

# Forms of authorship

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# On the Author Function in Dance History

## Tiivistelmä

Sovellan Michel Foucault'n 1969 ilmestyneessä esseessään "Qu'est-ce qu'un auteur?" ("Mikä on tekijä?") määrittelemiä tekijäfunktion neljää piirrettä hänen eksplisiittisesti kirjallisuuteen rajaamansa kontekstin ulkopuolelle. Ehdotan, että Foucault'n määritelmää voi laajentaa aikasidonnaiseen taiteeseen – tanssiin – jossa 'teoksen' aikaan saaminen vaatii yleensä monien yksilöiden yhteistyötä; jossa 'teoksen' identiteetti voi merkittävästi muuttua ajan kuluessa; ja jolla on myös hyvin erityinen suhde kirjoittamiseen.

## Abstract

Taking Michel Foucault's 1969 essay "Qu'est-ce qu'un auteur?" ("What Is an Author?") under scrutiny, I apply the four characteristics of the author function Foucault discusses outside his explicit frame of literature. I suggest Foucault's definitions can be expanded by looking at a time-based art – dance – where the creation of a 'work' usually involves several individuals, where the identity of a 'work' may significantly change over time, and which also has a particular relationship to writing.

## The Author Function

In my research, I have repeatedly returned to Michel Foucault's 1969 essay "Qu'est-ce qu'un auteur?" or "What Is an Author?".<sup>1</sup> Although Foucault limits his discussion to works of written fiction, much of what he has to say of the author function and the qualities attached to the name of the author ring true in our contemporary discourse on dance, where "the word work and the unity that it designates are probably as problematic as the status of the author's individuality."<sup>2</sup> However, although an author is intimately and inextricably tied to the notion of an opus or an œuvre created through the speech act of attribution and appropriation in which the author may or may not take part, Foucault does not really delve into the ontology of what this work is. Moreover, his self-imposed limits exclude certain kinds of authorship from his analysis that I would argue have repercussions for a time-based art – dance – where the creation of a

<sup>1</sup> I have here used the translation from Foucault 1998, 205-222 for quotations. However, see Foucault 2001, 817-849 for the 1969 debate version, which differs to some extent from the translated version.

<sup>2</sup> Foucault 1998, 208.

“work” usually involves several individuals, where the identity of a “work” may significantly change over time, and which also has a particular relationship to writing. As such, I hope to clarify why a discussion on authorship and the notion of “a work of art” in dance is timely and much needed.

Foucault designates four characteristics of the author function: the rapport of appropriation (whereby “author” designates (legal) liability for the act and certain (legal) rights to results of that act called “works”); attestation of reliability and truth-value (whereby “author” signifies creative authority and a degree of significance in the discourse); the rapport of attribution (whereby all the “works” by the same “author” are represented as sharing certain characteristics); and the position of the author (whereby “author” is a multiplicity of “selves” arising from the works as well as the historical circumstances of the individual designated as their author). Foucault’s actual interest, however, lies in how the “author” is a specific kind of a subject, ascribed with particular, historically changing roles that transcend the lifetime of the historical individual. He is interested in the conditions that allow this subject to arise in a particular discourse, what place can this subject occupy, how, and to what effect.

For me, this question of how does someone become an ‘author’ and what does that actually mean acquired particular relevance when discussing someone whose works no longer exist but still get discussed as of relevance to present practices – in other words, writing about a canonized historical figure in dance. Originally, I became interested in why everyone and their cousin seemed to ‘know’ this historical figure, in how they knew, and the nature of that knowing. Reading Foucault, I reformulated my epistemological interest in terms of the relationship of knowledge and power: who did this knowing benefit and why? This required further questions regarding the author function such as what kinds of author functions appeared in the discourse and why. It also drew attention to what was the work or *œuvre* being attributed and appropriated.

In *Dancing Genius*,<sup>3</sup> I identified three interlinked terms – virtuoso, star, and genius – used in early twentieth-century dance discourse to define art dance vis à vis other forms of dancing. My research focused on the male ballet dancer Vaslav Nijinsky, whose significance is nowadays related to his work as a choreographer – as someone who is an author by composing dance. To my surprise, I noted that in the public discourse of the early twentieth century, the focus was not on the choreographer at all but on the dancer.<sup>4</sup> As a dancer, Nijinsky was heralded not only as a virtuoso (someone with technically superior dancing skill) or as a star (the creator of the “art” in the danced act) but also as a genius (someone who has access to the transcendent and reveals this transcendent in their art). I ended up arguing that this latter notion, that of the genius, was intimately tied to the male body of the somewhat exotic Russian dancer by members of his audience seeking to ascertain their social status through an explicitly elitist specta-

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<sup>3</sup> Järvinen 2014.

<sup>4</sup> E.g. Flicht 1912, 10: “the dancer is more than an executant of the art, she is herself the medium of it. In the popular eye she has in fact always quite eclipsed the choreographer.”

torship of the disappearing act of dance. Ultimately, this resulted in a shift in the discourse from the dancer to the choreographer as the author figure of dance.

The (male) genius, in short, brought to the discourse of dance the author in Foucault's final sense of the term: someone transcending the historical individual. With a truly confounding logic typical to arguments about "natural" geniuses, the body of the genius was crucial to the notion of a dancing genius (the body being the instrument of his art), whilst the genius of the dancing genius survived in the absence of the body of the historical individual acclaimed as a genius. Outside of the dancing act, the performance, the body of the dancer was subjected to a search for the genius, which was irretrievable except in the fleeting moment of transcendence in performance. In contrast, the stardom of the star and the virtuosity of the virtuoso were corporeal, restricted to either the personality of the star or the skill of the virtuoso.<sup>5</sup>

Despite the specificity of this case study, the interplay between the always-already physical, gendered, and figurative dancing body and the terms used to place this body in the discourse of the art form constitute the corporeality of the dancer in ways that require attention and sensitivity to historical change from anyone speaking of or for dance today.<sup>6</sup> In the past century, authorship in dance and authority over dance as an art form has shifted from the performer of dance and the moment of dancing in performance to an individual ascribed with authority over the composition of choreography – understood as an abstraction, as the composition of the *œuvre* of dance – and choreographers are in the focus of dance criticism and dance research alike. In other words, research and review practices perpetuate the institution (of art) where the author function of a performance is assigned to a (usually absent) figure, the choreographer. Yet, with the choreographic genius, the epistemology of dance still follows the same logic as that of the dancing genius a century ago: art dance is an ephemeral act that, although it seemingly subverts the capitalist logic of ownership and the aesthetic of contemplation in favour of immediate experience, requires expertise through access to significant performances (an access that necessitates all the forms of capital Pierre Bourdieu has elaborated upon)<sup>7</sup> as well as a degree of intimacy with the author-figures in question. The choreographer's art merely lies in the repeatable abstraction called choreography rather than in the danced act of the dancing genius – the qualities of authorship attributed to these figures are very similar.

Neither have the requirements for success as an author(ity) in dance changed much in the past century. In art dance, men are privileged as authors and performers alike; ethnicity becomes a trademark and a stereotype; stars are stars outside the stage as well as on them; and virtuosic dance gets contested as "entertainment for the masses" – all factors that influence who is qualified as an author (and the singular is predominant, here) of dance and on what grounds.

<sup>5</sup> Järvinen 2014, esp. 88-91, 172.

<sup>6</sup> On words affecting bodies and vice versa, see Grosz 1994, especially x-xi; Hall 1996, 307-308; Hall 2002, 269-76. For the dance context, see esp. Gottschild 2003; Burt & Adair 2014.

<sup>7</sup> Bourdieu 1986.

But the historical record preceding the invention of the dancing genius reveals change is more than possible. As I am writing this, the controversy surrounding a statement by the celebrated British choreographer Akram Khan about how it would be unnecessary to have more female choreographers “for the sake of it” has, even if taken out of context and smearing the name of the choreographer, once again revealed a growing concern in the field about the role gender plays in the success of dance makers even as questions of ethnicity were bypassed.<sup>8</sup>

Through the historical record, the mechanisms that favour male stars, both dancers and choreographers, become less than self-evident: in the European art dance scene of a century ago boundaries between genres were less rigid than usually represented, and female authors and authorities were more common even in that most hegemonic of art dance forms, ballet.<sup>9</sup> After my research on Nijinsky, I would argue that the greatest legacy of the dancing genius lies in bringing to dance the discourses of fine art and processes of canonisation that gender art making and creativity in terms of transcendent male geniuses<sup>10</sup> which then enable a shift in dance authorship from the dancer to the choreographer and also change how “a work” is defined. Authorship in dance has a regulative function and hence, the author is more than simple shorthand for the group of individuals responsible for tonight’s spectacle: the author of dance points to the uses of power it obscures, and these uses of power also encompass dance research.

## Writing Dance

I became interested in how Nijinsky was defined as a dancer because of the scarcity of discussion on choreographic composition or, indeed, references to *any* authors of dance other than dancers outside of my Russian materials.<sup>11</sup> In fact, the idea that an external author (what we would call the choreographer but which in my sources would have been the ballet master or mistress) created a dance

<sup>8</sup> See e.g. Snow 2016a, 2016b, 2016c; cf. Amin et al. 2016.

<sup>9</sup> Although the canonised ballet masters of the so-called long nineteenth century are men (such as Marius Petipa, the French ballet master of the Imperial Russian companies), female dancers and ballet mistresses were frequently cited as authorities on their art form in the press and in books on dance. Especially prominent ballet mistresses were the Viennese Katti Lanner for the Empire theatre in London and the Algerian-born Mme Mariquita who choreographed for the Opéra Comique and other main stages of ballet in Paris (Gutsche-Miller 2010, esp. 40, 106). Like ballet masters composing in genres no longer considered of relevance to later developments of dance (such as the Italian Luigi Manzotti, whose name was almost synonymous with grand ballet), these women have not received their due in dance historiography. Outside the genre of ballet (itself very flexible as a term), numerous other forms of staged art dance paved the way for what became “modern” dance and those canonized figures of the early twentieth century. Koritz 1995, 110-111 notes this levelling of genres in G.B. Shaw’s writings but seems to think of it as an oddity. Contemporary sources (e.g. St.-Johnston 1906) thus give a very different perspective on the art of dance than the canonical narratives about European male ballet choreographers and American female pioneers of modernity.

<sup>10</sup> On the gender of geniuses see e.g. Battersby 1994; Citron 1995; Koritz 1995.

<sup>11</sup> Although Koritz (1995) gives a great overview of attitudes towards art dance in Britain, the local attitudes and the status of dancers elsewhere in Europe were very different. The step sequences and movement qualities of dancers and the composition and special effects of ballets received far more detailed attention in Russia, where ballet had close ties to the Imperial court, than in France, where ballet was performed extensively but had more bourgeois audiences (Järvinen 2014; Gutsche-Miller 2010; also Berlanstein 2001, esp. 1-8, 13-14, 23-26) on how the morality of the woman on stage that Koritz emphasises was very much a British issue.

that would be merely executed by the dancer did not seem relevant to critics or enthusiasts writing on dance. What obscures this lack of critical interest in choreography as composition is that beyond ballet, where discussion focused on the (usually female) star dancer or the special effects of the spectacle,<sup>12</sup> much of what was considered “art dancing” was solo work, where the design of the dance (often including elements of staging, costume and lighting as well as music, narrative, and what we would call choreography) was created by the dancer who performed on stage – and often was deliberately designed to seem spontaneous or improvised.<sup>13</sup> In these works, the name of the author figure coincided with the name of the performer or the principal star, and no difference was usually made between the figure of the dancer and the figure of the composer of the dance – one really could not tell the dancer from the dance.<sup>14</sup>

The term “choreographer” originally connoted someone writing a dance on paper,<sup>15</sup> but with the emergence of the ballet d’action in the late eighteenth century, and the consequent emphasis on pantomime and narrative that in notations had been auxiliary elements described in words, the written scenario (libretto) replaced notations as “the text” of dance. In nineteenth- and early twentieth-century France, dance authors’ rights fell under the dramatic arts (Société des Auteurs et Compositeurs Dramatiques, est. 1829) and the maître de ballet, no longer a writer-of-movement (choreographer), was rendered secondary to the textual and musical authors whose work could be documented in writing. Similarly, Russians generally accredited composers of the music and libretto with the authorship of works, although it was very common that the librettist was actually the ballet master.<sup>16</sup> As such, in relation to Foucault’s first point about the rapport of appropriation, the “authors” in terms of rights of authors (droit d’auteur) and of reaping profits (“copyright”) were not the dancers nor even the choreographers in the modern sense of the word for the simple reason that most legal systems required some kind of written documentation of the “work”, or a “story” – as Loïe Fuller found to her chagrin when she tried to sue a dancer she deemed her imitator.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Gutsche-Miller 2010, esp. 13-14.

<sup>13</sup> In discussing her methods, Isadora Duncan repeatedly emphasised inspiration, improvisation, and instinct: e.g. Duncan 1996, 58-60, 127-128; Duncan 1977, especially 52-53. These qualities were seen as typically ‘feminine’ (e.g. Malnig 1999, 40-44) and also associated with children and savages. Both contemporary advocates and dance researchers have emphasised that Duncan’s performances only *seemed* spontaneous: Flicht 1912, 105-108; Kinney & Kinney s.a., 241-245; Daly 1994, 18.

<sup>14</sup> See e.g. Flicht 1912, 10. As Franko 2011, 329 notes, for Yeats, ‘dance’ means ‘motion’ not ‘choreography’.

<sup>15</sup> E.g. Louppe 1994, 14.

<sup>16</sup> *The Yearbook of the Imperial Theatres* attributes one of Fokine’s first triumphs as a choreographer, *Le Pavillon d’Armide*, in the following manner: “Павильон Армиды. Балетъ-пантомима въ 3 карт., соч. А. Бенуа, музыка Н. Н. Черепнина.” I.e. “Armida’s pavilion. Ballet-pantomime in 3 tabl[eaux], lib[retto]. by A. Benois, music by N.N. Cherepnin.” *Ezhгодnik Imperatorskikh Teatrov 1907–1908*, ii:131. At first, the programmes of the Ballets Russes followed this pattern as well, with the name of the ballet master next to the list of the troupe, but the more disgruntled Fokine became with the company, the more prominent his name became. See *Saison Russe (opéra & ballet) donnée au Théâtre du Chatelet 1909*; cf. *Programme officiel des Ballets Russes 1912*.

<sup>17</sup> Kraut 2016, 43-81.

