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## Cross Pollination's Nomadic Laboratory: a praxis in-between practices

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**ABSTRACT – Cross Pollination's Nomadic Laboratory: a praxis in-between practices** – This collaborative writing presents the ways in which practitioner-researchers from Cross Pollination (CP), an international arts research platform with a focus on knowledge exchange, create nomadic and temporary laboratory spaces. It is argued that the encounter between different experiences of performative craft generates epistemic insights that enable members of the platform to rearticulate their practices through the reterritorialization of specialized techniques. Furthermore, the article discusses how an ethos of companionship may appear through dialogical and horizontal practices, contributing to a renewal of the theatre laboratory.

Keywords: **Laboratory Theatre. Performance. Theatre Anthropology. Cross Pollination. Creative Processes.**

**RÉSUMÉ – La Laboratoire Nomade de la Cross Pollination: une praxis entre les pratiques** – Cet écrit collaboratif présente les façons dont les praticiens-chercheurs de Cross Pollination (CP), une plateforme internationale de recherche en arts axée sur l'échange de connaissances, créent des espaces de laboratoire nomades et temporaires. Il est soutenu que la rencontre entre différentes expériences d'artisanat performatif génère des idées épistémiques qui permettent aux membres de la plate-forme de réarticuler leurs pratiques à travers la reterritorialisation de techniques spécialisées. En outre, l'article discute comment un ethos de camaraderie peut apparaître à travers des pratiques dialogiques et horizontales, contribuant à un renouvellement du laboratoire du théâtre.

Mots-dés: **Théâtre de laboratoire. Performance. Anthropologie théâtrale. Cross Pollination. Processus Créatifs.**

**RESUMO – O Laboratório Nômade da Cross Pollination: uma práxis entre as práticas** – Esta escrita colaborativa apresenta as formas pelas quais os praticantes-pesquisadores da *Cross Pollination* (CP), plataforma internacional de pesquisa artística com foco na troca de conhecimento, cria laboratórios nômades e temporários. Argumenta-se que o encontro entre diferentes experiências de artes performativas gera *insights* epistêmicos que permitem que os membros da plataforma rearticulem suas práticas através da reterritorialização de técnicas especializadas. Além disso, discute-se como um *ethos* de companheirismo possa aparecer através de práticas dialógicas e horizontais, contribuindo para a atualização do teatro laboratório.

Palavras-chave: **Teatro Laboratório. Performance. Antropologia Teatral. Cross Pollination. Processos de criação.**



*All becoming is based on movement*

(Klee, 2001, p. 45).

## Introduction

The authors of this article are all core members of Cross Pollination (CP), an international arts research platform with a focus on knowledge exchange, linked to Nordisk Teaterlaboratorium (NTL) (DK)<sup>1</sup>. Founded in 2017 by Marije Nie and Adriana La Selva, CP runs an expanded laboratory for the dialogue in-between practices, both scholarly and performance-based, as an integral and essential part of a politics of embodied research in theatre and performance.

This collaborative writing shares the ways in which practitioner-researchers from CP create nomadic and temporary laboratory spaces which are characterized by an ethos of companionship, interdisciplinarity and dialogical practices which lie in-between the bodies of knowledge we each possess. The encounter between different experiences of performative craft generates epistemic insights that enable members of the platform to rearticulate their practices. Thus, this text traces out the transmission, transformation and generation of knowledge through the reterritorialization of specialized techniques.

Our discourse below will map out the ways in which we intertwine, entangle and weave our practices in the space during our sessions, tracing CP's emerging approach to laboratory praxis. A critical reflection of CP's trajectory so far will be followed by opening up the epistemological field of inquiry in which our practices dialogue, whilst foregrounding the concrete praxical tactics we have developed and continue to employ as we work together. We will argue that CP's laboratory tactics enable us to actualise *nomadic villages*: dynamic assemblages in which our practices seed movements of territorial rearticulation.

## Cross Pollination: the heart of the beginning

CP was born out of an encounter between two artist practitioners from very distinct backgrounds – Marije Nie, a tap dancer and independent performing artist and Adriana La Selva, a theatre maker, performer and re-



searcher. The two first met in the confined space of the Ripa convent in Albino, in the North of Italy in 2016, where they took part in the 15th session of the International School of Theatre Anthropology (ISTA), organized by Eugenio Barba, founder of Odin Teatret/NTL, in collaboration with Teatro Tascabile di Bergamo. The ISTA has served as an important laboratory space for the expanded research of Barba, and has had periodic meetings between 1980 and the present. It was conceived as a temporary *village* where scholars and master-practitioners from different Eurasian theatre traditions gathered for certain periods, ranging from ten days up to three months. These gatherings were crucial in the formation of a *milieu* of artists and scholars around Barba and the group Odin Teatret, which was based on direct personal contact, shared experiences and the forming of personal connections. Each ISTA session also has participants; a colorful selection of theatre students, practitioners and scholars from different countries, who engage in intensive work-meetings with master practitioners from different theatre traditions across the world<sup>2</sup>.

As participants, Nie and La Selva spent time with the master practitioners of ISTA, studying their techniques and performance forms with care and resilience. They adopted a certain monastic life, which provided them with the time and focus to engage deeply with both the work and the other participants. La Selva and Nie left the ISTA session overwhelmed and touched. And puzzled. And burning with the need to find a response to this experience. What now? How could they carry this experience forwards? How could they continue the dialogues that were put in motion? With whom? And where?

