To me they only triggered the answer, “it depends on where I am!” I felt like a devil’s advocate, but it seemed so banal, of course we think and feel differently depending on where we are.

What saved me in these classes was an old essay I found enclosed in a secondhand book. It was called “EF’s Visit to a Small Planet” (Fuchs 2004). In this essay, professor at Yale School of

Drama Elinor Fuchs encourages her students to search for “the world of the play” (Fuchs 2004:6). She asks one to consider the function and powers of the concrete, invisible and imagined landscapes within a play. Following Fuchs’ encouragement, I started an exploration of the role of landscapes within theatrical fiction. This might be banal, but try to imagine Arthur Miller’s *Death of a Salesman* without the characters’ conflicting internal images of the American highway. Or *Hamlet* without a Norway? Where would Fortinbras and new politics come from? Or Ibsen’s *The Lady from the Sea*; without a sea to dream about, what would this play be about? Even though it is clear that the above-mentioned landscapes play important dramaturgical roles in these plays, it can be difficult to point to exactly how they do so (and that might be why they so often are overlooked). The power of these landscapes is not so much the impact any concrete surrounding would have on behavior; cold weather makes one freeze and so on. The power exuded by these landscapes lies in the way they constitute the mythological cosmos of possible dreams and imagery, and thus impact the world view of the characters in the plays. What I came to call the “life-form”, or the state of the place. In other words, the energy and the possible ways of thinking, organizing and living within that landscape.

Does it sound strange? Deterministic? To me, it is quite concrete and not at all opposed to a free will. Having moved a lot through different landscapes, cultures and societies, it is clear to

me that the energy and atmosphere of places and communities, their history and self-image, their state, makes me more open to certain types of behavior and thinking. It does not settle on any one thing but continues to be influenced. I believe one of the powers of landscape to be its ability to put me in a particular state. I think and prioritize differently in the endlessly white landscapes of Northern Greenland than when facing the cityscape of Tokyo from a café in Shinjuku.

But let's return to school. Actively searching for what I came to call life-forms, play analysis became a thrill, opening up a completely new way of approaching worlds of fiction. But more importantly with respect to dramaturgy, it made me question my own engagement with non-fictional space. In particular my engagement with the concrete landscape of the black box stage. If it is so that a space and a landscape contain a vague body of thought and mythology that affects its internal behaviors and thinking, thus creating a state or a life-form, then creating new potential life-forms and thoughts in the theater could be achieved by changing, recreating or simply leaving the black box. This is the basis of a trilogy of one-man theaters I have developed together with scenographer Heidi Dalene called *In the End We Are All Alone*. In this project I basically started by thinking upon the architecture of the space to see what state, thoughts and themes it opened up. What I learned at school was that I had to consider the resonance between what I had to say and the life-form of the space I was working in.

These thoughts reflect what is often referred to as site-specific art. However, in my practice this does not so much make me a "site-specific artist" as an artist working with landscapes and life-forms as a tool to analyze space. I have no political agenda beyond stating that there is a relationship between the landscape surrounding the staged event and the thinking and emotions the performance provokes. So, another way to think about a landscape dramaturgy would be how the vague conception of the state or life-form of the theatrical space is experienced, engaged and used as a dramaturgical tool.

Path 3: From poetry to maps

At the end of the first path I wrote about the territorial aspects of language. That words position themselves in a territory. That is where this path starts. It is a lover's path. It starts with my love for poetry, how poets use words to create and open landscapes of meaning that otherwise would be invisible to me. How poetry can be considered as maps to unknown landscapes. For many years Gertrude Stein was one of my favorites. It is well-known that Gertrude Stein also wrote some plays and described them as "landscape plays". She theorized around this in the introduction to *Last Operas and Plays* (Stein 1995). It is a text often referred to when the term "landscape dramaturgy" is applied, making her the grandmother of these approaches to theater. For sure, this is also a text that has informed and inspired my thinking. But maybe not in a straightforward way...

In her introductory essay to *Last Plays and Operas*, Gertrude Stein links her work with a formalist tradition in which structural reconfigurations are used in response to what she considers an old-fashioned focus on the narrative structure of drama. By seeing the text as a landscape, she proposes a new type of drama. A drama in which landscape is the structure. Sentences are put together as if they were a landscape. This is a focus and ideal followed up and developed in much modern and postmodern drama. "Writing has nothing to do with meaning. It has to do with landsurveying (sic) and cartography, including the mapping of countries yet to come." (Deleuze 2001:105) So claims Gilles Deleuze, opening up the whole question of texts as landscapes. However, this is a highway for others to explore. As for me, on this path, I will return to my personal engagement with Stein's plays. Because the more I read of Stein, the more I question her own description of her work as mere formalist experiments. In their humoristic absurdity and landscape form, what can be recognized in Stein's poetry is a strange kind of realism. Her landscapes are, despite her playful juggling with language, quite concrete. They are not only texts as landscape, but representations of real places and views, and they propose a landscape of the stage event. Once I had the idea that we ought to call them "performance maps" rather than plays. And since I have already confessed my somewhat archaic love of poetry, I might as well confess my love of maps. To follow these formalist approaches

to landscapes in contemplating the idea of a landscape dramaturgy, without acknowledging the art of cartography and its role in the arts, would be a serious slip.

But to keep it personal; in looking at my diaries it is striking how playing around with possible ways of representing structures and patterns in my performances, finding ways of mapping the landscape of my work, is a key tool. I am by no means alone in doing this. The post-it wall has become a cliché image of the process in many artistic practices. Quite like landscape speculations, it is a way of joining together, looking for meaning, looking for the whole and its details, trying to make a map of what I am about to make. And trying to make that map correspond to both an inner, felt landscape and the life-form of the space of the work. My maps seldom consist of text only, they often include images, sound files, sometimes also objects and videos. This way of working, making subjective maps of elements, layers and so on in my art, naturally affects the structuring of elements in time, its dramaturgy. Composition as poetry or maps somehow implies that one sees the structure of the stage and the staged event as a landscape.

However, the problem of defining this process as landscape dramaturgy arises within the works themselves. The map does not necessarily match the terrain. Gertrude Stein's dramas could be read as beautiful poetry. So even though working like this could lead to a work of art that is seen or experienced as a landscape, it does not necessarily

imply any recognizable or coherent set of structures or aesthetics. To some extent, all material, even a classic drama, can be treated and worked with in this manner as a landscape. This implies that a landscape dramaturgy defines a process rather than a result. A fixed idea of what parts and structures constitute the landscape. As demonstrated by the first path, this would imply a move away from the landscape as personally framed, to landscape as something culturally framed. A thought I will keep with me on the following paths.