This emphasis on writing draws attention to the limits of Foucault's model as well: in dance, notation was originally a tool for composing as well as for distributing dances – the vast majority of dance notations were of social dances sold by their authors, the dancing masters, for economic and social capital.<sup>18</sup> As Linda Tomko has pointed out,

A Foucaultian analysis would immediately query and recognize the disciplining force, which would be mobilized by prescriptive etiquette literature, choreographic scores, and the bodily practice of ballroom dancing that puts them into play. But the gaps in dance notation scores, the “absences” or “incompleteness” in the application of the notation system, may also be seen to create room for self-fashioning [- and -] the actualizing of a dance notation score points to the fluidity and plural readings possible[.]<sup>19</sup>

Notations, in this sense, are neither the dance nor the choreography in the modern sense of the word, but simplified abstractions of bodies and their movements in time and space. Although their authors can be the dancing masters, who thereby would fit the rapport of appropriation as Foucault defines it, in practice, this is no longer the case: no universally accepted and legible notation for dance exists in the manner of musical notation and both the systematic notation of dance and the ability to read notations require specialist training.

Mark Franko argues that this lack of a universal notation system is due, in part, to twentieth-century emphasis on dance's ephemerality: with the increasing stress placed on dance as existing only at the moment of performance, notation has become a tool for documenting and preserving the “work” post factum, eroding even the possibility to discuss notation as a tool for composition.<sup>20</sup> Yet, when the function of notation shifted from a guarantee of the rights of the author or a saleable product to preservation of a choreographic work (as with Balanchine), the twentieth century has actually seen a resurrection of notation systems –labanotation and Benesh movement notation being the two most widespread of these – and a different kind of interest in the relationship of dance and writing. Artists such as Deborah Hay, Trisha Brown, Merce Cunningham, and William Forsythe have all explored (idiosyncratic) notation and writing in their artistic practice and as artistic practice, teasing out connections between dance and text, composition and notation, the movement involved in writing, and the processes of signification therein.<sup>21</sup> In many ways, their work finds a parallel in the graphic notation systems used in the composition of contemporary art music where the

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<sup>18</sup> On various dance notation systems, see Guest 1989. In passing, Louppe 1994, 24-28 connects the desire to write dance with colonialist desire to master space, a point elaborated by Lepecki 2006.

<sup>19</sup> Tomko 1999, 3.

<sup>20</sup> Franko 2011, 328-329. Composition is the one use of choreographic notation of which there is evidence in Nijinsky's hand (see Guest & Jeschke 1991, 8-9) and which he does not mention in what remains his most comprehensive statement regarding his notation system, Peyser 1916.

<sup>21</sup> E.g. Louppe 1994.

notation sometimes becomes an art object in and of itself.<sup>22</sup> However, the relationship of dance and text only serves to emphasise how thinking of the author function in dance requires provisos about the nature of dance works as far less fixed than works of literature.

## Ephemerality, Authorship, and Authority

The relative insignificance of notation for dance as an art form is only one reason why Foucault's analysis of authorship is difficult to apply to dance. In comparison to literature, dance is ephemeral and unstable: "a work" is, in effect, a fiction constituted by a title re-used when performances retain sufficient similarity, including names of authors or even vaguer genealogies ("choreography after Petipa"). Yet, "Qu'est ce qu'un auteur?" helped me to question who, in fact, were responsible of constituting the work and its authorship.

At the turn of the twentieth century, "choreography" as we understand it was not as important for reviews or for books on dance as was the general impression given by the dancer of qualities considered "new" or "modern" – ephemerality, flight, ease of movement, grace, and so on. Often, the true focus lay in the audience member's *experience* of the dance, or what they remembered of the dance at the time of writing, and here, the emphasis often focused on Foucault's second and third points: the attestation of reliability and truth-value, and the rapport of attribution. Descriptions of the free-form dancers, many of them soloists, say very little of dance techniques used, although some authors made comparisons between dancers they had seen.<sup>23</sup> Genre – which dance tradition these dancers were seen as representing – was fluid, as flamenco, ballet, waltz, and various free-form dances were all lumped under the notion of "modern dance".<sup>24</sup> Lines between social and art dance were porous: the most famous ballet dancers of the long nineteenth century from Taglioni to Nijinsky taught social dancing;<sup>25</sup> and in theatrical repertoires social dance demonstrations, variety theatre spectacles, pageants, and folk dancing went side by side with ballet and "free-form" performances as well as art dance styles few but historians nowadays know, such as skirt dancing. Also professionalism was less rigid: some of the leading innovators in art dance had little dance training.<sup>26</sup>

Politically, much of this "art" of dance was in support of bourgeois ideals of health, race, and morality, and the dances of Fuller, Duncan, and others were

<sup>22</sup> See e.g. Ashwal et al. no date.

<sup>23</sup> Although early twentieth-century dance reviews were, by today's standards, exceedingly long, much of what was said regarded interpretation of narrative rather than dance technique or choreographic composition. Isadora Duncan's "barefoot" dance was certainly a point commented upon, but it is notable that critics vexed eloquent on dancers much less well known today: see e.g. Flicht 1912, 71-120.

<sup>24</sup> As in Flicht 1912; Caffin & Caffin 1912.

<sup>25</sup> Engelhardt 2009, esp. 3-4, 30; Nijinska 1992, *passim.*, esp. 173.

<sup>26</sup> E.g. Fuller 1913 mentions none.

mostly not something radical and shocking to contemporary discourse.<sup>27</sup> Overall, in what was said of dancing, very little dealt with what we would call choreography (composition, form, and so on); and until the First World War, even the idea that step sequences or choreographic features should remain the same from one performance to the next seems to have been relatively insignificant – on the contrary, dance was lauded precisely as an art of the moment:

Nothing is as close to a dream. The libretto, here, is nothing and the music often of little matter. It is the garden of bodies, in the flower of their youth. All is smoke; all is the illusion of a moment. The art of pleasing, the dream of spring, the bygone rose: and picked, it is already gone.<sup>28</sup>

This ephemeral, constantly changing and evanescent quality of dance was precisely what was understood as its modernity – modernity being something fleeting and impossible to pin down, as Baudelaire had famously pointed out.<sup>29</sup> Historical dances (whether “ancient” dances or old ballets) were reimagined and reinvented rather than reconstructed or preserved. This attitude towards former “masterworks” is exemplified in the words of Marius Petipa, the French ballet master of Imperial Russian fame:

The talented balletmaster, reviving earlier ballets, will create dances in accordance with his own fantasy, his talent and the tastes of the public of his own time, and not come to expend his time and effort copying what was done by others long before. We note that in *La Fille mal gardée* Mr Taglioni changed all the previous dances, and Mr Hertel composed new music, and so too do I, without exception, every time I revive an old ballet. And then, each dancer of course performs these dances depending on her manner and capabilities.<sup>30</sup>

The notion that ballet was “of course” recomposed every time it was staged anew or with new star dancers explains the continuing interest of Russian dance critics and audiences for what appears, in writing, a limited repertory of the “same” works. *Sleeping Beauty* ran for over two hundred times in the first ten

<sup>27</sup> In early twentieth-century texts, the laudable qualities of art dancing were often opposed to the racially “unsanitary” popular ragtime dances with syncopated rhythms and twisted bodies (e.g. Caffin & Caffin 1912, esp. 255-279; Duncan 1996, 244) and any signs of modernization are excluded from this “modern” dance – although modern life and modernization were, as e.g. Sarah Gutsche-Miller 2010, 254-258, 261, 268-273 has shown, exceedingly common on variety stages. Similarly, dancing was advocated as healthy exercise for girls, in lieu of sports (see Bloomfield 2007, esp. 684); and the free-form dancers’ flowing tunics rested on the conservative opinion of mostly male paediatricians who opposed the corset as hindering female reproduction and encouraging women to work outside the domestic sphere (Steele 2001, 59-85, 137-141).

<sup>28</sup> “Rien n’est si près du rêve. Le texte, ici, n’est rien; et la musique, souvent peu de chose. C’est le jardin des corps, en fleurs de leur jeunesse. Tout est fumée, tout est le mirage d’un instant. Art du plaisir, songe du printemps, rose qui passe: et cueillie, elle est déjà passée.” “Scantrel” 1911, 388.

<sup>29</sup> Fuller 1913; Allan [1908]; Duncan 1996. See e.g. Frisby 1985, 13-20, 33-37, 40-46 on timeless modernity, also 46-50, 57 fragmentation and 62-63 ephemerality as signs of modernity.

<sup>30</sup> Quoted in Wiley 1985, 2, see also xi-xii, 1-3.

years since its premiere in 1890 in a theatre where four out of five ballet performances were by subscription only. In principle, this meant that the same people would see the same dances over and over again, even if in reality, seats were sold on or given to friends, and speculation in tickets was rife.<sup>31</sup> Although changes in the staging of a particular work had to do with the rapid development of stage effects, costumes, and theatre technology,<sup>32</sup> the longevity of the “same” dance works also speaks to the prestige of the Imperial company, which guaranteed attention not given to ballets elsewhere in Europe. In fact, Russian critics took it as a sign of incompetence and disinterest when their French colleagues failed to review different castings of works by the Ballets Russes company.<sup>33</sup>

Contemporary admiration for total works of art, whether in the Wagnerian sense of one genius leading the production or in the more traditional sense of all elements of a staged production working harmoniously together, added to the relative irrelevance of discussion of one element – dancing – except when that element was seen as incongruous, whether because it was ‘not dancing’ in some sense or because dancing was seen as improper in conjunction with particular elements of the production, usually musical scores deemed “symphonic”.<sup>34</sup> As long as the choreographer was not considered the sole authority over the dance spectacle (a Wagnerian genius) and as long as what exactly dancers danced could significantly change from one performance to the next, the notion of “a work” remained quite flexible and fluid.<sup>35</sup>

The shift of authorship of a work from the performer to the author figure called choreographer required stabilisation and restriction of dancers’ free improvisation, making dance more about *choreography*, understood as a definite and invariable set of movements, actions, steps, and even expressions. This shift took place in the second and third decades of the twentieth century, a time when more dance began to be documented in moving images, and when a new generation of dance critics and an audience sought to establish themselves as experts of this modern art form. In this development, parallels can be seen with how musical improvisation well-nigh disappeared from concert practice in the second half of the nineteenth century, or how in theatre, directors became guardians of the dramatist’s intention.<sup>36</sup>

Yet, it is only with the gradual overthrow of the ideal of the total work of art and the emergence of formalism whereby each art should strive for its particular (sensory) essence that authorship shifts fully to the choreographer as dance critics strive to explain how the abstract message of the choreography is conveyed

<sup>31</sup> Frame 2000, 66-70.

<sup>32</sup> See Brewster & Jacobs 1997, esp. 7, also 142-158.

<sup>33</sup> Järvinen 2014, 235.

<sup>34</sup> E.g. of the former: St.-Johnston 1906, 130-131 on Fuller; e.g. of the latter: Finck 1916 on Duncan.

<sup>35</sup> Unlike often represented (e.g. Koritz 1995, 119-134) the first Wagnerian dance author in the Ballets Russes was not Fokine but Nijinsky (Koritz, too, cites articles about Nijinsky’s choreographies, not Fokine’s) whose works not only utilised his existing fame as the dancing genius but were sufficiently different aesthetically to require such rethinking of authorship of the total work of art. The first interview of Fokine outside of Russia that I have found is Chavance 1912, at which point Nijinsky had already been established as a new kind of choreographic author (e.g. “De la peinture à la danse” 1912).

<sup>36</sup> Lehmann & Ericsson 1998, especially 70-72, 76-77; Brown 1992, esp. 113; Citron 1995, esp. 27.

to the audiences.<sup>37</sup> The emergence of the choreographic author, in other words, was intimately intertwined with abstraction – non-narrative dance – as an aesthetic goal and dance critics’ and theorists’ need to explain the importance of art dance as something other than a narrative form. In practice, this led to what Kirsi Monni has called the idealist model of authorship in dance,<sup>38</sup> where the choreographer composes an abstract “ideal” of the work and the dancers repeatedly fail to execute this ideal composition in their physical practice. In this model, the choreographer is conceived as the author of “the work” that has no other physical, material form than the dancers’ imperfect execution; and the canon of dance is the history of these ideal forms and their authors, the choreographers.

But the shift from choreography as something constantly styled to current fashion to choreography as a specific composition is also evident in how early twentieth-century dance makers changed the position of the author (Foucault’s fourth point) by writing of themselves as authors of dance. Whereas Loïe Fuller’s 1913 autobiography still engages with the concerns of a theatrical entrepreneur seeking to attest her originality and significance in spite of prevalence of copies, the autobiographies of Maud Allan (published in 1908) or Isadora Duncan (published in 1927) represent any similarity in the work of others as proof of their importance as artists, seeing copiers as their pupils rather than as thieves.<sup>39</sup> Duncan and Allan also discuss far more their aesthetic principles, pedagogical ideas, and the general importance of their art form, dance, to the well-being of humankind than Fuller does – seeking therefore to assert their significance as more than makers of individual works.

Although few of these early figures write of compositional principles (or write of them only very metaphorically), their understanding of writing (and of interviews in the press) as a means of attesting themselves as significant figures for their art form shifted the focus of art from specific articulations on stage (performance) to authorship as a position one can take vis à vis art – the author function. Together with the attestation that the author stipulates a kind of truth (Foucault’s second point), this self-fashioning of importance for one’s art form brought those dance makers articulating their art in writing (as opposed to performance) far closer to author-figures in other art forms than, say, dance notation ever could. These authors of text were concerned with their legacy beyond performance (Foucault’s fourth point), and the role of factual texts by authors on their art draws attention to how much attribution of authorship and canonisation of particular authors has relied upon text rather than performance.

This, of course, blurs the neat lines between fictional and factual text and further emphasises the strangeness of Foucault’s limitation of factual authors (including himself) outside his discussion on the author function. As Antoine Compagnon has argued, the theory of the “death of the author” ignores the specific experience of the author as a creative individual in favour of the read-

<sup>37</sup> E.g. Morris 2004, esp. 170-172; Kunst 2003, 62.

<sup>38</sup> Monni 2007, 39-43.

<sup>39</sup> See Krauss 1988, 160-168 on the notion of the copy as the underlying condition of ‘the original’.

er,<sup>40</sup> and these examples of writing by self-proclaimed important dance authors point to the ties between authorial articulations and canonisation in the dance discourse. In dance research, and especially dance history, the authority over what the work once was is predominantly written authority, given to those describing, representing, documenting this disappearing performance – usually dance critics, historians, and scholars, who frequently quote the statements of artists but also interpret what these quotes signify. With more contemporary forms, this focus on the reader position has led to tensions between dance makers and those writing of performances, but since the 1990s, the emergence of artist-scholars and practice-led research in the arts has again shifted the focus of research towards the artists' self-fashioning as authors and authorities on dance.