After the ISTA session, La Selva and Nie continued to engage with Odin Teatret/NTL in meaningful ways. Nie, for example, went on to study at Odin Teatret's headquarters in Holstebro, Denmark, participating in an Odin Week<sup>3</sup> and a Collective Mind session<sup>4</sup> before being invited to join NTL as an Artistic Resident<sup>5</sup>. Nie had already channeled her professional tap dancing skills into work with Radio Kootwijk Live (NL), a music laboratory of which she was co-founder and which was built on the foundational concept of dramaturgically-shaped dialogues between musicians and other art disciplines, but also with professionals from outside the arts<sup>6</sup>. For Nie, the effect of each of the Odin actors' differing techniques woven onstage by

Barba into the collective dramaturgy, was akin to the musical instruments in classical ensemble music. This enabled her to reappraise her skills as a tap dancer-musician, a central concern at the time:

When I came to ISTA, a main concern for me was to understand how could this strange creature that is tap dancing – which is not acting, not music, not dance, but is somehow a monster comprised of all three – live onstage with other performers without being seen as a special guest, or a freak. Where can my practice live and how can it expand into other practices? How can tap dancing be a route for theatre? (Nie, 2021, p. 1).

La Selva, who was already a member of Iben Nagel Rasmussen's Bridge of Winds international research group<sup>7</sup>, was also asking similar questions at the time, and was particularly interrogating how theatre could lead to other pathways beyond performance. Both women were interested in creating a space for laboratory research, and were aware that this could speak to the large crowd of artists passing through the expanded workshop culture of NTL, who felt a need to stay connected to each other and to process their rich experiences and channel this into sustained research.

After lengthy discussions, Nie and La Selva devised an incipient structure for a nomadic laboratory, drawing on people they had met at ISTA, other NTL events and wider networks of professional colleagues, as well as practitioner-researchers they had encountered at international scholarly meetings such as IFTR<sup>8</sup> and TaPRA<sup>9</sup>, in a bid to blur the boundaries between practitioners and scholarly research and creating an interdisciplinary exchange beyond theatre practice. They chose potential participants according to their grounding and working experience in embodied performance crafts and a sense of a shared laboratory ethos. This group included performer, dancer and somatic practitioner Andrea Maciel and theatre maker and scholar Patrick Campbell, co-authors of this article and part of the core group of CP.

Potential CP members were sent a written invitation by email, which opened with the following text:

Each of you holds experience, questions, techniques, knowledge about the art of the performer and its relation to society at large, with angles that challenge and complement each other. The intention is to share and extrapolate what we are working on in order to cross pollinate and let ideas and thoughts unfold by passing them through our different minds, bodies and

practices. In the meeting we will concentrate on different ways of dialogue, techniques and reflection, both on the floor and around the table (or walking through the woods!) (La Selva; Nie, 2017, p. 1).

The email also challenged participants to reflect on the following key points of departure, which were to be of fundamental importance moving forwards:

1. Infrastructure for knowledge and how it reaches performers/researchers.

How do we produce and share knowledge, develop it and document it, across practices, disciplines and cultures, including those who have developed a highly personal mix of expertise, disciplines and skills? How does this knowledge become part of a communal 'body' or 'house' of knowledge, so that it can be both personal and develop as culture or history?

2. How do we keep our work (and the people who do it) alive?

Individual performers and researchers who work project-based or freelance have a specific position in their work and in their relationship with institutions, funds, groups and other artists. As more and more people are working this way, we think it is useful to look at the challenges and opportunities. Could a performer network function as a counterbalance to existing theatre networks? (La Selva; Nie, 2017, p. 2).

It is important to note that, like many other freelance performing artists, La Selva and Nie's professional lives had developed very differently to those of the master practitioners embedded in the performing traditions they had encountered during the ISTA session they had attended. The political and economic impositions of late globalised capitalism have created particular circumstances for contemporary performers that hinder continuous engagement with an artistic path, which can often seem like an ideal to be chased but rarely achieved. Consequently, one of the main concerns of CP was to give a home to independent and freelance professionals, many of whom have grounded their education in the infinite realm of workshop culture, working through a broad array of skills to sustain their fragmented professional lives. For independent artists today, beyond performance skills per se, a professional skill set also necessarily includes knowing how to write projects, edit videos, calculate budgets, sew costumes, maintain accounts, promote activities on social media and, as a last resort, turn to temporary jobs such as waitressing. Others work from project to project, or as *hired guns* making it challenging to find consistency in their artistic development.

In this everyday context, nourishing and improving one's artistic practices becomes a fight, a political form of resistance against neoliberal forces that promote consumerism over creation. Being an independent artist nowadays means living a *precarious* life, as Van Assche (2020) has thoroughly dissected in her recent book on dance labour. She reminds us of the etymology and meaning of precarity: granted until further notice, in temporary use. As she suggests, "[...] one is therefore legally uncertain because one has only a temporary residence and no knowledge about or say in when that period expires" (Van Assche, 2020, p. 8).