Path 4: Geo-cultural and geo-political landscapes

That landscape is also culturally framed becomes apparent when one considers how we talk about specific landscapes. I myself have for many years been fascinated by Arctic landscapes. So, I will start down this path with one of the things I have learned in the North. But, first, a question: Do you already now have an image of what I am talking about when I say Arctic landscapes? Is it an image of a white, vast, desolated landscape?

Well, this is also the Arctic, but depending on the definition used, the Arctic occupies about one-sixth of the world's surface. It is Northern Norway, Northern Siberia, Alaska, Northern Canada, Greenland and of course the Arctic ice cap – huge territories and extremely varied, in their geology, flora and fauna, aesthetically, climatically, economically, politically and so on. In fact, I would say that there are more things separating them than keeping

these areas together. Still, we often talk about them and understand them as one landscape, everything within one frame.

The aforementioned Denis Cosgrove points to how a landscape description, like the Arctic, “culturally is held together by its symbolic meaning” (Cosgrove 2008:31). In other words, when I talk about the Arctic you get an image in your head, because we share a geographical understanding of what this place is about and represents. It is a symbolic meaning that has implications beyond the territory it describes. “Arctic winds howl in New York,” a friend told me the other day. A more common symbolic meaning would be a periphery landscape far north, struggling with a sparse population, a harsh climate, hungry polar bears and melting icebergs. Starting like this, the emotional and political implications of how and what we consider to be a certain landscape become apparent. We talk about landscapes as characteristics of nations and political territories. And we use landscapes to claim a belonging. The characteristics of landscapes unify (and exclude) groups through the symbolic and emotional meaning projected onto them – this is the field of cultural and political geography.

This path leads me to questions about how these geo-cultural perspectives are engaged within dance and theater. In 2016, together with Ingeleiv Berstad, Kristin Ryg Helgebostad and Eivind Seljeseth, I made *Lulleli for Fruholmen fyr*. It was a “one-night-only” event at the northernmost lighthouse in the world. One of the core ideas of this

event was simply to interfere in a center-periphery thinking through a gigantic event and make this “remote” place the center of the new possibilities. This is only one example. National and regional institutions for performance, as “state” operas and “national” theaters are other examples of how theater and art is used to constitute geographical notions and a sense of belonging (or exclusion). We could, like professor Knut Ove Arntzen, talk about how certain theater cultures could be said to be connected to certain areas, or ask questions about how such perspectives are employed, represented and used as dramaturgical means.

Path 5: From surface to history

“I know this because I have been there.” It is by no means a critical argument valid in any discussion. At the same time, it is true when it comes to landscapes. Consider a landscape you know, maybe the place you grew up or your hometown. Now if you tried to explain this to me, would I then know it like you do? Probably not. You know these places because you have invested in them, spent time in them, given them meaning, created them. One’s knowledge of a landscape is inseparable from one’s history within it.

Lately I have been concerned with the power of remembering landscapes. The intellectual approach to this would probably start with Jewish professor Simon Schama. But on this path, I will continue in Greenland. Working in this environment, post-colonial wounds, nationalism and the

Greenlandic fight for independence have challenged my own understanding of landscapes and made me move beyond a post-modern conception of space as surface. Many modern and postmodern thinkers conceive of landscape as surface. They talk about geography, territory, topology and so on – a place to look upon, move about and map. In stage art such conceptions of space are of course connected to the role of the director and choreographer as creators and composers of movement on a floor – the outside eye with the power to see the whole “landscape of the show”. As an artist and kid of postmodernism, my initial understanding of landscape was a similar one. Greenland taught me that this is not the case.

A landscape has meaning, especially when it is lost.

To understand this, let me return to the initial argument of this path: “I know this because I have been there.” Framing a landscape is deeply connected to the work and investment of understanding and decoding a place. Framing a landscape is a way of connecting oneself to the place. Losing that frame, in case of Greenland, through the eagerness of outsiders to frame and understand the country from their perspectives, is experienced as a loss. My initial understanding, a bit simplified, that Greenland was just another place, was challenged. That is how I started to read Schama and consider the emotional powers of landscapes.

In *Landscape and Memory* (1995), Schama concerns himself with the role of nature and its effect on human psychology. He concerns himself

with how every landscape connects to mythological ideas of self. As Cosgrove he sees it as a work of the mind, but more importantly, as culturally-made depositories of the memories and obsessions of the people who gaze upon it. "Every landscape reflects an inner landscape," he says (Schama 1995:21). Through his studies of art, he is interested in how different landscapes are connected to emotions. His example of how Nazi Germany romanticized the woods, as a place for wild animals, as historically ancient, where rapes and murder had taken place, connects to identification with a place where only true heroes could survive. This serves as one example of how landscapes act as human sentiments.

In terms of dramaturgy, the implications are of course how such considerations could lead to questioning how they come into play as geo-cultural and geo-political aspects of a performance. However, my concern on this path is rather how concrete landscapes connect to nostalgia and connect us to a past. How landscapes, and our engagement with them, not only position us geographically as far away from or close to, but position us in time, as part of a timeline. "How much time have you spent in that landscape?" becomes not only a valid, but a necessary question to ask. A dramaturgy that engage itself with the landscape triggers questions of history.

Theater and art events can be used to create a similar attachment to space and history. You know Black Box teater because you have been there. It

connects you not only to the space, but the time you were there. Your descriptions of this space position you in relation to the history of this space and the amount of time you have invested in this space. Correspondingly, we can consider how a performance itself uses time as landscape and encourages a "landscape way of seeing", how it invites a continuous self-reflective gaze to connect you to the place as a historical memory. How it engages a gaze that does not only bring meaning to the performance, but also creates an attachment between the time invested and historical significance.

Path 6: From a notion of problems to ecology

"The Problems are in the Atmospheres Today". This was the heading I initially gave myself for my presentation on this topic. And this is where my last path starts. It is the shortest. But I promise that it is also the most beautiful.

"Wow, all I have to say is 'wow!'" I once heard a German tourist utter when facing the view of the North Cape in Northern Norway. This lack of words but sense of meaning is often connected to landscape experience. I believe that the re-occurring use of landscape in regards to theater, and the focus on defining and understanding a landscape dramaturgy among many practitioners today, reflects a similar need to say something when faced with a world where there seems to be no point in saying anything at all. A wider notion in society that

we are dealing with problems that are too complex, too encompassing, too confusing to be dealt with verbally or artistically. We sense that there are problems in the atmosphere, in political currents, in oceans of misery, in the climate in which we live. The drama out there seems bigger, more important than the struggles of any singular human being. It reflects a search for a singularity, not around a self, but around something bigger. At the same time, we know and understand the dangers any tradition of self-effacement has had in history. Concrete and metaphorical usage of landscape in regards to dramaturgy could be understood as a search for a way of acknowledging and giving focus to the needs and struggles of our surroundings, without writing ourselves out of the picture. As attempts to live within a climate crisis. You may call it a search for a different way of perceiving the world, where that which is silent is given a voice, where that which is “just there” and taken for granted is acknowledged, where that which is potentially without meaning is accepted. A search for a greater ecology.