## Beyond the Author Function?

Towards the end of the English translation of Foucault's article, Foucault imagines a future in which the author function has disappeared, and what defines fiction is what might be called experience of fictionality:

We would no longer hear the questions that have been rehashed for so long: Who really spoke? Is it really he and not someone else? With what authenticity or originality? And what part of his deepest self did he express in his discourse? Instead, there would be other questions, like these: What are the modes of existence of this discourse? Where has it been used, how can it circulate, and who can appropriate it for himself? What are the places in it where there is room for possible subjects? Who can assume these various subject functions? And behind all these questions, we would hear hardly anything but the stirring of an indifference: What difference does it make who is speaking?<sup>41</sup>

From today's perspective, the rhetoric Foucault uses here seems a little old-fashioned, but his questions are useful and pertinent: what would happen to dance as a discipline if, instead of speaking of "choreographers" and "dancers" we sought out other kinds of subject positions and what could be their genealogies?

Although the kind of formalism where a dance work was discussed as sequences of particular steps was fortunately short-lived, philosophers of dance seeking to understand what a work or its author(s) can be have struggled to propose more epistemologically sound theories than those resting on the choreographer as an author-figure, whose "truth" (Foucault's second point) asserts the work to be the same from one performance to the next. This, I would say, is because the notion of *œuvre* functions within the specific institution called "art", and, as Francis Sparshott notes, definitions of what qualifies as art tend

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<sup>40</sup> Compagnon 2012.

<sup>41</sup> Foucault 1998, 222.

to rely on distinguishing this art from what is not art.<sup>42</sup> However, Sparshott's own definition is limited by the manner in which his understanding of the identity of a work rests on the assumption that the author of the dance is the choreographer.<sup>43</sup> Importantly, the qualia Sparshott uses to define "art" exclude the kind of art dance increasingly common in contemporary dance: works that rely on audience participation, on the movements of non-professional dancing bodies, a virtuosity of small gestures and of being present.

Foucault's desire to see a discourse without the author figure seems particularly poignant for these kinds of practice and for dance makers eschewing the association of the title "choreographer" with composer of specific step sequences. In discussing the idealist model of authorship, Monni argues that this manner of understanding dance is increasingly becoming obsolete as choreographers become facilitators of dancers' practice and choreography is no longer something striving for similarity between different performances.<sup>44</sup> Indeed, in dance, the rise of collective authorship, and improvisational and citational practices<sup>45</sup> point attention to Foucault's idea that the author (here, the choreographer) is a function for grouping things together in order to make sense of the world. In a somewhat semantic move, Frédéric Pouillaude suggests relinquishing the notion of *œuvre* (the work) altogether in favour of material (*matière*) in art forms like dance that are temporal and do not produce a "fixed" object.<sup>46</sup> Yet, Pouillaude himself utilises the name of the choreographic author as a shorthand for these particular materialities without questioning Foucault's third and fourth clauses of the author function: that the "author" designates a certain continuum of characteristics appropriate to the kind of discourse they are seen as belonging to; and that these characteristics are one aspect of the "selves" created by and for this "author" both through their work and in addition to it.

In fact, any attempts at discussing examples of particular practices in art dance reveal the significance of Foucault's third point about the author as rapport of attribution, a short-hand for a particular set of aesthetic qualia and expectations from art works with which we make sense of the complexity of the field and the discourse. For example, many of Deborah Hay's pieces have a relationship to "the work" where the author merely provides a set of conditions for the performer to imagine and express their understanding of what the work is or might be. In performance, the choreography is then what the dancer dances into existence, the various dances thus created connected into "the same work" by the name of the piece that connotes a set of conditions created by the author figure (the choreographer), such as a notation as interpreted after an intensive training pe-

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<sup>42</sup> Sparshott 1995, esp. 38-39.

<sup>43</sup> Sparshott 1995, 406-419 cf. 374-396.

<sup>44</sup> Monni 2007; also Monni 2016.

<sup>45</sup> See e.g. Lilja 2015, 101-102; Pouillaude 2009, 370-374; Lepecki 2010.

<sup>46</sup> Pouillaude 2009, esp. 346-349.

riod with the choreographer.<sup>47</sup> This kind of authorship recalls not so much the written fictions of Foucault as the fictions of table top or live action role playing games where the author function is attributed to the designers (usually plural) not of something stable but a universe of possibilities that can be repeatable, have aesthetic aspirations, convey complex meanings and affective responses, and even take place in the context of institutionalised art such as a theatre or a gallery space.<sup>48</sup>

Of course, this is to again mess with the notion of “art”. If aesthetic qualia appear too elitist to exclude games altogether from the category of “art”, recourse can and will be taken to notions of professional training traditions, much in the manner that early twentieth-century defenders of art dance defined certain variety theatre practitioners or social dancing as the not-art of that day. But it is precisely in such definitions of what qualifies as art and who qualifies as an artist-author that Foucault’s desire to see a discourse without authors reveals its revolutionary power: to imagine art without artists or, to extend Foucault’s thesis outside of fictional text, research without researchers, is to raise the issue of capital.

Foucault’s first two points about legal rights and liabilities and the attestation of reliability draw attention to how authorship is increasingly about immaterial rights, about who takes credit and who gets paid. Hence, asking who acquires something from the attribution of authorship quickly draws attention to the economics of so-called creative economies where all but the most popular authors struggle to make ends meet. As noted, Foucault’s third point about the rapport of attribution, in contrast, draws attention to how “author” is convenient shorthand for finding a particular kind of dance (a product) in a sea of possibilities (a market) – in other words, an author as having “signature style”.<sup>49</sup> To an extent, famous authors of art dance have already acquired one of the main characteristics of a star in that audiences go see dance authors rather than particular pieces: it matters more what authorial name is associated with a particular piece than what that piece is.<sup>50</sup> This, then again, recalls Foucault’s fourth point about authors construed through and in excess of the work of art – the imagined personality of the author. The authors and works bring me to my last critique of Foucault, the question about canons.

<sup>47</sup> Between 1998-2012, Hay’s Solo Performance Commissioning Project included an eleven-day intensive residency for twenty dance makers training her most recent solo piece. The main condition of the project was that the participants raise all the funds for the commissioning fee and residency expenses through donations and grants from their community. Michele Steinwald (2012) sees this funding structure as one of the feminist organizational principles that she sees as crucial to understanding Hay’s practice.

<sup>48</sup> Stenros 2010, esp. 305-306; also Jara 2012, esp. 42 on different degrees of authorship in role playing games. The notion of what, then, are the limits of “a work” that is fundamentally serial or, in cases such as *Star Trek* or *Star Wars* (e.g. Wilbur 2016; Barsanti 2016), extensively franchised, raise questions about corporations (e.g. Disney) as authors and the tenuous connections between the author figure and their legal rights that Foucault could not have dreamed about.

<sup>49</sup> A signature style is the combination of those characteristics that distinguish an artist in terms of creativity, originality, and authenticity. See e.g. Grafenauer 2010 on the politics of signature.

<sup>50</sup> DeCordova 2001, esp. 9-12, 23-24, 112-114 on star personas; Koritz 1995, on how audiences go to see stars as stars, regardless of what piece they are performing; Järvinen 2014, 165-166 on Nijinsky as such a star.

## Canons of Art

Because Foucault's analysis of the author function focuses on text, he takes for granted that the author is an author of *lasting* works of art, works that can constantly be reinterpreted and re-evaluated in this discourse called "art" as aesthetic preferences change.<sup>51</sup> "Works" are fundamental to the evaluation of who merits being called an "author", and this evaluation, as Foucault points out, is a complex and constant process, even if, as for example Tia DeNora has pointed out, lists of important authors or canons of art are represented as unchanging and eternally true.<sup>52</sup> In art dance, the repertorial canon – works performed – overlaps with the historical canon – works considered "worthwhile" in the history of the art form, names taught as significant for students and, to a large degree, researched in dance scholarship. Research is nowadays crucial to canonisation of contemporary dance works and authors: dance researchers not only rely on marketing materials by production companies (and hence, good relations with those who control access to such materials) and publish about already well-known authors on the international festival circuit but also dance makers, regardless of their academic status or interests, increasingly refer to what they do as being "research". In part, this may be due to the new paradigms of practice-led academic work and artistic research<sup>53</sup> as well as neoliberalist inflation in the pressure to publish.<sup>54</sup>

Yet, because the past of dance is written into a history as a canon, a set of "masterworks" new generations should know as of particular importance, there is a constant tension between the self-evident changing that takes place in any work that remains in or is resurrected for the repertory and the need for longevity and a degree of "the same" in works in order for them to be useful as a measuring-stick for "newness" or "significance" of emerging authors' practice. In ballet, this first served to emphasise the position of the libretto and the musical composition as something referenced by audiences and critics alike to create an identity of what "a work" signified. Hence, *Giselle*, which originally premiered in Paris in 1841, is considered "the same work" today, although major changes have taken place even in these most stable elements – the music and the plot – of the spectacle.<sup>55</sup> Thinking of *Giselle* certainly raises the question whether it is very precise to both question what we do mean by "a work" and to use the term – to speak of "works" of dance, just as it is somewhat questionable to reflect upon the author function by giving examples of names of authors.

Yet, although we are stuck with notions like "author" and "work" because we use them to make sense of the complexity of the discourse of art (and of research), this does not mean we should not be critically aware of what happens in the process of designating something as "a work" by "an author" or when we then group these entities into "genres", "styles", "histories", and "canons".

<sup>51</sup> Murray 1989, 6-7.

<sup>52</sup> DeNora 1995, 4-8, 186–191.

<sup>53</sup> See e.g. Lilja 2015.

<sup>54</sup> See e.g. Mountz et al. [2015].

<sup>55</sup> See Ries 1979 for the changed plot; Smith 2000 for the musical score(s); Pouillade 2009, 268-270 on attribution. On what constitutes a 'work', see e.g. Fisher 2003, esp. 3-6; Thomas 2004.

For example, as Beth Genné has pointed out, notions like “classical ballet” and “modern dance” are curious artefacts of dance history, where works created within a very short timeframe are categorized as belonging to the opposing categories of “classical” (Marius Petipa) and “modern” (Isadora Duncan), giving the first the impression of having always been there and the latter the guise of outstanding newness.<sup>56</sup> The issues of canonicity only exacerbate once lines get drawn between “art” and “popular” and “social” forms of dance.<sup>57</sup> In other words, lists of authors and works in a dance canon are never neutral but always serve some kind of political and pedagogical agenda; and one characteristic of works that get canonised tends to be that they can be fitted into the changes in aesthetics that the canon serves – in other words, that the works can be interpreted differently by new dance makers and audiences alike.

This is to say that the complexities of what a work is in dance are only challenging if the institution of art is defined through the fixity of works and their authors. One means for responding to Foucault’s desire for a new kind of discourse might be to shift attention to different subjects – to discuss dancers or pedagogical genealogies rather than works and authors. For the most part, dancers’ experiences and their everyday rehearsal practices are underrepresented in the historical discourse of the art form. The dancers who published works on their art in the early twentieth century are nowadays discussed as *choreographic* creators, their works represented as evidence of unprecedented innovation and compositional principles as well as somehow essentially unchanging even over a career spanning several decades. The focus on the choreographic author has obscured the concrete bodies of dancers in the performing art by relegating the dancer into the role of executor of someone else’s authorship, a medium rather than a creative and corporeal individual. This is in part why, in *Dancing Genius*, I focused on the dancer and sought examples of training and rehearsal practices, beliefs about diet and health, touring schedules, and other everyday concerns that moulded the dancer’s professional and public figure.

## Some Conclusions

Because Foucault explicitly focuses on literature and excludes numerous forms of text from his theory of authorship, “Qu’est-ce que un auteur?” does not quite work as a template for discussing contemporary (or even historical) dance, at least not without major provisos having to do with ontological differences between the art forms and the nature of fact versus fiction. Yes, art dance as physical activity is founded on structured techniques (improvisation being one type of these structured techniques as improvisation is a skill that has to be learned and different kinds of improvisation techniques produce very different kinds of improvised dances); art dance usually produces something that then can be defined as ‘a work’ and performed to an audience in the context of art (within the

<sup>56</sup> Genné 2000. Here, too, recent research on variety stage works has shown trends in, for example, ‘Greek’ dancers prior to Duncan: Naerebout 2010.

<sup>57</sup> Dodds 2011, 18-21.

institution of art). Yet, this art dance does not have the same relationship to technique and studio work as literature has to writing as a technique or as a system, simply because published text remains fixed to an extent art dance never is – a dancer dances differently each time, no matter whether the “work” is based on a “fixed” notion of a choreographer’s idea, a developing score that changes through the practice of performing it, an improvisational score, or no score at all.

Hence, the subject of the discourse of dance is never simply “the author” who creates a “work” but always involves “a dancer” who may or may not be one of the “selves” Foucault writes about as the fourth characteristic of the author function. For the past century, this “dancer” has also been the subject whose experience is silenced far more than the “author” assigned with creativity, the “choreographer”, and silencing has to do with the undervaluation of dance as labour, and with the myth that dance itself is a *silent* art form.<sup>58</sup> Nevertheless, the manner in which Foucault stresses the complex process that creates the “author” in a discourse and the uses of power that attribution of authorship requires has drawn my interest to, for example, the critics whose opinions are often constitutive of how a particular historical “work” gets remembered, even if, in a performing art, critical opinion tends to focus around the first performance and often lacks analytical depth.

I am anything but convinced I have here managed more than a preliminary foray into a much-needed discussion on dance authorship. With the emergence of practice-based or artistic research, dancers have had the chance to bring their perspective on artistic creation, interaction, skill, and experience of dancing into academic discussion on the art form, offering a very different view to art dance as labour and as creative process than the perspectives of the connoisseur and the choreographic author hegemonic in dance research. Speaking as a historian, these processes and ways of thinking about and in dance have influenced my perspective on what signifies in documents of past dance and why. But the perspective of the dance maker who functions as the performer, composer, producer, and manager of their authorship is even more pertinent for the field of contemporary dance, where collaborative practices of devising and co-creation are more prevalent than in the fields of ballet or (American) modern dance. Authorship that goes beyond the singular subject is also particularly important for politically and socially conscious artists and collectives, especially those working with non-professionals, minorities and subaltern groups.<sup>59</sup> Hopefully, these forms of collaborative and collective authorship, where it most certainly does matter

<sup>58</sup> Again, Nijinsky is an excellent example: as a celebrity figure, he gave numerous interviews but these were actively silenced in historiography to turn him into a true genius that escapes words alike his silent art form. The silent audience of art dance, their rapt attention on the silent bodies dancing on stage, neatly separates dance that was art from danced entertainment or social activity, aligning theatrical dance with bourgeois notions about disciplined art. Järvinen 2014, esp. 173-174. Frédéric Pouillaude 2009, 228-229 connects this muteness specifically to the mechanical, the virtuosity in ballet prior to Noverre and the expressivity of the ballet d’action (second half of the eighteenth century). I would say that silence as a characteristic of dance emerges to separate art dance from other (theatrical) forms of movement, and that since the 1990s, dancers who speak in performance have become a staple of contemporary dance, especially the kind of contemporary dance that seeks to “research” particular topics.