### Nomadic Villages

CP came into being as a positive, proactive response to the fragmentation, isolation, precarity and temporal-spatial paucity faced by the independent artist. As a platform, CP is predicated on the notion of *villageness*, offering a *nomadic home* to diverse artists seeking to connect to others and renew their craft. The notion of villageness is influenced, in part, by Hastrup's (1996) concept of the *performer's village*, itself an ethnographic account of the socio-cultural configurations of an ISTA session. For Hastrup (1996, p. 9), the villageness of an ISTA session was characterised by itinerant travellers, and "[...] was more of a camp than a settlement". As a potentially broader trope, the performer's village:

[...] is a means of creating social space through the practices of the inhabitants, rather than by fixed physical parameters [...] no map of the village can be drawn. What seems to be possible is to make an itinerary, defined not by fixed coordinates in space but by the movement towards a goal [...] we can identify its moving centre: the village well. It is a spring of life, of bios, a sacred source of energy. It is the place where a particular performative practice defines the point of highest density within the social space (Hastrup, 1996, p. 11-12).

The notion of villageness delineated by Hastrup's anthropological account reflects the initial drive to develop CP as both a platform for knowledge exchange and an international artistic network. La Selva and Nie were inspired by the villageness of ISTA, by the personal relationships forged between the members of the network's *inner circle* that bridge disciplines and continents, by the structure of continuous yet periodic meetings and by the consistency of the work accomplished in between them. Fur-



thermore, in speaking of a nomadic village, we become-with Deleuze and Guattari's approach to the concept of *nomadism*, which points to a "[...] specific mode of relating to the ground on which one moves" (Groot Nibbelink, 2019, p. 13). Deleuze and Guattari (2004) argue that the hegemonic shaping of territories justifies the inequitable distribution of power by the State, reinforcing a way of living based on property, borders and ownership. In contrast, in CP our nomadic village aligns with another mode of being, one in which our praxes can be deterritorialized, set in movement and in relation with other traditions of *techne* by means of dialogue, implementing a destabilizing attitude towards pre-existing knowledge.

During CP's short existence, we have continued to expand this nomadic village, both face-to-face and digitally. Our laboratory is a pause, a place to stay in order to leave. A professional holiday.

### **A Life through Sessions**

#### *First Session: the collective body*

The first CP Session, which took place in 2017<sup>10</sup> was largely dedicated to understanding what CP could offer in order to expand the notion of the theatre laboratory through knowledge exchange and generation. Importantly, it was clear for the group that we needed to break with traditional master-pupil relationships from the outset and find horizontal ways of questioning and responding to one another in and through our professional disciplinary practices. Addressing this horizontality prior to the Session through e-mail correspondence allowed the participants to come with an open mind regarding transforming and interrogating their own body of knowledge.

The mornings were dedicated to floor work, to praxical exchange of the broad range of techniques each individual held. There were no set agendas at the start of a working day; the studio space was a white page ready to be populated by practices, reflection and documentation. For instance, on any given day, participants would all *roll in* to the studio and begin warming up individually, before connections would start to emerge organically, gradually bringing the group to shared actions. From this collective ground, a somatic practitioner might suggest an exercise focusing on





awareness; this might be responded to by an exploration of a codified form of actor training, such as the Wind Dance<sup>11</sup>; a sequence of rhythmic training inspired by tap might then commence, rounded off by a sharing of circle songs and extended vocal practice in the Wolfsohn-Hart tradition. In the afternoon, sessions were dedicated to song work and reflection through dialogical forms<sup>12</sup>. Song work has appeared very spontaneously as a shared desire in the group and we have found that engaging together in the learning of songs brings a sense of connection to the group, providing shared material to work with. It has also given us the opportunity to take part in artistic activities in collaboration with other resident groups in the space such as Ikarus Stage Arts, Teatr Brama and KompaniTO<sup>13</sup>.

So, instead of being preoccupied with pre-structured blocks of content, the group began to look at the fluid connections between practices, to the way they dialogue. Out of this sense of openness, *tactics* of knowledge exchange began to appear. The term *tactics* is employed, following de Certeau (1988), to refer to concrete practices in which individual agency can manifest beyond the confines of hegemonic structures of power. In CP, these tactics appear as dialogical modes in between our different praxes that allow for both creative renewal and a collective sense of a nomadic vilageness, a burgeoning professional culture. In CP, tactics offer accommodating frameworks that can carry work forwards rather than dictating results; they open up a laboratory space in which different praxical inquiries can unfold. The two key tactics that emerged during the first CP Session were entitled *Drifting* and *What If*.

In objective terms, Drifting consists of an extended, unstructured spatial improvisation which flows from individual warming up into moving and/or sounding collectively. This tactic combines precision and serendipity, instilling an ability to *tune into* one another through careful listening and focused attention. There is a technical rigour to this exercise of ensemble listening and reacting; this is not free-form play – there is already a tacit dialogue going on between us, which we draw from our different artistic techne as we weave them together to form a collective web. Drifting is akin to a liminal space we enter together, allowing our bodies to encounter an obscure world where inner and outer perceptions begin to mingle, where stimuli begin to be translated as immanent assemblages. The studio then



becomes an *archi-texture*: a meshwork of multiple energetic entanglements, ready to be inhabited.

*What If* challenges the group to pose questions in response to each other's practices, in a way that also allows for a self-reflexive investigation of one's own *techne*. This dialogic questioning is then translated into actionable research proposals. Questions are articulated clearly to the group and can take many different directions: some examples include transforming the original proposal into a different medium (*what if* we try and channel the kinaesthetic responses of contact improvisation into voice-work in pairs), proposing a continuation of the research through a different exercise or discipline (*what if* we use the technique of tap<sup>14</sup> to investigate the dynamic proposed by the Bridge of Winds' Out-of-Balance exercise)<sup>15</sup> or suggesting a contrasting activity (*what if* we explore the proprioceptive responses of martial arts now in order to ground and centre ourselves').