It might seem strange that I haven't mentioned this before. I guess that was on purpose. As much as simply connecting a landscape dramaturgy to a set of structural means, I find it just as problematic to simply connect it to an environmental concern related to the times in which we live. Any landscape refuses to be simply one thing, until you frame it. Engagement with landscape and its implications in theater and art reflects, in

my opinion, more than just one frame. It reflects an interdisciplinary search for artistic tools where art connects and engages with the complexity of our times, not with one political focus, but as a multitude of focuses and needs. And it shares the will to look outwards and consider our surroundings and our relations to them. My last assertion on a landscape dramaturgy is that, in its greatest potential, it implies a way of being in and caring for our surroundings, an attempt to open up new experiences of the whole. Artistic experiences are needed to face the problems we are facing today.

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Friendly Disruptions.

Tormod Carlsen's *In The End We Are All Alone*

Melanie Fieldseth

Friendly Disruptions. Tormod Carlsen's "In The End We Are All Alone" was first published in the collection of texts to accompany the presentation of Tormod Carlsen's installation *O-The Healing Lump* at Oslo Internasjonale Teaterfestival 2017.

Melanie Fieldseth has a background in theatre studies and is currently working as a writer and dramaturge. She has previously held the position of performing arts adviser at Arts Council Norway, where she also worked in the area of research and development. She has been a critic for the newspaper Bergens Tidende and the journal Norsk Shakespearetidsskrift, as well as co-editor of the journal 3t. Fieldseth was dramaturge at Black Box teater June 2016–June 2018.

Walking down the sloping approach to the cultural center USF Verftet on the Nordnes peninsula in Bergen, a city on the western coast of Norway, I am often struck by how the sea suddenly comes into view. On a clear day you can take in the cultural center's outdoor café and the neighboring apartment complex, but it's the water of the Puddefjord, Damsgård Mountain across the fjord and the untidy rows of houses and buildings dotting the landscape that catch the eye. Maybe you get a glimpse of the island of Askøy as you continue to walk along the curving contour of the waterfront. Nordnes is fortunate to have such lovely natural surroundings. The actual sea makes for a much more pleasant vista than the sea of concrete and asphalt that fills the open space between the street, USF Verftet and the apartment buildings, even on foggy, rainy, windy days. It's a hard, functional space that facilitates transit, but not much else. When a new construction unexpectedly turns up, disturbing the usual view of natural scenery and distant neighborhoods, I think most people familiar with the area would take notice. I know I did, when I happened upon the oddly angled, house-like construction placed near the outdoor café, only a few meters from the sea. A sign attached to the structure proclaims "A Strange Kind of Love". It signals to me that I haven't come across an ordinary house or outbuilding, but a construction that seems to beckon me, engage me and offer me...something. What is this strange kind of love?

A man and a woman greet me as I approach the mysterious construction. Perhaps I would like to make an appointment to come inside? There is one available immediately, no waiting. Without so much as walking around the building or examining the exterior in any detail, I sign up. They give me a few basic instructions. More will be revealed once I am inside. I enter. The interior is surprising. It too is angular, like the exterior. The shape and form of the space provides integrated seating for the visitor. There are doors and stairs and levels and passage-ways. Where they might lead isn't clear. A touch of neon and a glitteringly gold, fringed curtain increase my curiosity. I have a strange sensation that I am being watched.

With love or malice?

The possibility of being subject to surveillance comes into sharper focus as I enter what seems to be a windowed space overlooking the sea. Here I am invited to sit and contemplate the natural and manufactured scenery before me. Or am I doing more than that? People pass by on their way to and from the café or as they stroll along the waterfront. Maybe they cast a glance at the construction I am now occupying as they walk along. If they look up, can they see me? Do they think I am deliberately watching them, looking down on them? Am I observing them or am I surveying the sea and landscape? Does it make a difference?

I have now completed my journey through the space and am ready to leave. On exiting I am once again greeted by the hosts. They present me

with a photocopy of an image that was taken of me while inside the construction. The angle is strange, the image is distorted, but it is clearly a picture of me. Placed under surveillance and caught in the act of looking.

Once outside I finally scrutinize the exterior. A sort of watchtower on the upper level, the windowed room facing the sea with a seat tailor-made for taking in the view, there they are, and there I was, visible to all who pass by if they care to look. On the wall facing the sea there is a sign discreetly posted. "This house is under surveillance". Surveillance as an act of love? A strange kind of love indeed.

A Strange Kind of Love is the first in a series of small, mobile, one-person theaters initiated and created by Tormod Carlsen, together with scenographer Heidi Dalene, called *In The End We Are All Alone*. The second installment in the series, *O – The Healing Lump*, has been turning up in new locations since 2016. The theater installations are designed, both architecturally and dramaturgically, to intervene in public space and each individual's navigation and experience of this space. Architectonic principles are an important part of the artistic process and determining what type of construction to create. Out of the architectural choices comes a theme – a collective problem or challenge that can be addressed or explored through sensorial means in which the experience of the spectator, the temporary solo occupant of

the mobile theater, is central to the conception of the work. This creates a close relationship between exterior and interior on multiple levels: between the surrounding landscape and the construction, between the architecture and its interior, between the totality of the physical construction and the visual, aural or textual means employed to create and generate an aesthetic re-telling of the collective issue. The relationship between exterior and interior is not static but rather the result of an ongoing negotiation that is activated in part by the intentions of the artists, but even more so by the experience of the spectator-visitor-inhabitant-human being entering the construction.

Landscape and context are key interests that underlie Tormod Carlsen's expanding body of artistic endeavors. They are vital to *In The End We Are All Alone*. But Carlsen also seems to be guided by a keen understanding of theater history and how both cultural and artistic conventions and traditions of the past can be re-invigorated in the present. By allowing us to experience contemporary problems and challenges from new-old perspectives, Carlsen's artistic interventions have the potential to disrupt complacency in art as well as life.

**Sputnik *Natten* (or: On Namelessness,
but not in English)**

Ana Vujanović

Sputnik Natten (or: On Namelessness, but not in English) was first published in the collection of texts to accompany the presentation of Mårten Spångberg's piece *Digital Technology* at Oslo Internasjonale Teaterfestival 2017. Spångberg was an associated artist at Black Box teater in 2017.

Ana Vujanović is a researcher, writer, dramaturge and lecturer, focused on bringing together critical theory and contemporary art. She holds Ph.D. in Humanities, Theatre Studies. She has lectured at various universities and educational programs throughout Europe. Since 2016 she is a team member and mentor of fourth year students at School for New Dance Development in Amsterdam. She publishes regularly in journals and collections (*TkH, Maska, Frakcija, Teatron, Performance Research, TDR* and others) and is author of four books. She collaborates with artists such as Marta Popivoda, Eszter Salamon, Christine de Smedt, Dragana Bulut etc. Currently she researches on transindividuality and landscape dramaturgy, edits the collection *Live Gathering: Performance and Politics* with L. A. Piazza, and works on the documentary *Freedom Landscapes*, directed by M. Popivoda.