<sup>59</sup> See e.g. Kuppers 2010; Rossen 2015 on Forklift Danceworks.

who is speaking, also work a change in the discourse of art dance. By this, I do not mean to disparage the author called the choreographer but to add new voices, often silenced: the differently abled, gendered, and ethnic bodies, the sweating, affective, and speaking bodies that disturb the privileged gatekeepers of the hegemony and aesthetic ideals still too often limited to sylphs in white tulle.

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Teemu Paavolainen



# Textures of Theatricality: Three Approaches from Canonical Theatre Directors

## Tiivistelmä

Artikkeli esittelee kolme “teatterillisuuden” mallia ja purkaa niiden dramaturgiaa “tekstuurin” käsitteellä: kuva (syvä tai litteä, esimerkkeinä Richard Wagner ja Georg Fuchs), lava (esiintymiselle ja esitetyn kritiikille, esimerkkeinä Vsevolod Meyerhold ja Bertolt Brecht) ja nuora (Peter Brookin metafora “välittömälle” teatterille, joka tasapainoilee kuvan ja lavan kenties “pyhien” ja “karkeiden” pyrkimysten välillä). Mainitun kaltaisista auktoriteeteista huolimatta tekijyyden esitetään aina kehkeytyvän tekemisen monikollisissa prosesseissa: rakentamisen tai artikulaation sijaan tekstuuri sen metaforana kuvaa toisiinsa kietoutuvien toimintalinjojen rihmastollisuutta. Näin myös esitettyjen mallien erityinen teatterillisuus nousee osin siitä, miten niiden tekstuurit tiheydessään tai väljyydessään erottautuvat historiallisesti umpeen kutoutuneista (oopperan, kirjallisuuden, teatterin tai yhteiskunnan) performatiivisista normeista.

## Abstract

The article argues for a “textural” understanding of “theatricality,” across three fairly distinct models: *the image* – deep or shallow, as for Richard Wagner and Georg Fuchs; *the platform* – of skill or tension, as for Vsevolod Meyerhold and Bertolt Brecht; and *the tightrope* – this is Peter Brook’s metaphor for a kind of theatrical immediacy that navigates between the “holy” and “rough” aspirations of the above. Beyond such central authorities, authorship itself is seen as woven within the work; ‘texture,’ throughout, implies a dramaturgy of interweaving strands or processes, as opposed to the assemblage of pre-existing parts or components. What marks each of the three models as specifically *theatrical* is how the very density or sparsity of their textures ostensibly deviates from some historically specific performative norm – be it operatic convention, stage naturalism, capitalist society, literary or “deadly” theatre.

## Introduction

Quality always exhibits some degree of fusion of the details of its texture. This feature is perhaps most clearly perceived in [--] [a] simple musical chord [--] because most people can voluntarily take it as either fused or unfused. The tonic triad C-E-G has a distinctive character. [--] Flat the

E, and another chord is felt which has another highly distinctive quality. (Stephen C. Pepper)<sup>60</sup>

In the appropriate entry to *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Theatre and Performance*, David Saltz defines “theatricality” as a “presentational mode of performance that draws attention to its own status as theatre and as artifice.”<sup>61</sup> In its rough equivalence to a historically specific style of *theatricalism*, this default understanding of the term is inextricably intertwined with the authorial figure of the modernist theatre director. Certainly the very etymology of theatre as “seeing place” would chime with the newly professional role of an external observer. In Helen Crich Chinoy’s early overview (and the gender is indicative), “his genesis lay in the pictorial stage; his first successes in the facsimile stage; and his triumphs in the expressionistic and theatrical stages.”<sup>62</sup> The stakes would have been both aesthetic and political: displacing play, actor, and playwright on the one hand, effecting “a major reversal in the idea of theatricality” on the other – this is how Thomas Postlewait and Tracy Davis describe the modernist directors’ newly affirmative use of theatre’s “excess and its emptiness.”<sup>63</sup> (Routinely attacked in the antitheatrical tradition, these qualities would now justify a range of aesthetics, from the Baroque spectacular to the ‘poor’ bare essentials of Brecht or Grotowski.) With the kind of absorption readily afforded by stage realism and the emergent cinema, it now made new sense to celebrate the very artifice of theatricality, whether the appeal was to “retheatricalize” the theatre, or to theatricalize life itself as something from which humanity had become utterly alienated by its inert institutions.<sup>64</sup> Either way, the control remained with the director, its implications ranging from the cognitive – the Cartesian eye overlooking a regime of material bodies – to the cultural, epitomized in the Euro-centric baggage of colonial modernity.

With theatricality as my topic, my choice of case studies is somewhat evident. In the “wonderful tapestry of threads and knots” that Christopher Innes and Maria Shevtsova trace in their *Cambridge Introduction to Theatre Directing*, it is “the line initiated by [Richard] Wagner” (1813–83) that “made the modern director an essential figure” but also provided “a new definition of the theatre as art.”<sup>65</sup> While Martin Puchner would not shy from “attributing to Wagner [–] the ‘invention’ of what subsequently became avant-garde theatricalism,” it is with Vsevolod Meyerhold (1874–1940), however, that Innes and Shevtsova’s “directorial line of *theatricality*” properly begins.<sup>66</sup> Such notions of invention aside, the first strand of my article extends from Wagner to Georg Fuchs (1868–1949), often remembered for his slogan of “retheatricalizing the theatre” but otherwise routinely dismissed; the second, from Meyerhold’s early work to that of Bertolt

<sup>60</sup> Pepper 1984, 243.

<sup>61</sup> Saltz 2003, 1352.

<sup>62</sup> Chinoy 1976, 14.

<sup>63</sup> Postlewait and Davis 2003, 12, 4.

<sup>64</sup> E.g. McGillivray 2004, 84–94. I highly recommend this thesis on “the discourse of theatricality.”

<sup>65</sup> Innes and Shevtsova 2013, 3, 34, 54

<sup>66</sup> Puchner 2002, 8–9; Innes and Shevtsova 2013, 77 (my italics).

Brecht (1898–1956), who as Saltz suggests provided the theatricalist aesthetic with “its most fully articulated and influential ideological rationale.”<sup>67</sup> The final strand, while touching on the early “pan-theatricalist” Nikolai Evreinov (1879–1953), focuses on Peter Brook (1925–), as much glorified for his brand of theatricalist essentialism as he is indeed ridiculed for its perceived lack of political commitment. Altogether, these three strands address theatricality in its modes of excess, estrangement, and emptiness; in accordance with my target directors, I name them the *image*, the *platform*, and the *tightrope*, but also seek to intertwine them toward the end.

For a beginning, however, I need to make the focus of the article absolutely clear. Firstly, the main ambition is not historical. While I do address a range of well-known and indeed well-studied directors, and may even suggest a new angle here or there, it is not the directors themselves that I am interested in, but the fact that these names – add or subtract a few<sup>68</sup> – regularly shore up in discussions of *theatricality*. In the wider project to which this article contributes, I study this concept from a range of perspectives (from the *antitheatrical* tradition to different notions of *performativity*),<sup>69</sup> but here my focus is on explicitly “theatricalist” or “pro-theatrical” understandings. Secondly – and this is the weird part – I wish to study these notions through the arguably dramaturgical metaphors of *texture* and *weaving*, derived from pragmatist philosopher Stephen C. Pepper, anthropologist Tim Ingold, and director Eugenio Barba. In short, “dramaturgical” here means that things or qualities come about in action over time; “texture” means that their coming about is a matter of interweaving strands or processes, rather than their being assembled from pre-existing parts or components.<sup>70</sup> (Thus, with Chinoy and Saltz, the very craft of directing might be derived from the historical emergence of “the rehearsal, the co-ordinated acting group, and the scenic paraphernalia”; the “quality of theatricality,” from “the use of puppets and masks, displays of vocal or physical virtuosity, and conventions such as the aside.”<sup>71</sup>) Here, my textural argument consists in a shift from individualistic to more distributed notions of *authorship*, on the one hand – *woven within the work* rather than exclusively controlled by a single central “author-creator” – and, second, in showing how qualities of theatricality may indeed come about very differently in the three models I discuss.

More technically, this textural bias shows in three basic ways. First, I will deliberately highlight instances where my target directors themselves resort to textural metaphors: keep an eye on all the *lines, threads, strands, knots, webs*, and

<sup>67</sup> Saltz 2003, 1353.

<sup>68</sup> Apart from the Russian line – from Meyerhold to Valery Fokin – Innes and Shevtsova’s “directors of theatricality” include Ariane Mnouchkine, Frank Castorf, Thomas Ostermeier, Robert Sturua, Eimuntas Nekrošius, and Oskaras Korsunovas (2013, 77–115). Further applicants could include Adolphe Appia, Gordon Craig, Antonin Artaud, Max Reinhardt, Einar Schleeef, and Robert Wilson. For an accessible account of some key director theorists, in Finnish, see Paavolainen 2001 ([online](#), with chapters on Craig, Artaud, Meyerhold, Brecht, [Jerzy] Grotowski, and [Tadeusz] Kantor). More recently, I have also discussed Meyerhold, Grotowski, and Kantor in some depth, in Paavolainen 2012.

<sup>69</sup> Cf. Paavolainen 2016, forthcoming.

<sup>70</sup> For theoretical specifics, see Paavolainen 2015; see also Pepper 1984; Ingold 2011; Barba 2010.

<sup>71</sup> Chinoy 1976, 17; Saltz 2003, 1352–3.

*networks* to appear, for whatever they are, they are not the ‘building blocks’ of more mechanistic aesthetics. Second, I highlight metaphors of *musicality*, which not only partake in various projects of the theatre’s theatricalization,<sup>72</sup> but also concretely exemplify the aesthetics of texture. As Pepper suggests in my opening quote, tonality and orchestration provide prime metaphors for the material moorings of aesthetic quality. Much like the density, thickness, or range of sound is derived from the respectively “horizontal” and “vertical” textures of melody and harmony – rough or smooth, polyphonic or contrapuntal – so also may explicitly ‘theatrical’ qualities variously harbour dense and sparse textures alike. (As for the other core practice providing such metaphors – though I will not be addressing this aspect explicitly – the figure of weaving also goes some way toward decentralizing the specific masculinity of modern/ist authorship.<sup>73</sup>)

Finally, the notion of theatrical texture also implies a performative tension of cultural novelty and normativity, in the sense that “performativity” may equally denote a principle of efficient action *and* the compliant reiteration of settled conventions.<sup>74</sup> What I mean is best exemplified by the case of stage naturalism. While there is a valid argument that theatre is nowhere more theatrical than in its attempts at denying its own theatricality, the European theatricalism of the early twentieth century certainly arose as a counter-aesthetic to the then-dominant norms of “artless art,” dictated by extratheatrical imperatives of literature and verisimilitude. In such terms, the apparent density or sparsity of overtly *theatrical* textures – their excess or emptiness – measure as deviations from the aesthetic norms of stage realism more than anything else: showing too much or too little, relative to what convention would lead one to expect. In their normatively modernist quest for artistic “essence” – whether it be found in medium specificity (what is minimally needed for theatre to be theatre) or aesthetic interrelation (the Wagnerian interweaving of art forms) – this sense of deviation is crucial. For Saltz, theatricality has “little meaning in contexts where virtually all dramatic performance is overtly theatrical, such as most non-Western theatre, or Western theatre prior to the nineteenth century.”<sup>75</sup> In 1956, John Gassner admits to its enduring prevalence in stage production and musical entertainment, but finds its modern forms “inorganic” for not having grown out of “cultural climaxes” such as he locates in Periclean Athens or Elizabethan England.<sup>76</sup> What I would argue, in view of what follows, is that modern forms of theatricality do indeed parallel modern climaxes, culminating in two world wars and beginning, with Wagner, with the failed revolutions of 1848–49.

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<sup>72</sup> See Roesner 2014.

<sup>73</sup> But see Paavolainen 2015; my language here is also influenced by Pepper’s four “root metaphors” of *formism*, *mechanism*, *organicism*, and *contextualism*, “texture” being specific to contextualism (1984).

<sup>74</sup> On performativity, see e.g. Loxley 2007; cf. Paavolainen forthcoming.

<sup>75</sup> Saltz 2003, 1353.

<sup>76</sup> Gassner 1956, 179.

## Strand 1. The Image: Wagner and Fuchs

The “unique webbing” of Richard Wagner’s theatricality is well in evidence in the Prologue to his *Götterdämmerung*, premiered in Bayreuth on 17 August 1876, with three Norns weaving the rope of destiny from the strands of past, present, and future time. If their libretto draws together narrative threads from the *Ring* cycle as a whole, so also the score, as musicologist Richard Taruskin puts it, consists in “a ceaseless warp and woof of well-worn tunes” in Wagner’s “perhaps most densely woven tissue of *leitmotives*” (musical strands of reminiscence and premonition).<sup>77</sup> Where Wagner’s dense orchestral texture was to contest the dominance of the melodic line as an operatic norm,<sup>78</sup> the trinity of the Norns also evokes “the three primeval sisters” of dance, tone, and poetry he had envisioned in *The Art-Work of the Future* in 1849: surviving only as “isolated Grecian arts [--] sprung from the wreck of Tragedy,” the three would soon be “interlaced” or “entwined” in the “united chain” of the drama.<sup>79</sup> In its intertwining of past and future, it seems that Wagner’s famous utopia of “the total work of art” also owes some of its textural rhetoric to his once architect Gottfried Semper. Having discussed the “sister arts,” and indeed the “unified work of art,” already in 1834, Semper would neatly literalize Wagner’s sense of artistic “entwining,” by equating “*the beginning of building [--] with the beginning of textiles.*”<sup>80</sup> In brief, his idea was that monumental architecture only gave permanence to the temporary theatrical scaffold with its polychrome tapestries – and indeed Wagner also would have preferred “a provisional theatre, as simple as possible, perhaps merely of wood.”<sup>81</sup>

But obviously Wagner’s Festival Theatre at Bayreuth is no temporary scaffold.<sup>82</sup> Adapted from Semper’s Munich designs of 1865 – and woven with German nationalism from the nation’s concurrent founding to Wagner’s Hitlerian fandom – it stands as the permanent instrument for his vision of total theatricality, purpose-built much as his enlarged brass section, with a curiously dual effect of absorption and detachment. The sense of absorption derives from Wagner’s Romantic idealist aesthetics. As Matthew Wilson Smith puts it, “the total work of art implies not only an intermingling of art-forms” but also an organic synthesis of both subject and society – the *Volk* of a Greek past and of a German future, “the basic fabric of social life” torn asunder by modernity.<sup>83</sup> To counter “humanity’s fall from organism into mechanism,” the mere getting to Bayreuth would

<sup>77</sup> Taruskin n.d. (“unique webbing” quoted from Wagner’s own discussion of the scene, in a letter to King Ludwig II of Bavaria, dated 5 May 1870).

<sup>78</sup> See e.g. Puchner 2002, 44.