Finding these *responses that are questions* and tuning them to be open and accessible to the group is a delicate process. It asks practitioners to balance their own personal research path with that of the collective. In choosing to introduce the disruption of a new *what if* response, each practitioner attempts to understand on an unspoken level what we are looking for in this moment, with this group of people, without breaking the flow and direction of the collective process. The necessity of translating between one practitioner's *techne* to that of another calls for a careful choice of the technical level of the proposal, which bridges the gap of technical skill and experience in a sensitive way. We do not attempt to *learn* each other's praxes; we learn from them by decentering ourselves as we inhabit an in between, dialogical space. Thus, knowledge exchange in *What If* is not just superficial; it is a peeling back of layers like an onion skin. There are different levels of learning and questioning going on in a liminal space that is constantly actualised.

Therefore, this first meeting allowed a *collective body* to form and opened space for tactics of knowledge exchange to appear, based on an ongoing and open-ended dialogue, channeled through each practitioner's technical knowhow and professional experiences. The acknowledgment of an emerging laboratory was extremely important for the continuation of our individual research, as we returned to working as independent artists,

but now supported by a network of peers to collaborate with. Throughout the year, members of CP met in different constellations to take part in each other's projects – performances, concerts, workshops, joint organised symposia and smaller laboratory sessions focused on specific technical approaches<sup>16</sup>. This engagement with each other throughout the year also naturally defined a certain core group of CP participants, who have continued to actively work together to the present day.

*Second Session: consolidation of tactics*

The Second CP Session took place at NTL in November 2018<sup>17</sup>. A clear *theoretical companion* was selected to accompany us during our laboratory research – Donna Haraway's (2016) *Staying with the trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*, which La Selva had requested participants read prior to starting work together. This was the first time CP members had systematically engaged in directed theoretical preparation before a Session, and it enabled us to bring a more consistent critical lens to our practical sharings over the course of the week. Haraway's writing also helped us to establish a common vocabulary to speak about CP's emerging praxis, drawing on some of her concepts such as *string figures*, *making oddkin* and *tentacular thinking*<sup>18</sup>. Our morning sessions continued to expand the scope of embodied exchanges, and the work on Drifts and What Ifs continued. Early afternoons were dedicated to polyphonic sound work through practices of *kecak*, tap, drones and circle songs<sup>19</sup>. This work would then flow into the generation of more dramaturgically-inflected material, following emerging tactics described below.

A key tactic developed at this point was *Interview Threads*, which is freely inspired by the Perform Back Score tool created by Lilia Mestre (2015) and Guillermo Gomez-Peña and Roberto Sifuentes' (2011) spatial guerrilla interventions. This tactic, which was brought to CP by La Selva, uses performance work as a creative feedback tool which disrupts individual practices. Our Interview Threads begin with the offering of a poetic, performative *gift*, which could take the form of a dramaturgical fragment, a song or performance persona. After watching all of the gifts and without further deliberation or reflection on the performances, everyone decides who they will respond to, making sure that all gifts have one response. This



creates the beginning of several *threads* which will be cultivated for an agreed length of time, with sharings and responses taking place over several consecutive days, building an entangled body of dramaturgical work. When we respond to our colleague's creative offerings, we are catching pieces of each other's poetics, blurring authorial territories. Interview threads are increasingly employed as a key dramaturgical tool by CP in our parallel performance work together.

A further tactic that emerged over this period through concrete praxical exchange in the space between participants was *Juggling*. Juggling draws on CP member Ramiro Silveira's Theatre Playground technique, a practical ensemble approach to developing scenic material, and Gonzalo Alarcon's craft-based knowledge of physical comedy and circus skills<sup>20</sup>. In the case of CP, Silveira and Alarcon's personal techniques have been amalgamated and transposed to a research context and explored as a form of collective training. In Juggling, we set things in space – actions, objects – and create individual scores connecting them. We then walk our scores through at the same time, repeating the actions in a malleable way, interacting (because it is inevitable) and subsequently adapting our tempos and the energy-flow of the objects as they pass from hand to hand. Our individual materials take shape in a collective dramaturgical form and are set in a delicate balance with each other. Juggling opens up a *multispecies communication*, to paraphrase Haraway (2016), one in which our presence and the memory beneath our skin appear as a concrete nomadic ground. Our bodies of knowledge act between one another, producing unexpected triangulations of praxes. The loop-like quality of the Juggling score is a sharp experiment in deterritorialization, a nomadic call. A training that instills a collective attitude.

By the end of the week together, we also came up with a further tactic, *Spatial Fabulation*, which emerged out of our readings of Haraway and the visual arts practice of CP member Sara Strand by, in particular. Spatial fabulation is ostensibly a response to Haraway's (2016) *worlds of SF*: a poetic work predicated on *staying with the trouble*, which consists of "[...] modest possibilities of partial recuperation and getting on together" (Haraway, 2016, p. 10). Our spatial fabulations draw from visual arts practices such as collage, installation and media design to compose a reflection-in-movement

about a collective Session. They gather traces from the work that has taken place – texts, images, video, sound – and place them in a constellation literally connected by strings, creating a tied labyrinth of companionships. The practitioners, but also external visitors, are invited to thread their way through, making a pathway of their own. This interaction with the constellation of threaded material awakens memories, responses and invites action on reflection and meaning-making. In this way, no one is in charge of defining what happened, and the ephemeral, the invisible and the disregarded is still able to resonate inside.