At a public talk organised within the symposium "(re-)combining the in-between", which took place last summer (2016) in Munich, Walter Heun asked me and several other discussants about the performances we found especially appealing. After a hesitation I said that what excites me most is when a performance attracts me even if I don't understand it completely, when there is something intriguing, something that affects me strongly but I don't know how to name it. And voilà: only a few days later I attended Mårten Spångberg's *Natten* at ImpulsTanz festival in Vienna. It is indeed one of the most intriguing artistic experiences I've had in many years, at the same time fascinating and obscure, familiar and strange, enjoyable and hard to describe. After I had a few talks with Spångberg in which I tried to find words to explain my excitement about the piece, mostly in vain – the same struggle that I had with colleagues who disliked it – he proposed to me to write about *Natten*, which I already wanted to do myself, if only I knew how.

And here I am.

After some time spent in digesting what I had seen I realised that I didn't have a space in my head in which I could situate *Natten*. I can name it a theoretical-fiction performance and recognise some traces of Caravaggio's tenebrism, Adorno's negative dialectic (maybe), Deleuze, Merce Cunningham, Trisha Brown, Agamben, John Carpenter's *The Thing* (suspiciously), Rancière, Negarestani, and Butler's uninhabitable zones (too

complicated), and if I was to write an academic essay or a Ph.D. I would certainly rely on these references. But since I don't have to respond to those sorts of demands I prefer acknowledging that these traces are rather well-known shortcuts that don't help me much in thinking of *Natten* as *Natten*. Ok, that can be a problem. But I took it in a sporty way. And now I will try to perform the opposite manoeuvre: instead of trying to explain the performance by the conceptual platforms I have in my head, I will try to 'extend my head', to open my perception and discourse, so that a new space for *Natten* can emerge from the very process of speculating, remembering, analysing, and trying to speak about it. It may be that *our appreciation of art begins necessarily with the forgetting of art*. Already for that, I appreciate *Natten* very much – for its unpretentious call to open up for a new experience, and travel towards the uncertain potentiality of my capability to think and talk about art.

To outline some material ground for that journey I would remark that *Natten* ('The Night' in Swedish) is a seven hour-long choreography, taking place during the night time, with nine dancers, who spend almost all that time on the stage, walking, sometimes sitting on the floor and checking their notes or just taking a rest, standing still, singing, and dancing in different group formations, rarely in solos. The atmosphere is dark and somewhat mysterious. However, it is not created as a fiction with highly professional theatre equipment, which hides its operating mechanism. It is made manually

and we see Mårten Spångberg adjusting the video image, a fog machine working, or dancers changing clothes on stage. Yet, the mysterious ambience is there. Apart from having fog in some moments, the lights are in principle strongly dimmed; sometimes they almost fade out and it is only computer or smartphone screens that are left flickering, which drabs all the colours so that the performance is almost black and white. Much more black than white, though. Dark grey is its main colour. In addition, there are some objects and object arrangements around: vases with bouquets of red roses, wooden sticks forming a tripod-like shape, shiny curtains or their tatters hanging from the sealing... Their purpose is unknown. A great variety of music is played throughout the piece, from contemporary experimental music (Greg Heines, Keiji Haino, Machinefabriek) to post-rock and punk (Joy Division, Tortoise) to R&B (Jhene Aiku, Prince, Justin Timberlake) and hip-hop (Kendrick Lamar, Future, Drake). Although disparate in many ways, most of the tunes are slow, sometimes reduced to an instrumental or additionally slowed down, and they evoke sadness and nostalgia. Dance movements are also performed slowly, with released muscle tension and a relatively small spatial spread. There are no ecstatic bodies, big jumps, strong accents or anything that usually attracts our gaze. I see that these hardly visible creatures have a thin layer of artificiality or an emptied representation added to their pedestrian dancing bodies, but I don't know what they represent. Their dance in

some moments looks like a historical quotation but most of the time I find it just abstract and dreamy. Due to the simultaneous slow-motion and effortless precision, it looks like the dancers materially and with gentle care create dance where a ghost-like creature remains in the space after the dancers move away to another spot. There is something we can identify as sequences and scenes of the performance, but since everything is so slow and long, and the dramaturgy is spiral and wavy rather than linear, the temporality of *Natten* dissolves its own structure before our eyes and emerges as an indivisible, slowly rolling event. *A () hole.*

The performance takes place in a gallery space (Hofstallung at mumok), with the audience sitting around but without physical participation in the piece. All the time there is the fourth wall between us, the performance and audience, and the performers never acknowledge our presence. In a way, the piece is arrogant: for all seven hours it doesn't try to entertain us nor communicate whatsoever. But I must be honest: there is no arrogance in the piece. It is gentle and subtle, and at worst indifferent to us, the audience. That indifference may indeed be the worst because it vibrates with a tone of self-sufficiency. It is as if the performance says: I exist and you may as well not be here... I don't need you to justify my existence. I just invite you to travel with me. If you want. The communication that circulates in the room is loose, pretty open, and in fact everyone can find her place. If only she wants to.

It was interesting to be a member of that audience, almost left alone with each other – together and alone, together with the piece and alone – and to observe us at the same time. There was one moment which was organised differently. It was 'a time to sleep', when the dancers were sitting on the floor and singing repetitively a very slow and gentle kind of folk song (Ásgeir's "Going Home", slowed down), which sounded like a lullaby. Most of us really fell asleep, and it was the only collective moment, the moment when the audience behaved as a group. That collectivity was, however, not an elaborated conceptual or ideological proposition. It was a physical, bodily practice – sleeping; not together, next to each other. Otherwise, the visitors and spectators organised their time and space individually. One synchronic overview went like this: a man sitting next to me leaned against the wall, let his smartphone rest on his lap, and took a nap. Two others, further on his left, were sitting in the same position while staring at the stage. A young woman on my right was reading the book *Natten*, which accompanies the performance. How can she read in the dark? I wondered. Can she? A post/former-hippie, middle-age couple in front of me brought some beer and lay on the floor in the spooning position. They were hot. I thought: in this anonymity of the audience, at 1 a.m., freed from expectations, and feeling cool for attending such a contemporary artistic event where nothing was forbidden, they would soon have sex.