<sup>79</sup> Wagner 1892–9:1, 52, 95 (the first quote is from *Art and Revolution*, also of 1849).

<sup>80</sup> Semper quoted in Mallgrave 1996, 293. While Koss (2010, 25–6) finds Semper’s argument “hardly unique enough” to secure him as Wagner’s primary source, their significant historical parallels do suggest that “the artistic interrelation that occurred between the arts also took place within each one.” For an argument on Semper’s central influence on Wagner, see Mallgrave 1996, 7–10, 60, 126–9.

<sup>81</sup> Wagner quoted in Koss 2010, 28; on Semper’s theory, see especially Mallgrave 1996, 299–300.

<sup>82</sup> Certainly it was not destroyed after the first performance of the *Ring* tetralogy, as initially planned (Koss 2010, xxvii). The following discussion owes mostly to Koss 2010 and Smith 2007.

<sup>83</sup> Smith 2007, 11–12.

amount to a Platonic pilgrimage from the cave of commerce to the sun of social restoration, arising from dance, tone, poetry, and participation.<sup>84</sup> Once there, a series of innovations were in place to reduce distraction and to focus audience attention entirely on the ideal reality on stage. The theatre was sparsely adorned, cleansed of the standard operatic paraphernalia of boxes and balconies; the seats steeply raked so as to afford roughly equal sightlines; the house lights darkened during performance; the orchestra pit tucked beneath the proscenium stage.<sup>85</sup>

However, the “mystic gulf” thus created – so called by Wagner and Semper “because it had to part reality from ideality” – also served the most drastic separation of the two realms. The forced perspective of Semper’s double proscenium further endowed the singers with an ambiguous air of distance and “superhuman stature.”<sup>86</sup> In Wagner’s words, the viewer found himself “in an actual ‘theatron,’ i.e. a room made ready for no other purpose than his [--] looking straight in front of him.” Before him was a consciously framed “scenic picture,” brilliant in colour but hovering in darkness.<sup>87</sup> Hence then the further divide between *the image and the imperceptible*, emphatically repressed or dissimulated in the interest of artistic and societal totality. For Smith, this “concealment of production [is] at the heart of Wagnerian performance,” whose mimetic basis he aptly identifies as “a mechanism pretending to be an organism.”<sup>88</sup>

Should we read this in terms of the theatrical instinct for *dressings* or *veiling* from which Semper derives his architectural theory – the emergence of form from the masking of material (cf. Greek polychromy and the marble beneath)<sup>89</sup> – Wagner’s specific dressing would have been woven in various theatrical layers. On the surface, its Semperian “seams”<sup>90</sup> are overtly apparent: I refer to Martin Puchner’s enjoyable analysis of Wagner’s *gestural* aesthetic of ascending and descending leitmotifs, harshly attacked by both Nietzsche and Adorno. Rather than developing into organic “themes, motives, and (musical or dramatic) lines,” in Puchner’s analysis, Wagner’s disjointed musical gestures appeared to critics as mere “isolated entities” that could “only be performed one at a time,” and perhaps mechanically “amplified and exaggerated” – “leading Nietzsche to the seemingly paradoxical statement that Wagner’s megalomaniac works represent a ‘miniaturism’ in music.”<sup>91</sup> Beneath this seaming surface of music and melodrama, however, a vast theatrical network was arduously hidden in layers of naturalistic detail (trees painted by the leaf on backdrops), Romantic landscapes (at times in stage-wide moving dioramas) and mechanical magic (gauze curtains and clouds of steam). Major effects were used especially for major changes, such as when the Norns,

<sup>84</sup> Smith 2007, 13 (Schiller on organism and mechanism), 25 (on Bayreuth as a site of pilgrimage).

<sup>85</sup> E.g. Smith 2007, 30–1.

<sup>86</sup> Wagner 1892–9:5, 334–5 (“The Festival-Playhouse at Bayreuth,” 1873). On Semper’s earlier but very similar discussion of his 1865 Munich designs, see Koss 2010, 61–2.

<sup>87</sup> Wagner 1892–9:5, 334–5.

<sup>88</sup> Smith 2007, 35, 18.

<sup>89</sup> Mallgrave 1996, 300–1.

<sup>90</sup> Based on the etymological connections of the German *Naht* and *Noht* – for “seam” and “necessity” – leaving seams undisguised was, for Semper, to “make a virtue out of necessity” (Mallgrave 1996, 292).

<sup>91</sup> Puchner 2002, 34–45, 52–4.

their rope of destiny snapped, “sink into the earth to a concatenation of Curse, Oblivion, Fate, and [--] Götterdämmerung motives.”<sup>92</sup> To enable the magic and to conceal the machinery, although discouraging both singers and scenographers, the Bayreuth stage all but outsizes the auditorium in every direction.

Not so with the Munich Artists’ Theatre, opened by director Georg Fuchs and architect Max Littmann for the Munich Exhibition of 1908, and briefly famous for its shallow “relief stage” in close proximity to the audience. Built “on Theatricalist principles” and bridging “the mystic gulf of Wagner,” commentator Mordecai Gorelik found it “perhaps the first conventional-style theatre building of the modern era.”<sup>93</sup> Even if the actual stage was not much wider than it was deep, it made literal “the theme of flatness epitomized by Jugendstil design,”<sup>94</sup> as art historian Juliet Koss argues. Fuchs’s major influences included his earlier cooperation with architect Peter Behrens, at the Darmstadt Artists’ Colony, and a two-dimensional emphasis in the German visual theory of the 1890s. The one inspiration that Fuchs denied, in his 1905 essays on *The Stage of the Future* (although the title implies otherwise), was Wagner: “The stage can never be the ‘Gesamtkunstwerk’ [--] but instead is *an art for itself*.”<sup>95</sup>

First of all, then, Fuchs’s famous “retheatricalization of the theatre” joined in a current refrain of artistic liberation, especially from the bounds of literature. Indeed, the very name of the Munich Artists’ Theatre proclaims the specific *art* of the theatre.<sup>96</sup> Second, the “deep stage” of naturalism, “overburdened” with three-dimensional reality, was to collapse for an overtly unnatural use of the *pictorial* plane. Rather than “lost in the unfathomable depths of an opera stage,” voices and figures would emerge in a relief that Fuchs boasts could fully satisfy “even foreigners.”<sup>97</sup> Third, and against “the literary theorists [who] separated stage and auditorium,” it was not on stage but “in the audience that the dramatic work of art is actually born.”<sup>98</sup> If the theatre, in Fuchs’s ur-narrative, arose from these two experiential elements being “assembled in one place,” then “the drama [was] possible without word or tone, without scenery or costume, simply as rhythmic movement of the human body” in space.<sup>99</sup>

To make his case – apart from literalizing a theory of relief sculpture<sup>100</sup> – Fuchs was entertainingly at pains to prove the pertinence of his shallow stage, not in pictorial terms, but as arising from the very nature of acting, drama, and the aesthetic experience. Thus he deems it “a discovery as old as the theatre itself” that performers “involuntarily press forward” at important moments, an “instinctive [dramatic] urge” just “sweeping them down” to “assume positions similar to

<sup>92</sup> The quote is from Taruskin n.d.; see also Smith 2007, 26–9, 33–5.

<sup>93</sup> Gorelik 1962, 289. My key references here will be Fuchs 1959, Koss 2010, and Jelavich 1985.

<sup>94</sup> Koss 2010, 160.

<sup>95</sup> Fuchs quoted in Koss 2010, 121.

<sup>96</sup> Fuchs 1959, xxviii; Koss 2010, 163–4.

<sup>97</sup> Fuchs 1959, 98.

<sup>98</sup> Fuchs 1959, 6, 43.

<sup>99</sup> Fuchs 1959, 46–7.

<sup>100</sup> Indeed, Fuch’s debt to sculptor and visual theorist Adolf von Hildebrand, specifically *The Problem of Form in the Fine Arts* of 1893, is at the very core of Koss’s arguments in Koss 2000 and 2010.

the arrangement of figures in a relief.<sup>101</sup> This follows “from the dramatic necessities of the play,” “since every drama in its decisive moments pushes forward away from the background”; the relief stage only allows it “to create its own surroundings as a snail builds its house.”<sup>102</sup> Insofar as this house also includes the auditorium, finally, the relief stage was “to intensify the dramatic experience [–] not only for the eye, but also for the ear.” Acoustically, the “shallow scene, shut in above and at the sides,” would keep sound from dispersing. Visually, the “principal plane” would not be the background but the forestage, where “the highest figures meet,” again forced there by dramatic necessity.<sup>103</sup>

Consequently, any naturalistic reproduction of actuality, and “its necessary depth of stage, is at best superfluous and at worst annoying.” Given the forward urge of the dramatic action, such a stage “remains unused for almost two thirds of its depth,” and only becomes more obtrusive if then filled with illustrative detail.<sup>104</sup> Moreover, it produces an “untheatrical” relationship between actor and environment, often with “insurmountable difficulties” for the performers thus divided just to “have a scene together.”<sup>105</sup> “The more the actors work in one plane, the more strongly their action will hang together”<sup>106</sup> – this principle of textural cohesion was also stressed by other adherents of the relief effect. Where critic Karl Scheffler likened the relationship of deep stage and shallow proscenium to that of bass line and melody in music, Behrens found in relief “the most striking expression of the line, of the moving line” and hence of the “essentially lateral” movement that for him was “everything, in the drama.”<sup>107</sup> In striking contrast to my model of the platform, he would argue that “movement which occurs in the direction of the audience is, optically speaking, without effect.”<sup>108</sup>

Concerning *the image* as a model of theatricality, accordingly, its two extremes can now be identified in the absorbing abyss of Wagner’s “scenic picture,” and the shallow relief in which Fuchs’s actors would push forth but could only proceed sideways. For critics, however, “the life-threatening tightrope-walking of the pedestrians” in Fuchs’s *Faust* (1908) made both the lack and the need of spatial depth “clear to the point of irony. Often wonderful as a picture, it is impossible as a dramatic scene.”<sup>109</sup> Altogether, Fuchs seems to have relied on an outmoded aesthetic ideal at a historical moment when – and Koss traces a theme of flatness in all these developments – abstract painting, cinema, and the mass audience of the 1920s were already imminent.<sup>110</sup> In Munich, Wilhelm Worringer, the advocate of abstraction, denounced his efforts for their “Protestant” fear of theatre itself (or a “detheatricalization of the theatre”) and indeed, Max Reinhardt took

<sup>101</sup> Fuchs 1959, 68.

<sup>102</sup> Fuchs 1959, 72, 70.

<sup>103</sup> Fuchs 1959, 67, 73 (“highest figures” quoted from Hildebrand).

<sup>104</sup> Fuchs 1959, 74, 76.

<sup>105</sup> Fuchs 1959, 76, 73, 72.

<sup>106</sup> Fuchs 1959, 72.

<sup>107</sup> On Behrens and Scheffler, see Koss 2010, 174, 179 (also Jelavich 1985, 189–90).

<sup>108</sup> Behrens 1910, cited in Koss 2010, 174.

<sup>109</sup> Otto Falckenberg (then in the executive board of the Artists’ Theatre), cited in Jelavich 1985, 206.

<sup>110</sup> Koss 2000, 3; 2010, 184, 185ff.

over the supervision of the Artists' Theatre the very next summer.<sup>111</sup> Apparently undaunted, Fuchs edited his essays into a new volume that presented his work as a success – *Revolution in the Theatre* was widely read throughout Europe, not least for its catchy French motto, *Rethéâtraliser le théâtre!* – but still his German failure would have been a blow. According to an early friend's testimony when he was tried for treason in 1923, Fuchs's boyhood dream had been of "the German people erecting a Festspielhaus for him and performing his dramas."<sup>112</sup>

Hence one final sense of Fuchs's retheatricalization: the "strange intoxication which overcomes us when, as part of a crowd, we feel ourselves [--] united in an overwhelming passion." In its Nietzschean modality, the function of theatre would have been to satisfy this "atavistic urge" for "intensification of life" or "primitive enchantment": "The more this excitement is intensified, the more specifically theatrical this art will be."<sup>113</sup> The other modality was well kept by the executive committee of the Artists' Theatre, but plainly to be seen in Fuchs's anonymous *Kaiser, Culture, and Art* of 1904, with chapter titles such as "Race and Rhythm," or "Culture and the Position of World Power." In 1933, having served five years in prison for his separatist ambitions in the 1920s, Fuchs embraced the affective theatricality of Nationalist Socialism. In 1944, the Munich Artists' Theatre was reduced to rubble in an Allied bombing raid.<sup>114</sup>

## Strand 2. The Platform: Meyerhold and Brecht

If Naturalist and Symbolist productions had tried to "represent" places and characters, the Theatricalist ideal was to "present" them directly to the audience, bringing them in on the stage platform as on a tray. [--] [Theatricalism was defined by its] frankly artificial "scenography" [--] – a recognition of the stage as platform rather than as picture. [--] The second feature is a shift in emphasis from the *walls* of the setting to the *floor* of the setting. (Mordecai Gorelik)<sup>115</sup>

For the 1914–15 class at his studio, in St Petersburg, Vsevolod Meyerhold envisioned "a new form of pantomime in which music dominates on its own level and the actor's movements proceed parallel to it," "weaving a rhythmical pattern" across the corresponding planes of the main stage and the proscenium. As a unifying principle, he states in the studio journal, "theatricality presupposes an inevitability of form."<sup>116</sup> In a 1909 lecture on his inaugural production at the Mariinsky Opera, he likewise stated that an opera without words "amounts to a *pantomime*," and that "the dance is to the body what music is to thought:

<sup>111</sup> Koss 2010, 180–4; Jelavich 1985, 208.

<sup>112</sup> Jelavich 1985, 208, 201.

<sup>113</sup> Fuchs 1959, 3–5.

<sup>114</sup> Jelavich 1985, 203–4, 198–200, 308; see also Koss 2010, 119.

<sup>115</sup> Gorelik 1962, 291, 295.

<sup>116</sup> Meyerhold 1998, 149, 147.

form artificially yet instinctively created.”<sup>117</sup> Apart from his then interest in “stylized theatre” and in the spectator as its “fourth creator”<sup>118</sup> – filling in scenic suggestions as “one does when listening to music”<sup>119</sup> – Meyerhold’s production of *Tristan and Isolde* was based on a year’s study of Wagner, whose “fundamental conception of the stage as a pedestal for sculpture” he proposed to embody with a set of “practicable reliefs” derived from his reading of Fuchs.<sup>120</sup> Where Fuchs’s reliefs consisted of actors, however, Meyerhold’s practicables would be anything the actors touch or lean on, sculptural pedestals for movement, so constructed “that the lines of rhythmical expression can stand out distinctly,” “cross and vibrate.”<sup>121</sup>

From these early musical considerations, one already intuitively senses Meyerhold’s comprehensive sense of acting as melody and staging as harmony, both of these orchestrated by the director in textures of line, movement, and gesture. Whether homophonic or contrapuntal, as Edward Braun notes, their “rhythmical discipline [would be] reinforced by the purposely contrived spatial restrictions of the stage area.”<sup>122</sup> In *Tristan*, Meyerhold sought a strict synchrony of music and movement so as to “free the actor [--] from the demands of his own temperament”: from the “inspirational” style that his key 1913 essay, “Fairground Booth,” would fault with the still-negative connotations of “theatricality.”<sup>123</sup> What he means by the “pure theatricality” that the essay emphatically argues for can be succinctly outlined by briefly unpacking the implications, of the essay and of the later studio journal, for acting, dramaturgy, and spectatorship.