Over the course of the Session, a shared praxical vocabulary began to come clearly to the fore, through a more systematic entanglement of theory and practice within the tactics we were developing. Importantly, these tactics opened up a dialogical space in which our different *techniques* could usefully collide and inform one another.

### *Third Session: trouble*

CP's Third Session, held in Holstebro, Denmark in February 2020<sup>21</sup>, followed on the heels of the Second NTL Festival and was kickstarted by a one-day meeting with a larger network of researchers and scholars, which launched The Parliament of Practices (PoP)<sup>22</sup>. The name of the new initiative, which was coined by La Selva, responds to Bruno Latour's (1991) proposal for a Parliament of Things and aims at activating a broader network of researchers and practitioners through deep research into forms of dialogue and writing that activate our practices within a social context. PoP also has a broader goal of offering a space in which a wider community of practitioners, both scholarly and artistic, can engage with each other beyond CP. As we mentioned elsewhere:

The guiding impulse behind PoP was *how to give voice to and through practice*, whilst responding to (craft-based) genealogies and engaging with contemporary social concerns, such as diversity, intersectionality and democratic participation (Campbell; La Selva; Maciel; Nie, 2021, p. 11).

In this Third CP Session La Selva and Nie suggested three themes to frame the work for new practitioners participating in the event: personal genealogies, building/objects and William Kentridge's (2014) notion of the studio as mapped out in his book *Six Drawing Lessons*. The work, however,

ran its own course, which would test the emerging laboratory culture of CP and its delicate, dynamic balance of tactics, attitudes and values. After the creative explosion of the Second Session, there arose the challenge of balancing the core attitudes of listening and becoming-with others, alongside the preconceived expectations of both new and experienced participants. Here follows a fragment from Nie's session notes, which offers an insight into the trouble that emerged in CP at this point:

As a spontaneous opening gift, CP core member J. R. traced a huge string figure of the 'Tree of Life' from the Jewish Kabbalah<sup>23</sup> on the floor of the White Room at NTL, an act that carried deep personal meaning, knowledge and affective connections for him. Over the course of the day, the group engaged with the Tree in different ways; and when objects arrived inside, it also became a *Wunderkammer*<sup>24</sup> – a 'cabinet of curiosities', a collection of notable objects. The next day however, in the course of an energetic movement improvisation, A. M. entered the Tree form like a strong wind and vigorously, gleefully, playfully, destroyed the tree, tangling its threads, spreading the objects around and leaving behind chaos, to the delight of the group. Looking at the destruction, C. F. remarked 'mercy<sup>25</sup> is the first to go' and 'Now that the space has been desacralised, anything can happen'. J. R. however was upset about the destruction of the Tree and the group decided to recreate the tree form, which then stayed there till the end of the session, with quite a heavy presence, acting as an obstacle to the flow of the work (Nie, 2020, p. 2).

Then finally, on the last day of work, the participants gathered around the *Wunderkammer* installation in the corner of the studio and shared the personal, genealogical connections that the gathered objects held for them in a performative, narrative fashion. In the dramaturgical flow of the session, this moment served as a plateau, a village *campfire* where biographies, both professional and personal, were shared. The *Wunderkammer* thus began to operate as an *open door* between the working floor and the personal life of the practitioners, as the objects traced out affective pathways inside the installation, which were articulated by CP participants through a generous and healing moment of sharing.

Through the trouble, the Third Session revealed CP's solidity as an emerging laboratory culture, with fluid and open attitudes that carried the collective work in intangible but important ways, and an insistence on the presence of mess as an integral part of knowledge exchange and generation.



It revealed the precariousness of a culture grounded upon immanence, as solidity slipped into petrification, dialogues became discussions, the collective process needed to be *decided* and structured, and the open doors of the laboratory were questioned. Adding to this, in a meeting with Barba, who visited the work one morning, it was clear that the entangled research processes of CP could be difficult to perceive from an outside position, possibly because they were not obviously centered on research into the pre-expressive principles of the actor. Rather, an important part of the work took place in-between the practitioners through tacit exchanges within uncharted territory.

After the Session, the CP core group questioned if the nature of a session should be more carefully identified, and divided into *Introduction Sessions*, Core CP Sessions and workshops, in order to meet and attune more consciously to the expectations of the people involved. Furthermore, the importance of central CP principles that had been proposed from the very beginning was reestablished; it was understood that each practitioner must bring a mature professional practice to CP, a unique constellation of techniques, experiences and knowledge; that the work in CP is based on dialogue in-between these (constellations of) practice; and that everything brought into the work may well be transformed in the process, and participants need to be open to this potential *troubling* of form, intention and structure.

In many ways, Haraway's notion of staying with the trouble revealed itself to be a further central tactic, and perhaps a key attitude, underscoring the delicate internal nature of CP's shared culture. A collective ethos had been established over the first two Sessions through an organic process of creative research and inevitably questions had begun to arise pertaining to issues of access, belonging and becoming. Staying with the trouble allowed for the messy reality of an open-door policy, in which different practitioner-researchers were accommodated, change was always welcomed and the parameters of the laboratory were open to reconfigurations according to dialogues with praxes from other disciplines. The proposed transformation of technique at the heart of CP's dialogical process of knowledge exchange and generation was recognised as a much broader dialectical process in which preconceived models, desired outcomes and fixed structures would neces-



sarily be challenged, contaminated and rearticulated. The capacity to allow for this troubling slippage, to abide in the unknown and to accept ambiguity were clearly key conditions of this particular village laboratory.