Some people later said that they “didn’t get much from the performance.” I tried to understand that impression, since I got this huge burden which obsesses me and about which I don’t even know how to speak without shattering it. One explanation that came to my mind is that you in fact got what you gave. If you were mostly busy with checking Facebook – and nobody on the stage prevented you from doing that – of course you didn’t get a lot from the performance. You are not Napoleon, in mythology known for his ability to hold his focus on four things at the same time. So, this might be the state of affairs: you yourself didn’t pay attention to what was happening on the stage, and there was *something* always happening there, and as a consequence you simply didn’t get that ‘thing’. This is a far-reaching game proposed by *Natten*, this invitation to give your attention to something that doesn’t require it, and then go home with ‘something’ that filled your attention, or with ‘no-thing’, or with ‘not-many-things’ between these extremes. A marginal thought is that it also probes our contemporary selves where human biological evolution doesn’t follow new life forms and practices, and a multi-tasking doer, the hero of our time, actually does not perform all these tasks with the same efficacy (and passion!) as she would with one task only.

I also didn’t follow the performance with my eyes wide open all the time. For a while I would be curious to follow a dancer leaving the group and going to his ‘station’ on the stage, where he would take a sip of water and read from a notebook. I would

then lose interest and look around. Then I would get back and try to predict how the new dance sequence would develop. I vaguely remembered that formation, with three of them dancing together and one alone, far from the group. Very often I would follow one particular performer (Hana Lee Erdman), whose precision and grace I adored. I tried to understand why I was always able to recognise her in that half-dark, and I caught my thought: although all the performers were well concentrated and there was almost no difference in their performing mode, that one performer embodied the very thought of the piece. But what was the thought of *Natten*? ... I would observe Hana Lee Erdman again: she in fact dances as if she leaves the traces of former movements visible like long-exposed photographs. Then I would briefly comment on that to my girlfriend sitting next to me. She would add another comment and we would start chatting on some unrelated topic. Then I would go back to the video, where the image of fog was still lingering over the screen. Or once I just closed my eyes and enjoyed listening to Prince’s “Purple Rain”...

Attending *Natten* was similar to travelling by the night train, in a compartment with a stranger. Travelling the whole night... to Istanbul, let’s say. And during the travel, my co-traveller would sometimes address me. Sometimes, I would reply. In some moments we would talk. Then, since we don’t have much to share, the conversation would fade out... And he would take a nap. I would observe him. I would notice rapid movements of his eyes,

and start speculating on his life, his history, his dreams... Gradually, he would become less strange to me. Some of his remarks are trivial, but others resonate with me. He would then go to the toilet. And when he would get back after 10 minutes or even longer, I would share with him something that I don't share with many people. A memory from my childhood. Maybe because he doesn't seem particularly curious about it. Time is passing... And we are still there, tied by the space and time spent together. For a moment I would feel aroused. ...As the night is rolling and the time passing is growing bigger and we stop dividing it, he would become more than an accidental anonymous fellow-traveller to me, a kind of "sputnik", with the connotation of Slavic languages given to that word. *Sputnik (sputnjik or saputnik)*, in Russian, Polish, or Serbo-Croatian adds something to the fellow with whom I travel. (You can call it a (false) promise, but it can well be ontologically new.) She or he is a companion, and could even be a life companion, a life partner, the one who travels with you through life. Travelling together with a sputnik erodes the borders between you and her as autonomous and self-indulgent individuals, not in terms of fusing you in one harmonious being, but in terms of bringing about the life as the third entity in your journey. The entity around which you become sputniks to each other. And about which you start to take care, together. It is really not far from how *Natten*, with its dimmed lights, slow-moving performers, dream-like set design and music, gradually brings about

the experience of dance as a 'thing' between the stage and the audience. To travel with us through that long night, and invite us to take care of it. *Like a dust-covered box, you vaguely remember you exhumed in the night from under your bed.* It is speculatively possible that the dance would stay there even if we were not present, that *dance exists without us*. But ontologically speaking, *Natten* exists in the journey only to the extent someone takes care of that experience of dance. That is why if everyone would leave, no-thing would remain. In that way, *Natten*, without saying a word, underlines the sociability that characterises every performance, even when the others, the sputniks are not empirically present. It is what allows me to speak about producing new publics and a new 'publicness' by this performance, which Spångberg himself mentioned in an interview, though without elaborating on what he meant. Maybe what he intuitively and where our thoughts intersect is that a new public arises when a new thing is brought into the world, and, around that thing, when people start taking care of it, together.

The spiral dramaturgy of the piece, which I mentioned earlier, manifests in the composition that progresses somewhere, then goes back to an earlier point, and from that point continues in a new direction. These points – a dance material (Birgit Åkesson's solos), a tune (Samuel Barber's "Te deum"), or a group formation (two trios) – although changed, mixed, and remixed when they reappear, pop up as what we know, like loose and

brief anchors for our perception, but only to fail us in the next moment by not continuing in the way we expect. And we do expect a continuation in a certain direction on the ground of what was previously seen emerging from that point. Namely, we are looking for patterns which can organise and systematise our experience. But it doesn't happen, and *Natten* seems to revisit and erase its traces all the time. The eponymous book is composed in the same way and makes this dramaturgy even more obvious. The recurrent points are for instance the line "This story is told", the dream motif, places like the city and the street, the colour grey, the figure of the dead sister, the questions of death and time, etc. By going back and forth, and from the changed back to a new forth, at one point the book stops being exciting or 'dramatic', so to speak. When it, by that gesture, leaves the frame of the horror genre, we realise that it won't bring us very far... and, if we accept the game, we let the book bring us where it can, or where it wants. This dramaturgy resembles the process of having obsessive thoughts to which we get back, but which trigger us to do different things in response each time. That is why it doesn't seem sufficient to me to say that the dramaturgy of Spångberg's recent works forms a sort of landscape. To an extent it does, but every piece has its specificities. And if *La Substance, but in English* and especially *Internet* were mostly composed like landscapes, with no perspective as a spatiotemporal location of one subject (of creation or observation), *Natten's*

composition is rather like a spiral and only its set design engages the principles of landscape in a strict sense. How I see it, that dramaturgy is neither like a concentric circle nor about any kind of hermeneutics. The spiral dramaturgy of *Natten* resembles the messy squiggle of a spring that curves and swirls throughout a sheet of paper, all the time losing and finding itself again.