As for the actor, the essay suggests that he “rediscover the basic laws of theatricality” from the *cabotin* – the “strolling player” akin to juggler, conjurer, and quack<sup>124</sup> – and the theatre’s “primordial elements” of mask and movement, puppets and pantomime; in the studio, “the truly theatrical ages of the theatre” would also be studied.<sup>125</sup> Much as Fuchs had and as Grotowski would, Meyerhold contends that “the theatre remains the theatre” even if “deprived of dialogue, costume, footlights, wings and an auditorium, and left with only the actor and his mastery of movement.”<sup>126</sup> As for dramaturgy, the essay argues that the merest “scenario of movement” suffices, with elements of prologue, parade, and address, and with reality utterly “schematized” now spatially, now temporally. According to the studio journal, “any dramatic work which is imbued with the quality of true theatricality is amenable to total schematization.”<sup>127</sup> Lastly, and

<sup>117</sup> Meyerhold 1998, 80, 85.

<sup>118</sup> Meyerhold 1998, 63.

<sup>119</sup> Meyerhold 1998, 26 (“The Naturalistic Theatre and the Theatre of Mood,” 1906).

<sup>120</sup> Meyerhold 1998, 89–90. On the production, see e.g. Braun 1995, 86–95.

<sup>121</sup> Meyerhold 1998, 91, 63. The latter quote is from “First Attempts at a Stylized Theatre” (1907): “Stage movement is achieved not by movement in the literal sense, but by the disposition of lines and colours, and by the ease and cunning with which these lines and colours are made to cross and vibrate.”

<sup>122</sup> Braun 1995, 89; on Meyerhold’s notions of melody and harmony, see e.g. Roesner 2014, 79.

<sup>123</sup> Meyerhold 1998, 85, 129; on the notion of synchrony, see also Braun 1995, 94.

<sup>124</sup> Meyerhold 1998, 122, 136.

<sup>125</sup> Meyerhold 1998, 126, 125, 146, 148.

<sup>126</sup> Meyerhold 1998, 125, 147. Cf. Fuchs 1959, 46–7; on Grotowski, see Paavolainen 2012, 93–161.

<sup>127</sup> Meyerhold 1998, 124, 137–8, 150; his example of the latter is the Mousetrap scene in *Hamlet*.

most famously, Meyerhold's notion mirrors the then principle of the Russian Formalists that art lay its devices "bare" for perception. In Robert Leach's words, "the painting did not attempt to conceal its paint, [--] and the theatrical presentation its theatricality."<sup>128</sup> Thus Meyerhold's audiences were constantly reminded that they were in a theatre, the *quality* of theatricality estranged by foregrounding its very *texture*. The curtain and the footlights might be abolished, the house lights left on, scenes shifted by stage-hands before their eyes. As Leach suggests of his later work in the 1920s, "the final 'baring of the device' was to put the actor in an empty space, or a space with a few platforms, [--] throwing into relief the reality of objects and people."<sup>129</sup>

Since I have analysed Meyerhold's biomechanics and constructivist settings at length elsewhere,<sup>130</sup> however, I now turn to discuss what I mean by the theatricality of *the platform* more generally. This is best exemplified by three early commentaries of 1939/40, by the American designer-historian Mordecai Gorelik, the Prague School semiotician Jindřich Honzl, and the German cultural critic Walter Benjamin. As Gorelik notes, first, the idea of the platform stage thrust forth like "a tray" is ever relative to the *picture* stage of the Renaissance, perfected by Wagner, receding inward and leaving its audience ever more passive and introspective as well. The two things that the scenic platform enables "the Theatricalist designer" to do instead are to "carry the actor into direct contact with the spectator," and to "treat the setting as a component part of the action." Insofar as the setting no longer "surrounds the actors" but rather "deals with the actors," its floor plan becomes more important than its walls: "When the area of the stage is broken up by means of platforms, steps, ramps, partitions or barriers of any kind [--] the actor is vitally affected," his movements defined "by the spatial arrangement of the setting. Where steps are placed in his path he must ascend; where an area is restricted" by partitions or barriers, so are his movements.<sup>131</sup>

For Gorelik, in short, the theatrical platform – the bare device – amounts to a network of practicables. What Honzl and Benjamin add to the notion (both attacking aspects of Wagner) is a further sense of its textural dynamics. For Honzl, "the action value, that is, the theatricality" of the scenic network resides in its "structural stability" insofar as it enables "versatility" in use: in the theatre, "space need not be indicated by a space, sound by a sound, light by lights, human activity by an actor's acting."<sup>132</sup> "The firmer the structural base, the more finely will the textural strands weave patterns and pictures that captivate us with their beauty."<sup>133</sup> For Benjamin, the texture of the action will also include the audience, but no longer quite "captivate" them as if by magic: to bridge the Wag-

<sup>128</sup> Leach 1989, 11, 128; see also Innes and Shevtsova 2013, 81–2.

<sup>129</sup> Leach 1989, 38–41, 82, 94.

<sup>130</sup> Paavolainen 2012, 53–92.

<sup>131</sup> Gorelik 1962, 285–8, 298.

<sup>132</sup> Honzl 1976, 91, 79, 85, 83.

<sup>133</sup> Honzl 1976, 80.

nerian “abyss,” the stage will become “a public platform.”<sup>134</sup> With this notion, and with Benjamin, we now move to more Brechtian aspects of theatricality.

For all his varied debts to Meyerhold, it is against the magic, hypnosis, or intoxication of Wagner’s theory that Brecht first calls for the “radical *separation of elements*,” making “*music, words and set design [–] more independent of one another*” (1930).<sup>135</sup> In later direct references, he “invites all the sister arts” to “mutually estrange one another” (1949), now as “a collective of independent arts” (\*1956), now as a Gesamtkunstwerk but conceived “as a bundle of separated elements” (1939).<sup>136</sup> While discussions of Brecht and Wagner range from Puchner’s emphasis on Brecht’s antitheatrical heritage – interpreting his *gestus* as a “theory of controlled theatricality” – to Brown’s reading his drama as a quasi-Wagnerian system of “leitmotiv networks,” I am inclined to side with Smith that he was not up to dispense with unity per se, but rather with the Wagnerian, organically textured illusion of “seamless unity.”<sup>137</sup>

Just consider the textural imagery Brecht himself provides for his key concepts. First, *historicization*,<sup>138</sup> or showing things as ephemeral and thus changeable: in textural terms, this is the effort to “untie” or “resolve” conditions into processes and relationships (\*1931),<sup>139</sup> to “untangle ‘fate’ into a mesh of types of behaviour” (1941).<sup>140</sup> Second, *Verfremdung* or estrangement<sup>141</sup>: to show things as peculiar and striking rather than familiar and inconspicuous, the events of the plot are to be “tied together in such a way that the knots become conspicuous” (1949).<sup>142</sup> Third, the principle of the *not ... but*, that the actors always “imply what they are not doing” (1940), akin to “rough sketches” with “traces of other movements and features” still apparent (1949).<sup>143</sup> Here the historicized event becomes a *knot* of *buts* pointing to the strands *not* followed, further tightened by all the sister arts deliberately pulling in different directions.

In short, what Brecht adds to the *platform* metaphor of theatricality – so fluently playful and rhythmical in Meyerhold – is a sense of unresolved tensions in its very texture. Below, I elaborate what this means in terms of aesthetics, thematics, and reception, in the work of his “stage builder” Caspar Neher. Even his preferred epithet highlights the scenic platform against the “Nazi word” *stage picture*.<sup>144</sup> On their stage, Brecht’s twin principles of estrangement and historicization would have been in evidence on virtually every level: “to show the world

<sup>134</sup> Benjamin 1988, 22.

<sup>135</sup> Brecht 2015, 65–6.

<sup>136</sup> The 1949 and 1939 quotes are from Brecht 2015, 254 (section 74) and 145; the \*1956 quote is from Brecht 1967:17, 1210 (in Finnish Brecht 1991, 284). The asterisks generally indicate passages for which I know of no translation in English; for \*1931, I have modified the newest existing one.

<sup>137</sup> Puchner 2002, 140, 152; Brown 1991; Smith 2007, 76, 78–9.

<sup>138</sup> E.g. Brecht 2015, 187–8.

<sup>139</sup> Brecht 2015, 57–8. As for the implicitly mechanistic “breaking down” of conditions and theatrical material, as it is rendered in the English translation, *untied* or *resolved* are not only more literal but also more textural translations of the German “löste [–] auf / die Auflösung” in Brecht 1967:15, 220, 222.

<sup>140</sup> Brecht 2014, 55.

<sup>141</sup> E.g. Brecht 2015, 143–4, 192–3 (section 17).

<sup>142</sup> Brecht 2015, 251 (section 67).

<sup>143</sup> Brecht 2015, 185, 240 (section 39).

<sup>144</sup> Willett 1986, 13–14; on Neher, see also Baugh 2006.

in such a way that it becomes manageable” (1940), with “man as a function of the milieu and the milieu as a function of man” (1936).<sup>145</sup>

Rather than “melt into a Gesamtkunstwerk,” first, the art of stage design should not only remain apart from the other “elements” at play, but itself consist in a “montage of mobile elements” so as to undercut any misleading sense of stability (\*1938).<sup>146</sup> In rehearsal, Neher could influence the acting and groupings, enabling new meanings and gestures. The set would be introduced as a “fellow-actor” early on, an extra or protagonist with “its own climax and special round of applause” (mid-1920s).<sup>147</sup> Thematically, man and milieu would create the desired *gestus* reciprocally, with “Neher-height” chairs and tables so lowered as to “create attitudes.”<sup>148</sup> To enhance legibility, any “beautiful approximation in matters large of scale” would be matched with “carefully worked-out detail in costumes and props” (1949).<sup>149</sup> Hence the Brechtian realism of work and implied human history: A door frame, perhaps, from a torn-down building, “no contrived construction” but “a sociologically adept thing with its own biography” and the sole purpose of “securing the passage of people” (\*1938).<sup>150</sup> The whole would be represented metonymically by its parts – the room, by furniture and the merest frames for its doors and windows: “solid, realistic, second hand if wanted.” On the otherwise-bare platform, these “tokens” or fragments would stand out like a sculpture on a pedestal, decontextualized and hence defamiliarized to the full, effectively isolated for critical scrutiny. Rather than have the audience believe that they are “in a real place of real life,” they should believe themselves “in a good theatre,” and indeed, find themselves in a theatre even when “in a real place of real life” (\*1938).<sup>151</sup>

All in all, Brecht’s is a “deictic theatricality,”<sup>152</sup> *pointing* not only to its own devices, but also to the *performativity* of social norms and conditions – to the *texture* of their assumed qualities, their well-woven habits made conspicuous like knots. Insofar as *de-familiarization* depends on what has performatively been rendered familiar, first, Brecht all but prefigures Judith Butler’s critique of gender essentialism. Rather than depicting “‘universal’ situations that allow Man with a capital M to express himself: man of every period and every colour” – “timeless” and “eternally human” (1936) – the “epic” actor “derives his characters entirely from their actions” (1938) and makes things appear strange by showing them as “customary” (1949).<sup>153</sup> In more *theatrical* terms (theatrical as in the etymological “seeing place”), defamiliarization works to provide *perspective* on the performative: In rehearsal, the actors could gain in “detachment” by reading

<sup>145</sup> Brecht 2015, 188, 157.

<sup>146</sup> Brecht 1967:15, 441, 446; in Finnish Brecht 1991, 187, 190.

<sup>147</sup> Brecht cited in Willett 1986, 98.

<sup>148</sup> Egon Monk cited in Willett 1986, 113; on Neher’s chairs, see also Brecht 2014, 117–18. On these and on the theatrical/cultural affordances of chairs more generally, see also Paavolainen 2012, 44–5.

<sup>149</sup> Brecht 2014, 187.

<sup>150</sup> Brecht 1967:15, 458 (in Finnish Brecht 1991, 193).

<sup>151</sup> Brecht 1967:15, 457–8, 451 (in Finnish Brecht 1991, 193, 191).

<sup>152</sup> Puchner 2002, 153; my discussion of Brecht and performativity is somewhat inspired by a [2014 blog post](#) by Jena Zelezny on the “Performance Philosophy” website (link checked 11 Jan 2016).

<sup>153</sup> Brecht 2015, 156, 179, 251 (section 67).

the stage directions out loud and by using the third person and the past tense – also, by seeing their own work in a mirror, or “their roles played by others” (especially comedians, 1940).<sup>154</sup> In performance, the theatrical perspective would highlight direct appearance and reflective distance: As for the looks of things, bright white light from apparent sources would have prevented illusion but also highlighted the appearance of theatre as theatre and of objects as objects, their rough, well-worn texture itself embodying a strong sense of history and human labour. As for reflection, issues as well could be estranged by means of a spatial distancing, implicit in Brecht’s situating his plays in “model” cities and societies (from China to Chicago) but also in the “epic” scale of his plots not being “tied to time” in Aristotle’s sense.<sup>155</sup> With each scene seen for itself, the storyline would unfold as a rope of chosen knots, each apart from the other, and offered for synoptic scrutiny in their very separation.

Finally, this zooming between perspectives also evokes Brecht’s initially binary theorization of estrangement and empathy: “just as empathy turns a special event into something ordinary, so *Verfremdung* turns an ordinary one into something special” (1941).<sup>156</sup> Here, Juliet Koss’s intriguing argument is that Brecht, “in claiming a Soviet theoretical heritage” in Shklovsky and Meyerhold, “repressed a particular German one” that would have still been apparent during his early years in Munich: that of Georg Fuchs, aligning his conservative right-wing politics to a specific theory of empathy (*Einfühlung*, signaling both “absorption” and “self-alienation”).<sup>157</sup> Whatever the case, historically, Koss herself agrees with Brecht’s later dialectics that “a consciousness of distance,” in her words, depends on “the experience of its absence; [that] estrangement relies on the intermittent experience of empathy. (A fully estranged spectator would get up and walk out during the performance.)”<sup>158</sup> Thus, empathy is “one of the two strains comprising the dialectical structure of *Verfremdung*,” oscillating “between distance and closeness,” or “absorption and theatricality,”<sup>159</sup> or perhaps, between the empathetic image and bare device of the theatrical platform. A version of such fluctuation would also characterize the work of Peter Brook, who himself witnessed the “dazzling theatricality” of Brecht’s *Mutter Courage* in 1955, not as cold and distant but instead as highly emotional on a practically empty stage.<sup>160</sup>

### Strand 3. The Tightrope: Peter Brook

Craig, by putting the question: “How much is it essential to put on the stage to convey a forest?” suddenly exploded the myth that it was

<sup>154</sup> Brecht 2015, 186, 190 (section 6).