### **Entanglement of Theory and Practice**

For Barad (2007), knowledge is an open-ended articulation predicated on *entanglement*. Entanglement here does not connote simply intertwining with another, as in the joining of separate entities, but rather an acknowledgement of the primacy of intra-subjective relationality as opposed to independent, self-contained existence. This state of entanglement speaks to the dialogical tactics at the heart of CP's praxis, which inculcate an ability to listen and accept uncertainty, making sense of collective events retroactively through praxical knowledge.

In CP, theory and practice are inextricably entangled, both informing and mutating into the other as we work together. This reflects the lived experience of the members of the platform, who are practitioner-researchers constantly amalgamating conceptual thinking and embodied knowledge in a living process of artistic research. We speak in CP of *walking backwards into the future*; we follow our practices as they offer us insights, drawing on our varied praxical genealogies in order to question and repurpose them in light of our current concerns and needs. Our doing and thinking helps us echolocate *walking companions*, sources of inspiration, which may range from the master practitioners who have guided our previous training to contemporary philosophers and critical theorists speaking to broader social, epistemic and ontic concerns. In fact, when we speak of a nomadic village laboratory, we are already pointing to a kind of laboratorial approach that steps away from the idea of an isolated, objective scientific research inquiry. The complexity of connections that we have access to through our embodied practices keeps us attached to the action of the present, while theorizing.

Furthermore, our collective praxical investigations are not guided by binary notions of *success* or *failure*, but rather by a search for interruptions and disruptions. The tactics we have developed enable us to crack open our artistic techniques, allowing for rhizomatic connections to emerge in the studio that open up new creative pathways. The utility of our experiments is judged on a necessarily subjective and phenomenological level, as our fo-





cus is on the embodied, praxical genealogies we each carry within us. The process is, by necessity, messy, amorphous and non-constructivist, and at times breaks with the external rigour of traditional theatre laboratory practices. Nevertheless, it is precisely in these moments of controlled chaos that we are able to counter our professional automatisms and discover fresh possibilities, together as a collective.

There is, however, a rigour to CP's emerging praxis, which draws on different roots. The first root is in the specialised techniques and practices of each CP member. The years of training, the professional work in which the practice is put into action, the intimate relationship between practitioner and craft: these elements build a practical rigor that is tested in and through the doing. These techniques feed the CP laboratory, and are a crucial element to its power. What is brought into the work through each participant defines what can be generated through the different collective tactics employed.

The second root is a shared attitude; the delicate yet diligent ability to be present and generous, listening and tuning in to partners whilst remaining open and vulnerable. This attitude cannot manifest in a half-hearted way: *being present* speaks to the insistence of sticking to the research, not giving up and not letting go. It also means waiting patiently for the right time in the collective process to bring in a suggestion, or choosing to keep it as personal research if the time is not right to share. Staying with the trouble entails the necessity of allowing for the transformation of whatever is brought in.

The third root lies in personal interests and *eureka* moments (or *PoPs*, as we call them). In the entangled and plurivocal laboratory of CP, it is crucial for each practitioner to stay in touch with their personal interests and professional inquiries, or they might easily lose their own thread in the melee. It means a practitioner has to keep listening to the inner voice of technical knowhow grounded in the first root alluded to above – personal practice – while participating in the collective process, creating a mesh of simultaneous research.

### **The Laboratory as a Village: the trouble we are in**

A recurrent question has been how the emerging laboratory culture of Cross Pollination is related to the neighbouring territory of artistic creation. As CP was centered on the pre-production/pre-expressive phase of artistic practices, the production of performances at first seemed to be outside the scope of our research. However, within the laboratory work itself, performative moments and materials consistently began to appear as *mobile assemblages*, artistic material travelling from one performer to the other, from one context to another. Ultimately, we came to realise that the act of performing is, itself, a tactic inside the CP village laboratory, with the same weight as any of the other tactics alluded to above. Performance in CP, however, is not reified as an end result – it is part of our ongoing, entangled process of laboratory research<sup>26</sup>.

Furthermore, a preoccupation with the social dimension of the nomadic village, and a broadening of the potential political impact of CP's work has led to a range of new initiatives. Much of this work has drawn implicitly on the Third Theatre's legacy of barter, cultural action and horizontal exchange<sup>27</sup>. The dialogical tactics developed by CP allow for a particular androgogic approach to teaching and learning that we have begun to share with students at institutes of Higher Education across Europe<sup>28</sup>. CP members are also developing meaningful social engagement projects, both online and in situ, that are reaching out to communities on both a local and global level<sup>29</sup>.

Importantly, all of these activities have allowed us to stay active over the lockdown period generated by Covid-19; during the pandemic we realised that our nomadic village could also migrate into digital space and find temporary homes on online platforms such as Zoom. The limitations of social isolation became a part of our laboratory conditions, and our drive to stay with the trouble has allowed us to respond to the challenges that the current moment has placed in our path. More than ever, our ongoing research activities have allowed companionship to flourish at a time of great difficulty for independent artists across the globe.