In the moments of anchoring (finding itself again), there is something like experience formation on the verge of language. Something appears over there – I don't know exactly what it is (or what it represents) – and I face it, disarmed. It hits me. The first time it occurs, it is an unknown thing to me, and when it passes I feel relieved: It was not important and it passed, I don't need to think further about it. But then, it comes back, and hits me again. When it hits me again, it alerts me, it calls me to find a name for it, to understand it, to respond, and I know I must react because it stays. It is, in my view at least, not the first hit which is the event, as Mårten Spångberg suggested in an interview I made with him. For me, *Natten* is not that much an event of dance as it is about losing and finding the experience of dance again and again. The first hit comes in a way from the future. We don't have a name for it and tend to dismiss it. The composition of the piece itself allows us to forget that hit. "What was that? I don't know. Ok, let's move further." That is what I did. In a way, I forgive the first hit. What I cannot forgive is that it comes again and starts rebounding. Then it stays

with me, like the train-travel or the life between me and my sputnik(s), and I face the limits of my language in the eye contact with the nameless. The existence of the thing leaks from the future and not from the past that I know, and that can help me with its repository of 'proper' names. Can I dare to compare it with how we European citizens, and especially European governments, act in the midst of the so-called refugee crisis? 'They' started coming from elsewhere. We ignored it. But they continued coming. There is no place for them in the space we have. Still, they stayed. It hit us. Now it is rebounding... And we panic, because we have to respond to their existence... It is now present between us, taking its place.

However, we know that the period of the thing rebounding after it hit our body cannot last forever, for we humans are experts in symbolising. We want daylight. We cannot let things just happen around us. Or just 'be' around. We want to stop them hitting us by finding their equivalence in words. It is how we domesticate nature, the dark matter, the refugee, art, existence itself. And that is where I would agree with Spångberg, who said: "The thing bounces, bounces, bounces... and when it stops bouncing it is completely capitalised." It is true, and that is why, from an experiential (and not institutional) standpoint, the performance truly exhausts itself in performing. Already in the next moment, there are names, symbols, concepts, discourses, and no-thing remains. Then we write history and sell ('immaterial') goods.

The last issue I would like to tackle here is exactly the artistic gesture of bringing about (a thing). Although for some years already I have written about poiesis and praxis, *Natten* raises new problems for me. I started doubting that maybe I had been looking for the politics (of art) in the wrong place: in practice. And maybe I was mistakenly worried about not finding it there when I – following Arendt and Agamben – had to infer that the practice has changed over time so much that it had eventually gotten rid of its ancient Greek roots in ethics and politics and ended up in an expression of human free will and creative force. ...In a very simple way, *Natten* appeared to me as a poetic piece, which then forced me to rethink the *poietic*, not praxis this time.

It was a big surprise for me, since I've known Spångberg's work for several years and his *Spangbergianism* and to an extent his early performance *Powered by Emotion* as well were for me clear examples of cynicism. I understand it as an artistic approach that acknowledges the conditions in which we live and work, but instead of revolutionising them – or leaving the brutal and dirty battlefield – it opts for a continuous operation therein while finding satisfaction in showing, from a meta-level of observation, the awareness of the deep shit in which we live and work. Isn't that what Spångberg was known for? Appreciated or hated, or sometimes both?

Already before seeing *Natten* a blurred impression of poetry crossed my mind while

watching *La Substance, but in English and Internet*. But *Natten* took it much further. There is cynicism neither in the book nor in the performance. They are smart and the book and the performance do play with our conceptions and preconceptions of the unknown, darkness, fear, horror, nothingness, namelessness, and something that could be intuited as the precarious ontology of existence, but at the same time the book and the performance submerge themselves in these (pre-)conceptions and explore them from under the surface. I cannot say how sincere the performance and the book are, but what I see is that at the place of meta-discourse there is this message: *This page is not available*. In that way, *Natten* becomes a disturbing, vague, and fragile agency of becoming, of bringing to being, from nonbeing to the light of presence. It could well be the light of Caravaggio's night. That is the meaning of poiesis as 'pro-duction', which Agamben stressed when questioning the separation between technical production and artistic creation. However, if we would follow Aristotle and to certain degree Agamben as well, we would need to introduce a projective plane into poietic activity, which implies the deliberate agency of pro-duction. The agent of projective poiesis is deliberate, stable, and capable of planning and controlling the chaos of the process, since she projects the image in her head onto the thing she is to create, while shaping a material, giving it a shape that materialises the mental image. On the other hand, a poiesis that is not or refrains from being projective lets something

unknown, nameless, new, pass from nonbeing to being. Can we accept that speculation? While juggling with these thoughts, I've noticed that *Natten* forced me to think poiesis beyond Aristotle, Arendt, and Agamben. I cannot guarantee that there is no image in the head of the mastermind behind this whole event, but nevertheless I cannot discern that from the performance itself. It simply looks uncertain, like a world opened for existence, or, from another side, like coming from the source where the demarcation line between the nature and human is conceptual, rather than ontological. For a moment, it brings poiesis back to a pre-Aristotelian postulate – maybe Plato's, that *any cause that brings into existence something that was not there before* – which doesn't distinguish the way nature creates from the way self-conscious human do. But *Natten* is not created by nature. It is a purely human creation, the one where – thanks to the conceptual differentiation between the nature and the human – creativity could be discussed, examined, and (re)claimed, without being individually possessed. As an artistic gesture of reclaiming creativity in a society where it is degraded to the means of capitalist production, Spångberg's choreography goes beyond the paradigms of mimetic theatre, modern dance, and even conceptual dance. In those genres the image behind the thing is so well thought and, in successful cases, appears so intelligibly in the work, that the thing gets a name before even becoming. *Natten*, on the contrary, does not immediately unify itself with its shadow, nor does

it strive to dissolve its contradictions just because they bring confusion and anxiety.

Again, making a long leap, I would associate Spångberg's choreographic gesture with the experience of the uncertainty of life we live now – in Europe at least – after the period of modernity and postmodernity where society and life attempted to be 'well tailored'. Today, in order to learn how to live – or even simply survive – we must get rid of that phantasm; we must endure contradictions and face the precarity of existence. Alone and together. I wouldn't say that I exaggerate (too much) when I claim that while attending *Natten* I experienced the historicity of the current moment. The moment happening on the verge of language. The moment that doesn't resemble European 1930s but 2030s. On that ground, speaking now from within the field of performing arts, I see *Natten* as a proposition for the choreography of the moment in which we live. A new proposition, which we experience as familiar because we live it every day, but for which we still lack words. And how indeed to find the words to inscribe *Natten* into history, yet let it bounce around? I don't know, but I nevertheless tried.

How Deep is Your Love?
Mette Edvardsen

How Deep is Your Love? is a commissioned text exploring the work of Jonathan Burrows and Matteo Fargion, invited at Black Box teater to present three different performances for the first time in spring 2017.

The work of Mette Edvardsen is situated within the performing arts while it also explores other media and formats such as video, books and writing, with an emphasis on their relationship to the performing arts as practice and situation. With a base in Brussels since 1996, she has worked for several years as a dancer and performer for companies and projects. She has been developing her own work since 2002, which she presents internationally and is currently a research fellow at Oslo National Academy of the Arts. Edvardsen is an associated artist at Black Box teater (2018–2019).