<sup>155</sup> Cf. Willett 1967, 156–9, 167.

<sup>156</sup> Brecht 2014, 46.

<sup>157</sup> Koss 1997, 810, 812–13.

<sup>158</sup> Koss 1997, 817.

<sup>159</sup> Koss 1997, 810, 817, 818.

<sup>160</sup> Brook 1998, 64.

necessary to show an entire forest, trees, leaves, branches and all the rest. And the moment the question was put, suddenly the doors opened to the bare stage and the single stick, suggesting whatever is needed. [--] I think it is in that area that the visual revolution of Craig relates to an acting revolution through Brecht. (Peter Brook)<sup>161</sup>

Turning now to Brecht's "Man with a capital M," an early pioneer of a *universally* "theatrical instinct" would have been the Russian Nikolai Evreinov, preceding even Meyerhold in his appeals to "the theatre theatrical," and in coining the concept of *teatralnost'* in 1908.<sup>162</sup> "Infinitely wider than stage," he found in theatre a "pre-aesthetic" instinct of transformation – thus preceding the arts of "formation" – that was "as essentially necessary to man as air, food and sexual intercourse." In Tony Pearson's precis, "children, savages, primitive societies, even animals" all exhibited "an instinctual [--] urge to theatricalize – and hence to transform – their lives."<sup>163</sup>

I begin this section with Evreinov, because he initiates an *essentialist* strand of theatricality, quite distinct from those previously discussed, yet one to be carried on by a more famous director later in the century. In the 1970s, Peter Brook likewise promoted *playing* as "a basic function, like eating, drinking, making love," with "all vital forms of theatre" thus "an extension of a natural activity."<sup>164</sup> Since then, Brook's prime instrument has been his International Centre at Paris's Bouffes du Nord, a blend of theatre and anti-theatre with its nineteenth-century balconies and its long-since dilapidated texture. With the Bouffes as his Bayreuth, the Gesamtkunstwerk of Brook's Centre has consisted in an interweaving of performance cultures.<sup>165</sup> In 1968, he arguably initiated an aesthetic of "emptiness" with his succinct definition of theatre – "a man walks across [an] empty space whilst someone else is watching him"<sup>166</sup> –, but since then, Brook has also come under some fire for essentializing the "man" of this sentence. In 2002, most notably, playwright David Hare accused him of "draining plays of any specific meaning or context to a point where each became the same play – a universal hippie babbling which represents nothing but fright of commitment."<sup>167</sup>

Here, I argue that Brook's is precisely a theatre of *intertwining contexts*, "theatricality" being what "makes the invisible appear from the visible: if something abnormal is to come forth, what is normal must exist first. Then you heighten it."<sup>168</sup> If Evreinov wanted the theatre to be *theatre* (not "a temple, a school, a mirror, a tribune or a pulpit") and assured the theatrical instinct would build "pal-

<sup>161</sup> Brook 1987, 42–3.

<sup>162</sup> Brecht 2015, 156; Pearson 1992, 153, 156–7. "An Apologia for Theatricality" was Evreinov's inaugural address when he succeeded Meyerhold at Kommissarzhevskaya's theatre in August 1908.

<sup>163</sup> Evreinoff 1927, 6, 23–4; Pearson 1992, 163.

<sup>164</sup> Brook in Williams 1992, 200.

<sup>165</sup> On the Bouffes du Nord, see especially Todd 2003. "Interweaving performance cultures" is Erika Fischer-Lichte's intriguingly textural concept of multicultural performance.

<sup>166</sup> Brook 1990, 11.

<sup>167</sup> Hare's criticism and then correspondence with Brook is quoted at length in Kustow 2005, 297–300.

<sup>168</sup> Brook quoted in Worrall 2007, 1343.

aces out of cardboard” on the simplest pretext,<sup>169</sup> Brook would share his confidence but also texturize his vision. First, if temples are built “downward from the abstract,” then in Brook’s theatre “one starts in the dirt of everyday life.”<sup>170</sup> Hence the consistently vertical thread in his thought, from the “rough texture” of the everyday – or, the “rough theatre” of “available means”: of Brecht and Meyerhold – to the other aspect of reality he variously relates to imagination and “holiness”: the sacred as a transformation of “[what] is not sacred at the outset,” and whose forms easily turn “deadly” over time (Brook wonders if Artaud too was “dragging us back to a nether world, [--] [to] Wagner”).<sup>171</sup> If this duality is overtly Platonic at times – such that where “visible [--] forms live and die,” “the invisible world has no form [and] does not change”<sup>172</sup> – it is the “passing from the visible to the invisible and back again” that Brook locates as “the basis of the theatre experience”:<sup>173</sup> a “double vision” native to children and enabled by “artistic form,” provided that the actors and the audience inhabit “the same world.”<sup>174</sup> Be it from prose to poetry, or from the long shot to close-up, what matters is “the constant in-and-out movement between various planes”; in the vast depth of the Bouffes du Nord stage (beyond the easily rough and holy associations of its peeling-red walls), it is suggested that one step separates distant panorama from utmost intimacy.<sup>175</sup>

However, as Brook would argue in various texts and talks of the 1990s (including his autobiography *Threads of Time*), “simplicity [--] is the end result of a dynamic process that encompasses both excess and the gradual withering away of excess.”<sup>176</sup> To make life “more visible [and] vivid than on the outside” (hence again the “seeing place”), the theatre presents it as “more concentrated [--] more compressed in time and space,” by “removing everything that is not strictly necessary and intensifying what is there, [--] putting a strong adjective in the place of a bland one.”<sup>177</sup> One recurring model for this process is the “traditional storyteller’s art,” enabling the invisible to appear in “the most mundane of objects” if only they are neutral, ordinary, and “empty” enough to arouse the theatrical instinct.<sup>178</sup> In more musical terms, a connecting thread is also provided by *rhythm*: “that the movement of the eye as it passes across a painting or across the vaults and arches of a great cathedral is related to a dancer’s leaps and turns and to the pulse of music.”<sup>179</sup> Finally, even if he sometimes dates the theatre/everyday duality back to Meyerhold (he doesn’t mention Evreinov), there is no doubt of Brook’s highest ideal: In Shakespeare, “all levels of society” would be “linked in a common event,” one section “following the crude” and another

<sup>169</sup> Evreinoff 1927, 148, 33.

<sup>170</sup> Brook in Todd 2003, 251–2.

<sup>171</sup> Brook 1993, 56, 72; Brook 1990, 60 (Wagner). On holy and rough theatre, Brook 1990, 47–109.

<sup>172</sup> Brook 1993, 105.

<sup>173</sup> Brook 1987, 128.

<sup>174</sup> Brook interviewed in Croyden 2003, 174, 72.

<sup>175</sup> Brook 1987, 46; Brook in Todd 2003, 27.

<sup>176</sup> Brook 1998, 74.

<sup>177</sup> Brook 1993, 11–12.

<sup>178</sup> Brook 1998, 165; Brook 1993, 72, 55.

<sup>179</sup> Brook 1998, 172, 19.

er the “sophisticated level,” then treated “to an instant of deep insight into the fabric of reality.”<sup>180</sup>

In what follows, I only briefly introduce three spatial models through which Brook has sought to navigate between the extremes of “holy” and “rough” theatricality (which I suggest resonate well with my models of the image and the platform). The first was introduced during his new group’s hundred-day journey of Africa, at the turn of 1972 and 1973: lay down a big blue carpet, wait for an audience, and see if “a common ground” could be established by someone just “walking across” it (much like the primordial man in *The Empty Space*).<sup>181</sup> In such carpet work, there is a sense of roughness, immediacy, and contact, but also, potentially, a degree of imagistic purity, in the ritual framing of those who traverse it. Here is Brook himself in 1993:

We often use a carpet as a rehearsal zone, with a very clear purpose: off the carpet, the actor is in daily life, he can do what he wants – waste his energy, engage in movements that don’t express anything in particular [--]. But as soon as he finds himself on the carpet, he is under the obligation of having a clear intention, of being intensely alive, simply because an audience is watching. [--] It was through this that we experienced the technical basis of Shakespearean theatre.<sup>182</sup>

The second practice was assumed during the rehearsals for Brook’s most overt “celebration of theatricality,” in his 1970 production of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*: “abandon everything” (like the iconic trapezes in *Dream*) when a sense of story and production have begun to emerge, and present the work-in-progress to children in a school gym or basement, re-routing all associations through local affordances on the fly.<sup>183</sup> While the production resonates with the lightness of its imagery, the gym work exemplifies not only the rough immediacy of the platform, but also a dual sense of *context* that I would argue defines Brook’s theatricality more generally. On the one hand, the very point both of his Centre and his aesthetic is to “work outside contexts” and “systems of reference,” be they geographic, cultural, or linguistic.<sup>184</sup> In cinema, for example, one “is always in a context” and “the mind of the spectator is already furnished,” but “in an empty space, each detail comes into focus” and “audience participation” consists in a sense of complicity, “on condition that the actor be ‘nowhere.’”<sup>185</sup> On the other hand, there is no way whatsoever that the materiality of context will evaporate by merely going to a gym or to Africa, rather it will make itself felt more acutely. In Brook’s terms, once the “invisible network of relationships among the characters and themes that grows up during rehearsals” is in place,

<sup>180</sup> Brook 1993, 103; Brook in Croyden 2003, 102–3; Brook in Todd 2003, 52 (Meyerhold).

<sup>181</sup> Brook 1998, 159; Brook in Croyden 2003, 94–5 (the *Empty Space* analogue is mine).

<sup>182</sup> Brook 1993, 17, 33.

<sup>183</sup> Brook 1993, 138–40; see also Brook 1998, 131, and Brook in Croyden 2003, 6–7 (“theatricality”).

<sup>184</sup> Brook 1987, 124.

<sup>185</sup> Brook 1993, 30–2.

this “hidden production” can also be divorced from its external form, and woven through the “immediate set of references” provided by any anonymous gym or carpet.<sup>186</sup> For Brook, such interweaving defines the art of the storyteller, acting in the first person rather than the Brechtian third, her story always dependent on the context of its telling.<sup>187</sup>

In Simon Brook’s 2013 documentary *The Tightrope*, finally, an 87-year-old Brook (with actor Yoshi Oida and two musicians, himself stylish with a cane and an orange shirt) leads a workshop into another uniting thread of the “theatre experience.” This time around, theatre happens when one walks across an imaginary tightrope, keeping the “triple balance” of self, other, and audience without “falling into tragedy and comedy.”<sup>188</sup> Whether or not the exercise works for actors, the metaphor does capture something of Brook’s perpetual balancing act between the theatrical extremes discussed in this article: the sanctified image (holy theatre in danger of turning deadly) and the public platform (rough theatre, risking its reduction to mere slapstick). If the *imagined* tightrope exemplifies the theatrical “heightening” Brook speaks of – a narrow path up in the air, or in one exercise across fire and water – it remains ever relative to the gravity of its material platform: watching the students walk across, or on the edges, of what look like Brook’s Persian *ur*-carpets of the 1970s, his late theatre aesthetic comes across as peacefully moderate rather than strikingly “immediate.”

The same goes for the operatic work of 2010, from which the fire and water exercise was directly derived. “Freely adapted” with Franck Krawczyk and Marie-Hélène Estienne, *A Magic Flute* was Brook’s last production as the artistic head at the Bouffes, de-cluttered into a ninety-minute *Singspiel* in black and red, with two actors and seven singers.<sup>189</sup> That I end with this perhaps minor example is because it exemplifies a *musical* texture very different from the Wagnerian one with which we began. (Always “fascinated by the act of conducting,” Brook himself has attributed his earliest sense of emptiness to a late concert by a frail Toscanini, still drawing from his orchestra a “transparent texture of sound in which each thread was clear and present.”<sup>190</sup>) While Mozart’s “pure language of story, people, and sound,” as Brook conceives it,<sup>191</sup> may evoke Wagner’s sister arts of poetry, dance, and tone, in its triple interweaving, its texture and quality differ radically, in the terms provided by Pepper at the beginning. Rather than having an orchestra in its pit or even tucked under the carpet like Wagner, *A Magic Flute* was accompanied solo on stage by pianist Franck Krawczyk, cutting all embellishment and “reducing [Mozart’s] textures to a cool Satie-like minimum.”<sup>192</sup> The very overture to the opera was abridged to its opening chords, their qualities of “openness and happiness” – as Brook defines them in *The Tightrope* – very

<sup>186</sup> Brook 1998, 132; Brook in Croyden 2003, 70 (here with the boxes as the immediate “references”).

<sup>187</sup> Brook in Todd 2003, 185; Brook in Croyden 176, 173.

<sup>188</sup> Brook 1993, 40 (“triple balance”); Brook in S. Brook 2013.

<sup>189</sup> Brook 2010; since then, Brook has only directed an English version of *The Suit* (2012); *The Valley of Astonishment* (2013); and *Battlefield*, based on *The Mahabharata* and opened in September 2015.

<sup>190</sup> Brook 1998, 74.

<sup>191</sup> Brook cited by Margaret Croyden ([blog post from 2011](#)), link checked 11 January 2016.