As CP has developed, it has enabled us to reach out to other networks operating in a similar way. The spirit of the so-called Third Theatre and theatre laboratory traditions are beginning to resonate with a new generation of practitioners, including many from outside the theatre. Interdisci-



plinary artistic laboratory practices, such as those of CP, are gaining new ground through the development of networks, nomadic attitudes and villages, connecting the local to the transnational in a variety of different ways. The shift from production to practice speaks to a *zeitgeist*, to an emerging community of independent yet deeply entangled individuals, who can work together fluidly and in shifting constellations, who follow their practices and the immanent, oracular archi-textures that they construct. We would suggest that this shift foregrounds immanence as a methodological cornerstone and companionship as paradigm. We move away from an object/subject-oriented ontology towards a practice-oriented ontology in which bodies and objects unite through creative tactical assemblages, actualised, interrupted and re-territorialised in the moment again and again.

CP blossomed as a response to ISTA and the needs of contemporary artists and we recognise these beginnings. Our own, particular village laboratory lies in an imminent archipelago of autonomous artistry, grounded in knowledge exchange. It is within this smooth dialogical space that we map out an emerging practice-oriented ethos, staying with the trouble together, through companionship, *cum panis*.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Nordisk Teaterlaboratorium (NTL) is the umbrella organisation that comprises Odin Teatret and an extensive range of activities and groups, both in Denmark and internationally.
- <sup>2</sup> For more detailed discussions of The International School of Theatre Anthropology, please see Barba and Savarese (1990), Barba (1995; 2015).
- <sup>3</sup> The Odin Week is a yearly festival at Odin Teatret. The programme includes training, attending rehearsals, all Odin Teatret's performances and work demonstrations currently on repertoire, films, meetings with Eugenio Barba, lectures and discussions.
- <sup>4</sup> In the Collective Mind/ Cohabitation project, Odin Teatret opens the doors of their rehearsal room to around 20 selected participants to follow a creative process developed by the group. Participants are immersed in the Odin's delicate, elusive and at times repetitive and exhausting way of working.

- <sup>5</sup> A limited number of artists and theatre groups are invited to be in residence at NTL to work on autonomous research and projects, mostly resulting in productions. Periods of residence vary in length and can be spread over repeated stays. A fundamental condition is that all resident artists should carry out interventions in the community.
- <sup>6</sup> Radio Kootwijk Live (RKL) was an artistic research laboratory based in the monumental Radio Kootwijk building, and carried out four 3-day sessions and four concerts per year between 2009 and 2013. The artists of RKL were highly-skilled, classically-trained musicians, accompanied by lighting designers, directors, site-specific theatre makers, writers, dancers and, importantly, audience groups, working together on the question *what is a concert*. During the course of four years, the work with audience groups shifted towards sharing the musicians' artistic practices with professionals from outside the arts, with a focus on themes surrounding *work*.
- <sup>7</sup> The Bridge of Winds is an international theatre group and a pedagogical project initiated by Odin actress Iben Nagel Rasmussen in 1989. Group members (including La Selva) come from Europe, Latin America and China and meet yearly in different locations around the world to develop their training research, perform and collaborate with different communities through barbers. For an account of the group's work, see La Selva (2019).
- <sup>8</sup> International Federation for Theatre Research.
- <sup>9</sup> Theatre and Performance Research Association.
- <sup>10</sup> The meeting took place from 02 to 10/12/2017. List of participants: Adriana La Selva (BR/BE), Marije Nie (NL), Vilja Itkonen (FI), Gonzalo Alarcon (CH/BE), Arkadius Rogozinski (PO), Daniel Mroz (CAN), Marieke Breine (BE), Andrea Maciel Gomes (BR/UK), Alex Boyd (UK), Clara Solana (SP), Joaquim Carlos Bezerra de Carvalho (BR/DE), Simon Bronikowski (DE).
- <sup>11</sup> "The Wind Dance consists of three fairly simple steps, almost like the waltz, but in which the first step goes down towards the floor with bent knees, in order to take the impulse (sats) and jump in the second step. The third step works as a transition for a new cycle to begin, creating a ternary structure of movement in constant renewal. This exercise develops a light kind of energy, where the body of the actor is constantly taking off from the floor. Since it is a cyclic exercise, it should be done for a longer time; the objective is not the steps as such, but the 'doors' the steps open, allowing the actor to go beyond



tiredness and find hidden sources of energy [...]”. Available at: <<https://bridgeofwinds.com/training/>>. Accessed on: March 17, 2021.