Last October I was invited to Dramatikkens Hus in Oslo to talk about a writer. This was part of a lecture series they organise every second Tuesday, where a writer speaks about another writer of his/her choice. Looking through the names of writers, or playwrights, that had previously been presented in these lectures, I was not surprised that no choreographers featured on the list. After all, this being the 'house for new playwriting', naturally a list of writers, both living and dead, from Norway and abroad, male and female, did appear, along with a few other choices of focus. I am not a writer (in the traditional sense), but I think of choreography as writing.

There was only one hesitation in making my choice. I am also interested in the dancer as a writer. Not for issues of authorship or claiming (co-) authorship, but to consider the agency of the dancer as another form of writing and as something in itself. How can we acknowledge and therefore value the position of the dancer and performer in his/her own right? But also more, how can we articulate this 'place of writing' without being trapped in the authorship battle where one is always diminishing the other? Perhaps this calls for a Tuesday of its own, but in the meantime I will think two thoughts at the same time.

I am not sure what came first, Jonathan Burrows or a choreographer. Either way, my choice of a writer was made. I had my criteria for choosing, it had to be someone who is alive, who is still making work, and that I have seen the work myself. But it is not possible to speak about Jonathan Burrows

without also speaking about composer Matteo Fargion. And the two of them should need no introduction. Together they have been performing and making pieces continuously since 2002, and their performances (all of them!) are still touring extensively the four corners of the world.

When I choose then to speak about the work of Jonathan Burrows and Matteo Fargion, it is of course their performances I am referring to. The fact that they are both always also performing their pieces only adds to this entanglement. In terms of 'writing', there is no separation between the dance and the dancing. I don't just mean the fact that they are co-authoring their work, but that the 'place of writing' resides in the doing, in performing it. It would be a difficult, if not an impossible task, to separate between the two.

But the work is so much more than the performances they make (and I put an emphasis on the 'so much'). Not as a measure of effort or of difficulty, of how 'much more' the work demands in order to do it. Obviously there is more work to a performance than the work of performing it. In professional terms, their contribution to the dance field through their active engagement in years of teaching, mentoring, speaking, writing, collaborating and participating, even curating, is outstanding. But still, I mean 'more' more as a dimension, like life. The universe. That 'much'.

I had this thought, that with their pieces one would need to write only one program note, one text that would fit all of the pieces. Or better

still, what would be written about one piece could easily apply to another and be equally fitting. Because what matters is not so much what their pieces are about, but *the way they are* about or not about something. Like, it is not only about that we love someone, but the way we love. It is not only about caring about the world, but the way we care. Content is not separate from form.

I have a sense that the pieces of Jonathan and Matteo are getting deeper and deeper. As the years go by, there are more and more. I think I have seen most of them, and some of them more than once. I have lost count. There is a progression, yet it is the same. Not more of the same, but the same more. Like when going out to sea, where deep is not opposite to wide, to surface, to horizon, but is in itself. Itself more. And I, we, can be there, sitting in the dark, and be ourselves. More.

**Mette Edvardsen and Juan Dominguez
in Correspondence**

During the fall season 2017, Juan Dominguez was invited to present his performance *between what is no longer and what is not yet* at Black Box teater. He also participated in an artist-conversation with Mette Edvardsen, who was presenting her piece *oslo* during the same season. On this occasion, Black Box teater is publishing excerpts from their ongoing correspondence.

Juan Dominguez is a maker and organizer within the fields of choreography and performing arts. His work explores the relationship between different codes and advocates the complete dissolution between fiction and reality, using the former to produce the latter and vice versa. He is currently working on the construction of contexts that generate stronger and lasting relationships through continuity. He is also working on the idea of co-authorship between all the agents involved in a live aesthetic experience. During the last 15 years, he has curated various festivals and programs.

Dear Juan,

I am writing you now with some thoughts I have for the new piece I am working on. As I mentioned to you, there are some crossing interests and I thought it would be great to exchange with you about your thoughts and experiences; me from the place of approaching these questions, you from a place of already having experience dealing with similar questions. Or this is how I imagine it.

Since we spoke about doing this kind of correspondence I keep having internal conversations with you. I am writing letters in my mind. Though in my mind I never write the beginning, I just write. And now that I sit down to actually write, I don't know where to begin. The beginning is always the hardest, how to start, because I find it so determining. But then eventually I just start, I just did. And then I think it is in fact quite simple. To begin to write a letter. To begin a piece. To begin a day. I don't think about how a day begins, it just does. In reality things don't start and stop. Maybe it is more like a compositional problem, if what comes first determines what comes after, or maybe in a letter this doesn't matter. Here, finally, a first letter to you.

Today was my first day in the studio. Not the first day of the creation process, but the first day of placing myself with my thoughts and ideas in a studio. All of a sudden the premiere starts to feel very close. Right now that feels a bit like an end point, it is both exciting and frightening. I am in that moment of the process where it is not about drifting and imagining and opening. I need to make

choices, to orient myself in the space. There is a limit, a horizon. There is also an inherent dynamic in that. I need to begin to place and to construct. I need to find myself. To begin the writing.

As it turns out, today is the first day for the studio as well. A first day for this space or room to be a studio or residency space. It used to be the office space of a dance company, and before that maybe people used to live here? Now it is like an empty space where someone has just moved out, and the dust from behind shelves and doors that have been here for decades are the only things left behind. It makes me think of the old school house in Berlin where we were working and could rent a classroom for 50 cents per hour or something like that, do you remember? I was bringing my objects to the corner of that classroom for every rehearsal, and I kept collecting these little dust balls. I still have them. They became part of the piece. The remains when objects are gone: dust. It's like I am visiting another era. I feel the need to operate with a new cosmology of studio time. In the beginning there was...heating, a table...and one chair would be good. There is no table. I don't know what to do with myself. I am not sure this will be a productive lack.

Time passed.

The new piece I am working on is called *oslo*. The title is both an anagram of solo and refers of course to my city, Oslo. The piece follows from the trilogy with the pieces *Black* (2011), *No Title* (2014) and *We to be* (2015). Many of my works are solo pieces, however I don't really think

of them in that way, it just happens that I am alone. There are certain expectations of the solo as format I feel uneasy about, and in this piece I want to address some of these issues. But there is also, like in the other works, a more functional aspect to it, of what the piece needs. For this piece I would like to do as little as possible, just enough to sustain the situation. The audience will be seated frontally, classical. And I will be on stage. So the stage and auditorium set-up is intact. I am working with the theatre. But I will also have people in the audience that are part of the performance. They will look and behave as audience throughout the piece, except in the moments when they perform their part. But they never leave their seats and can disappear into being audience again once they have performed their part. I want to keep the frontal set-up in order to work with the tension between stage and auditorium. For me it is not about transgressing, but about extending the space, that the audience is not only looking in front and giving their attention to the performer on stage, but can also listen and feel what is going on around them in the space. I see it as something soft, something that opens the space, a total space where we are all inside. I want to work with a choir, for example. I think the voice is a strong physical presence that has the capacity to open the space and bring us close to it, the experience of it. After making *We to be* I had a strong feeling of the space of the audience, or the auditorium. In that piece I am seated together with the audience, the stage is empty, and I am reading

the play out loud. When the performance is over and lights are back up, there is a real sense of having shared the space, been somewhere together. I want to follow this up. Also in *No Title* where I perform the entire piece with my eyes closed, there was something else that happened in the space between the stage and the audience, proximity – and, at the same time, distance – were intensified.

Another line could be traced like this: from *Black* – where objects are gone, to *No Title* – where space is gone, to *We to be* – where the performer is gone, and then in *oslo* – the audience is gone. This was at first a bit of a joke and a playful prediction. It is not that I could imagine doing a piece in the absence of audience, but maybe more to reconsider the space of the audience. Conceptually, following this line of thought, the performer could already be gone. It could be only the audience and what takes place in the auditorium. I have also had fantasies of a piece in which the entire audience would be involved in the piece, so all performers, except one – one single audience member. But it is not about such a 'monumental' gesture. And also, the tension between the stage and the auditorium is important, I find, for this piece. I don't want to make a piece without a performer, at least not to start with. I need that minimum of a convention.

Even if very different, I am thinking of your work with the series *Clean Room*. You take the work with the audience much further. As audience we are all playing a part in the piece and, at the same time, experiencing it. Yet it is not just participatory,

to me it is still in the poetic realm, in a space of fiction. As you put it, it is not what fiction, but how fiction comes about, how it is constructed. This is very interesting to think about. How can we access and work with fiction and imagination in another way.

I think this is a good place to end for now.
More soon!

Kisses x Mette

Dear mette, thanks for having the confidence to talk to me about your work and concerns.

I am super tired today, slept very little and now I have a Skype talk with students from La Paz in Bolivia to talk about how I understand spectatorship from my experience. So I hope this email will serve as a warm-up.

The matter you propose is huge and has been a kind of obsession for me since I started to make my work. Not so much when I was a dancer, then I was busier with what already takes a lot of space, concentration, attention and dedication. But once I became a maker, I always question the role of that agency in the work we do, spectatorship. I also question and reflect about my agency as

maker and other agencies like the curator. I have been curating for 15 years, so no way to escape from that. But once you are critical, you have to be critical to everything, maybe not at the same time, but to everything.

Since my very first piece, and since I started to make my work, I have been trying to force that agency, the spectatorship, to be partly responsible for the experience produced in between everybody, within the piece, project or performance. I always look in different ways for the complicity of the spectator, to a point where I don't want spectators anymore. I only want accomplices. But that's extremely difficult to get, so I play with the tools I have in order to generate contexts and experiences that can become beneficial knowledge for all the agents involved.

I know that our field is considered leisure and that some people experience our work on that level. I am OK with that, but not particularly interested in having a relation to that kind of spectator, because yes, I want to have a relationship with spectators that are willing to work, to commit, to engage. That's why, the other day, I said jokingly that I will cast the spectators. Only taking the ones I am really interested in. It sounds as stupid as it is radical if I really do it. But in a way, I am very worried about the use assigned to our work. I cannot relax thinking that the spectator is smart enough to digest the experience and do something with it, our work is not so easy and most of the spectators don't have time to follow the processes of art

creations. We are many artists creating constantly and our paths are not as open as they should be.

I go to the theatre to propose something, and others go to experience something and receive the proposal. So the relation is given. Then it is about what kind of contract we are signing. And this contract is extremely important to me. Maybe the contract is from where we have to begin. The contract has to be super clear in its intentions. I am not talking about that I cannot work with ambiguity if the matter treated needs it. I am talking about actualizing that contract. What is it to be a spectator? What is it to be a maker? What is it to be a curator? Which responsibilities do we acquire when we sign this contract? It cannot be the artist alone who is responsible for what is going to happen.

I am still fighting with these issues. For me, to make a piece and think I am affecting the spectators and giving them responsibility for what happens afterwards, is not enough. I want to be affected by them in a more radical way. Is this what they really can do?

Today I was talking about provocation, about accessibility, about commitment, about responsibility, the one we share and can pass from one to another.

In your work, when you are alone, I agree with you that being alone doesn't mean it is a solo piece. To me, in your work, I am part of the piece, maybe I am proactive and don't want to be submissive to what is happening in front of me.

I was talking yesterday about how fragile I am when I am emotional, but how much it is that state that generates more knowledge for me. I am extremely sensitive and vulnerable, but as a black hole eating everything. When this happens to me as spectator I am so happy, stupidly happy, but so happy.

In my work I have been doing pieces where our bodies disappear and let the ones of the spectators appear. We don't disappear completely, but we play our roles differently. This is something interesting to think about. What are the new roles?

And this is very important to what you are going to do. You will ask people to play the role consciously and differently, to become performer, protagonist. (Maybe your single performer can go from the tribune to the stage for the clapping at the end).

When I ask the spectators to change their role, they still keep that role, the one of the spectator. So I build a double line in which they are two things at the same time without forgetting they are both, performers and spectators.

Spectator...I thought artists are a species that will never disappear, but the true thing is that spectators are the ones that will never disappear, they are, we are, indestructible. So if they are, we are, indestructible, why don't we go further.

In whatever way you are going to provoke us, you have to bring us further, as far as possible, we have to feel the abyss you are putting us in and not only the intelligence. I like, of course, that there are no performers. You eliminate a classic filter and

go straight, no intermediaries, no subjectivities to decode, no body seduction, but spectators playing, performing, transforming. Jesus, how I would like to be completely transformed when going out of a theatre. What else can we be?

But for now, let's continue this talk.

Xxx
juan

Kolofon

Redaktører: Melanie Fieldseth,
Anne-Cécile Sibué-Birkeland
og Elin Amundsen Grinaker
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Black Box teater
Marstrandgata 8, 0566 Oslo
Tlf: +47 23 40 77 70
blackbox@blackbox.no
www.blackbox.no

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Black Box teaters publikasjoner er en samling av tekster med ulike innganger til teatrets kunstneriske program. Tekstene omhandler alt fra kunstnerne teatret samarbeider med, konkrete forestillinger samt overordnede temaer knyttet til det kunstneriske programmet fra vårsesongen 2017 til vårsesongen 2018. Publikasjonen er satt sammen av ulike stemmer som på hver sin måte skaper innblikk og perspektiv omkring scenekunsten. Noen tekster er på engelsk, noen på norsk.

This publication is a collection of commissioned essays and interviews or republished texts that suggest different entry points to contextualise the artistic program of Black Box teater, from spring season 2017 till spring season 2018. It encompasses diverse voices that, in their own way, offer multiple insights and perspectives on current questions, subject matter, artists and performances presented in our program. Some texts are in English, some in Norwegian.