- <sup>12</sup> Inspired by methods such as Lois Wever’s Long Table (<http://www.split-britches.com/long-table>), Bohm’s dialogues (2004 [1955]), Performing Back Scores (2015) and the work of Radio Kootwijk Live music laboratory (NL, 2009-2013).
- <sup>13</sup> For more information on NTL resident groups and artists, see: <<https://odinteatret.dk/nordisk-teaterlaboratorium/>>.
- <sup>14</sup> In tap technique, balance is used as a dynamic principle. While tapping, the dancer moves their weight out of balance to one side, gathering energy and then shifts and redirects this energy to another direction, so that the initial input of energy stays active throughout the dance (Nie, 2021).
- <sup>15</sup> In the out-of-balance exercise, “ [...] the body is brought out of balance and, just before it falls, moves to an opposite direction, so the energy that was supposed to end in a collision with the floor is thrown back into the space” (La Selva, 2019, p. 142).
- <sup>16</sup> Key activities included a Postgraduate knowledge exchange event at Queen Mary University of London (UK), organised by Andrea Maciel (April 2018), a sharing of collaborative papers at IFTR (2018), and a performance at De Koer, in Ghent (BE).
- <sup>17</sup> The meeting took place from 22 to 28/11/2018. List of participants: Adriana La Selva (BR/BE), Marije Nie (NL), Gonzalo Alarcon (CH/BE), Andrea Maciel (BR/UK), Alex Boyd (UK), Joaquim Carlos Bezerra de Carvalho (BR/DE), Patrick Campbell (UK), Sara Strand Holmsby (DK), Ramiro Silveira (BR/UK), Dina Abu Hamdan (JO/DK), Jonas De Rave (BE).
- <sup>18</sup> For more information on these concepts, please refer to Haraway (2016).
- <sup>19</sup> *Kecak*, is a form of Balinese Hindu dance and music drama developed in the 1930s in Bali, Indonesia.
- <sup>20</sup> Please refer to Silveira (2014).
- <sup>21</sup> The meeting took place from 04 to 08/02/2020. List of participants: Alex Boyd (UK), Andrea Maciel (BRA /UK), Marije Nie (NL), Adriana La Selva, (BRA / BE), Joaquim Bezerra (BRA / DE), Jonas de Rave (BE), Sara Holm Strandby (DK), Dina Abu Hamdan (JOR / DK), Simon Bronikowski (DE), Patrizia Marzioli (AR / DE), Christoph Falke (DE), Melina Scialon (BRA),



Emilie Lund (DK / DE), Theophile Choquet (FR), Lucas Duran (ARG), Linda Lyn Cunningham (IR).

- <sup>22</sup> The Parliament of Practices (PoP) meeting took place at NTL on 13/02/2020 and was initiated by La Selva and Nie. PoP has stayed active throughout this pandemic, with several online meetings investigating forms of dialogue and connecting a broad network of artists, cultural workers and researchers in alternative modes of being together through virtuality. For more info about PoP, please refer to: <[www.parliamentofpractices.space](http://www.parliamentofpractices.space)>. List of Participants: Adriana La Selva, performer, director, researcher, University of Gent / BE / BRA, Marije Nie, tap dancer, performer / NL, Dr. Alex Boyd, Daoist practitioner / UK, Dr. Andrea Maciel, dance artist / BRA / UK, Joaquim Bezerra, performer, costume designer / BRA / DE, Jonas de Rave, musician / BE, Simon Bronikowski, actor, Studio 7 / DE, Christoph Falke, director, Studio 7 / DE, Prof. dr. Melina Scialon, dance and performance artist, Unicamp / BRA, Emilie Lund, dance artist / DK / DE, Theophile Choquet, actor / FR, Lucas Duran, actor / ARG, Sara Holm Strandby, visual artist / DK, Dina Abu Hamdan, director / JOR / DK, Linda Lyn Cunningham, De Montfort University / IR, Ofer Ravid, choreographer / ISR / DK, Dr. Adam Ledger, University of Birmingham / UK, Daniel Jacewitz, theatre director, Teatr Brama / PL, Maciej Ratajczyk, Teatr Brama, actor / PL, Prof. Dr. Dariusz Kubinowski, University of Szczecin / PL, Dr. Jane Turner, Manchester Metropolitan University / UK, Dr. Patrick Campbell, Manchester Metropolitan University / UK, Marta Wryk, opera singer / PL / DE, Tomasz Prasqual, composer / PL / DE.
- <sup>23</sup> The Tree of Life is a diagram used in several mystical traditions, including Kabbalah. The different nodal points represent different emanations of divinity.
- <sup>24</sup> The *Wunderkammer* or Cabinet of Curiosities emerged in the sixteenth century, although more rudimentary collections had existed earlier and were precursors to museums.
- <sup>25</sup> One of the nodal points on the Tree of Life.
- <sup>26</sup> In 2020, CP developed a series of street parades and outdoor performances in collaboration with Third Theatre group Studio 7 in Schwerte (DE) and produced the online performance *La Petite Mort*, which mixed recorded videos and audience participation. These two concrete examples of performative research projects speak to the emerging ways in which CP's practice can encom-

pass live and recorded performance as outcomes of an ongoing research inquiry.

- <sup>27</sup> Barter is a tactic for performative exchange across cultures developed by Eugenio Barba and Odin Teatret. For further information on barter, please refer to Barba (1999).
- <sup>28</sup> Educational projects have been carried out by CP at institutions including Aarhus University (DK), East 15 Acting School (UK), Fontys Academy (NL). In March 2021, Marije Nie has developed a series of international online workshops within the frame of EUGLOH, an international university network, with a working group of PoP, Embracing the Unknown, entitled E-Spaces of Encounter, with Marta Wryk, Tapani Mononen, Vera Dickman and Christoph Falke.
- <sup>29</sup> CP members have initiated several performative social engagement projects, such as CP's CROP village project Wunderkammer (DK, 2021), initiated by Marije Nie and Gonzalo Alarcon, Sara Strandby's Nye Tide i Vinden (DK, 2020-2021), Andrea Maciel and Alex Boyd co-created NGO Intercultural Roots for Arts, Health and Social Change, and the Parliament of Practices' 1001 Fires project, with Marije Nie, Adriana La Selva, Linda Cunningham, Emilie Lund and Jenny Crissey.

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