<sup>192</sup> Mark Swed, review in *Los Angeles Times* ([15 July 2011](#)), link checked 11 January 2016.

lightly woven from simple triads of E flat and C minor: G-B ♭ -E ♭ /C-E ♭ -G/(G)-E ♭ -G-B ♭ .<sup>193</sup> The images of the enchanted forest, or the temple, or the cage, were silently woven by the two black African actors, with the set of thin bamboo poles on the otherwise-bare platform. Of the reviews I have read, one notes the “uncomfortable, unfortunate evocation [--] of the ‘magical Negro’ [--] facilitating the love plot of white protagonists.”<sup>194</sup>

## Textures of Theatricality

Zooming out to the wider context, the specific theatricality of the director’s art has often been defined from a few perhaps conflicting positions. On one level – that of the individual author-creator, and often of the historical record – it may come across as a theatricality of *writing and naming*, often in the avant-garde genre of the manifesto. Rather than a theatre of performances, this is a theatre of epithets: cruel, epic, or poor, approximating the plague, the planetarium, or the laboratory, to cite only Artaud’s, Brecht’s, and Grotowski’s trademark labels. Somewhat conversely and more texturally, the director’s art has been understood as a theatricality of the *mise-en-scène*, taken as a fabric of bodies and objects, rendered “theatrical” in its constitutive subversion of text and language. Finally, these developments have also been related to the argued primacy of the visual in modernity, and to its effects of social alienation and fragmentation. Only at the loss of such “accepted values” as had previously “made the director as a distinct craftsman unnecessary” does Crichton task him with “restoring the artistic and social unity that had always been the central demand of the collective art of theater.”<sup>195</sup> As new technologies of vision would specifically polarize the viewer and the viewed, Rebecca Schneider and Gabrielle Cody relate “the notion of a director ‘in the modern sense’ [--] to the organization of [--] a decidedly *visual* whole.”<sup>196</sup>

In the cases discussed here, this search for coherence has also been situated between further extremes of *quality* and *texture*: the tendencies to purity and plurality, medium specificity and artistic interrelation. Where the aesthetic line of Wagner would absorb or interweave arts and audiences alike into the total texture of an organic work of art, the avant-garde line of Brecht and Meyerhold would rather have them mutually estranged, in politicized attempts at “barring the device” and opening its mechanics to critical scrutiny. If *theatricality* as a term only emerges in the latter moment – in line with concurrent formalisms of *literariness* or *pictoriality* – it still resonates with what Puchner calls “the Wagner effect: forcing the arts to take a definite stance toward the theatricalized theater [--] transforming the concept of theatricality from a description of the theater as an art form [--] into a value that must be either rejected or embraced.”<sup>197</sup> If

<sup>193</sup> Brook in S. Brook 2013; see also the [trailer](#) for the production, link checked 9 September 2016.

<sup>194</sup> Zachary Woolfe, *Observer*, [9 August 2011](#) Accessed 9 September 2016.

<sup>195</sup> Chinoy 1976, 9, 4.

<sup>196</sup> Schneider and Cody 2002, 5, 4.

<sup>197</sup> Puchner 2002, 9, 31.

Wagner’s project is one of quasi-Romantic organicism, and Brecht/Meyerhold’s, one of bare mechanics, then Brook’s theatre approximates an immediate “emptiness” that depends on the duality and intertwining of the mechanical and the organic precisely: The “holy” is woven from the “rough,” not as a Wagnerian totality but in “invisible networks” of bodies, objects, and performance cultures. In order to tie up loose ends, I now proceed to argue that the “textures of theatricality” I have suggested all benefit characteristic areas within a general range of possibilities.

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>IMAGE</b> for audience</p> <p>Theatrical Texture: fused, heavy, dense: Performative Quality: oneness/normativity: Audience: apart but absorbed:</p>	<p>upstage: Wagner &amp; †Fuchs excess: organic, figural, lateral</p> <p>in detail and orchestration (†W) ritual character of performance physically/psychologically</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>TIGHTROPE</b></p> <p>Theatrical Texture: spread, light, sparse: Performative Quality: repetition/novelty: Audience: close but apart:</p> <p style="text-align: center;">performers’ <b>PLATFORM</b></p>	<p>“holy” or “deadly” Brook: “immediate” “rough theatre”</p> <p>in naturalistic detail (also †F) skill displayed/norms estranged physically/psychologically</p> <p>empty: mechanical, literal, frontal downstage: Meyerhold &amp; Brecht</p>

Table 1.

In effect, the ensuing discussion is outlined in the adjacent Table 1, furnishing the previous models of *image*, *tightrope*, and *platform* with some conceptual parameters. Needless to say, the mappings here are only indicative; while I believe they offer some interesting variables to consider, they may intertwine in many different ways.<sup>198</sup> For example, take the typical stage positions suggested in the right-hand column: while Fuchs’s is indeed a theatre of the *image*, it does not take place upstage, nor is it “dense” in its textural detail (these deviations are marked with crosses, in the table). In such terms, Brook’s *tightrope* is indeed entirely metaphorical, navigating an “immediate” middle ground between what he would term the “holy” and “rough” theatricalities of the image and the platform – think tragedy/comedy, or church/marketplace. Other such conceptual extremes, again in the right-hand column, include the tendencies to “excess”

<sup>198</sup> If many an *auteur* director has turned perfectly practicable performers’ platforms into absorbing images – think Craig, Appia, Wilson, or the ultimate “estrangement” of life in Tadeusz Kantor’s Theatre of Death (see Paavolainen 2012, 163-2017) – so also have images increasingly taken on qualities of the platform (think of video screens and their migration to 3D objects). If the “poor theatre” of Grotowski may appear all “spread, light, sparse” in the texture of its staging, it also exhibits an utter density of text, muscle, breath. Indeed, an apparent emptiness on one level will often be woven through with excesses on others.

and “emptiness” that also fuel antitheatrical prejudices, as Postlewait and Davis have argued; organistic and mechanistic aesthetics; a general emphasis on the *figural* and the *literal*; and a sense of movement as lateral or frontal (within the frame, or more toward the audience: here one may also think of Gorelik’s “wall” and “floor”; the internal and the external; re-presentation and direct presentation.)<sup>199</sup> In what follows, I advance a more general discussion of theatricality – and why, perhaps, it can be argued to matter – by opening out what in Table 1 (across the columns) are titled “theatrical texture,” “performative quality,” and their relations to the audience.

To begin with, a key argument running through this article – if often between the lines – has been that the *quality* of theatricality is a function of its dramaturgical *texture*. In other words, even if Gorelik’s notions of (upstage) image and (downstage) platform were intuitive enough for the reader to get a general sense of what I am talking about, I would argue that their specifically theatrical qualities are due to the specific ways they support the interweaving of usually heterogeneous strands or processes. In Table 1, I describe the texture of the Wagnerian *image* as “fused, heavy, dense” in its detail and orchestration, as opposed to the “spread, light, sparse” quality that defines the *platforms* not only of Meyerhold and Brecht, but indeed of Fuchs and Brook as well. If we think of it in terms of the philosopher Pepper’s tonic triad, quoted at the very beginning, then one will present it as fully merged, the other at given intervals apart, but it is important to remember that the strands at play are indeed not all of a kind. Where Wagner dreams of *dance, tone, and poetry* as “interlaced” or “entwined” in a “united chain,” Brecht wishes to “untie” or “resolve” naturalized conditions into *processes and relationships* “in such a way that the knots become conspicuous.”<sup>200</sup> By way of another analogy, the image and the platform perhaps compare with romantic and abstract *painting*, respectively over- and underdetermined in depth and context. Related to questions of authority or authorship, the contrast is a familiar one between textures that respectively seek to conceal or highlight the very fact of their weaving.

Hence then the second category of *performative quality*, which in Table 1 is delineated with further distinctions of repetition/onceness and novelty/normativity. That their combinations may appear awkward – are not norms arrived at by repetition? is not novelty marked by a sense of onceness? – is again a function of said tendencies to concealment and emphasis. If the normativity of the image is often dissimulated by a ritual sense of occasion (whether ideal or conventional: Brook’s “holy” and “deadly”), it is by highlighting how what it presents is a *repetition* that the platform would contest it (a key to Brechtian *Verfremdung*). More generally, it can be argued that the very “theatricality” of any performative texture will only appear as such – as contrived and “stagey”; empty or excessive; overly sparse or dense – with respect to some historically specific performative norm from which it ostensibly deviates, perhaps, throwing its very performativity into theatrical relief. Here, such norms could include operatic convention

<sup>199</sup> Postlewait and Davis 2003, 4; Gorelik 1962, 295; on literal and figural, see Jackson 2004, 144–5.

<sup>200</sup> Wagner 1892–9:1, 95; Brecht 2015, 57–8, 251 (section 67).

(Wagner), literary drama (Fuchs), stage naturalism (Meyerhold), capitalist society (Brecht), or whatever one means by “deadly” theatre (Brook). Perhaps, it is in avoiding the extremes of the image and the platform that Brook’s tightrope act gets the ridicule that it regularly does: to cite two default criticisms, he is just not as “holy” and serious as Grotowski, nor as political – if indeed at all – as Brecht.

Finally, this dialectic of norm and deviation also affects the roles of the audience, in Table 1. For the *image*, this role has been defined as one physically apart but psychologically “absorbed,” for the *platform*, as physically close but psychologically apart. In both cases, what renders the role “theatrical” is its ultimate *apartness*, which I would like to consider in relation to one specific definition of “normativity.” This is the iterative intertwining of perception with action that enables fluent performance but in so doing also conceals its historicity; for example, the phenomenologically “recessive” body needs to conceal itself from itself in order to act effectively.<sup>201</sup> In such terms, specifically theatrical deviations may begin with the simple *decoupling* of action and perception that occurs when an image or a platform presents itself to be watched or trodden on – perhaps, a mere tightrope as a slight heightening – but that need not even be institutionalized into formal divisions of performers and audiences. As Elizabeth Burns perceptively put it in 1972, “the theatrical quality of life” is most acutely experienced “by those who feel themselves on the margin of events either because they have adopted the role of spectator or because [--] they have not yet been offered a part or have not learnt it sufficiently well to enable them to join the actors”:

[They] have not yet learnt the conventions of a foreign country, or [--] find themselves suddenly in a situation in which they had never envisaged themselves, in a hospital bed or prison cell. [--] They are acutely aware of the element of composition in the management of sequences of action, which the participants may feel to be spontaneous. [--] This perception emerges in the history of the individual when the child realises that what happens in the world about him is not under his control [--] though he may at first attempt to take part in the scene.<sup>202</sup>

In deeming theatrical action “meaningful and affective (not instrumental and effective),” Burns is clearly following the distinction of praxis and performance long since established by the Russian Formalists and the Prague semioticians, between the instrumentality of something and its poetic function: its literariness or theatricality.<sup>203</sup> However, the dynamic does also seem to work across the very different cases I have discussed, whether one is placed on the theatrical “margin of events” by Wagner’s mystic gulf or by the very skill of Meyerhold’s actors. In Brecht, an equally theatrical decoupling also takes place on stage, as it were,

<sup>201</sup> On the coordination of action and perception, see e.g. Ingold 2011, 58–61; on the recessive body, see Leder 1990, 36–68; on the arguable *performativity* of such dynamics, see Paavola forthcoming.

<sup>202</sup> Burns 1972, 11, 13.

<sup>203</sup> Burns 1972, 31.

once the performer steps aside her material so as to better enable its contemplation or manipulation, as in the exercises of past-tense or third-person narration. For Brook, finally, “all that is needed for an act of theatre to be engaged” is for one “man” to walk across an empty space (or a carpet, or a tightrope) “whilst someone else is watching”: Here the literal context of perception is suspended for the “invisible network” of action established in rehearsal.<sup>204</sup>

Perhaps, in short, what is minimally needed for a *theatrical* quality to make itself felt is not so much a clear distinction of actors and spectators as the cut or cleavage in a texture of action and perception that their division exemplifies.<sup>205</sup> On the model of the platform, this is a multiply *deictic* theatricality that *defamiliarizes* performative textures by *decontextualizing* their workings, and in so doing *deautomatizes* perception by *decoupling* it from opportunities of intervention and reciprocal adjustment. On the model of the image, the stage/audience distinction is more rigid but also more concealed; perhaps, the quality of theatricality is only felt in degrees, beginning with the merest “outside” perspective of the novice, and only proceeding to a sense of excess and contrivance as its attended moments of decoupling accumulate over time? On the model of the tightrope, theatricality is akin to the slightest act of contemplation in the midst of ongoing action – zooming out to check the pattern before weaving in again: close to the “rough texture” of reality but still somehow “heightened.” In all cases, theatricality pursues to provide a perspective on performative processes that might escape perception otherwise, whether it does so by framing them as images, rehearsing them on platforms of display, or by balancing between the two as if on a tightrope.

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<sup>204</sup> Brook 1990, 11; Brook 1998, 132.

<sup>205</sup> For Josette Féral (2002, 97, 12), theatricality “emerges through a cleft in quotidian space” and opens a novel relationship to “objects, events, and actions” by way of a series of “cleavages: everyday space/representational space; reality/fiction; symbolic/instinctive.”

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Satu-Mari Jansson



# “I Need a Door Onstage through which I Can Enter” – Learning Challenges of Collaborative Theatre Practices

## Tiivistelmä

Tutkin tässä artikkelissa ammattiteatterin haasteita, jotka liittyvät teatterin tekemisen prosesseihin ja taiteellisiin käytäntöihin, kun esityksiä valmistetaan ryhmämuotoisesti. Hypoteesina on, että teatterin ristiriidat ja oppimishaasteet liittyvät tekstilähtöisen teatterin ja ryhmälähtöisempien tuotantoprosessien välisiin eroihin.

Tavoitteena on vastata seuraavaan tutkimuskysymykseen: *Mitä pitäisi oppia, jotta ammattiteatterissa voitaisiin laajentaa teatterin tekemisen tapoja?* Artikkelissa pohditaan, mitkä seikat olisi hyvä ottaa huomioon tulevaisuudessa. Miten teatteri kokonaisuudessaan voi sopeutua ja muuttaa prosessejaan? Artikkelissa käsitellään molempia puolia: yksilötason reaktioita ja arvioita mutta myös teatterin työkäytäntöjä.

Ammattiteatterin oppimisen haasteita tarkastellaan kolmen eri tason avulla. Ensimmäinen taso liittyy yleisiin teatterituotannon malleihin sekä prosesseihin, kuten aikataulutuksiin ja työnjakoihin. Toinen ja kolmas taso liittyvät pikemminkin tuotantojen yksilölliseen puoleen: harjoituskäytäntöihin, johtamiseen ja näyttelijöiden näkökulmiin. Analyysin kohteena on erään laitosteatterin kaksi kokeellista tuotantoa. Esittelen kohdeteatterin kehitystä pidemmällä aikavälillä. Tätä varten kuvaan molempien artikkelissa analysoitujen tuotantojen avulla, miten vakiintuneiden hierarkioiden muuttaminen ja kollektiiviset prosessit ja käytännöt otettiin vastaan teatterissa pitkällä aikavälillä (2008–2011).

Käytän teoreettisena kehyksenä kulttuurihistoriallista toiminnan teoriaa ja kehittävää työntutkimusta. Vastaan tutkimuskysymykseen tarkastelemalla kahden kokeellisen tuotannon ristiriitoja, dilemmoja, häiriöitä ja ratkaisuideoita. Muodostan analyysin tuloksena kaksi yhtenäistä tarinaa teatterin muutosyrityksistä.

Avainsanat: teatteri, laitosteatteri, devising, ryhmäkeskeiset työtavat, tekstilähtöinen teatteri, kehitys, toiminnan teoria, kehittävä työntutkimus

## Abstract

In this article I will study the challenges of subsidised institutional theatre when faced with theatre making processes and artistic practices that take on new dramaturgies and aesthetics and collective theatre making practices. The hypothesis is that the contradictions and learning challenges of theatre are connected to the relationship between literary theatre and more collective types of performance making processes.

The aim is to answer the research question: *What should be learnt in order to broaden the theatrical practices of subsidised theatre?* The article ponders what should be taken into consideration in the future. How does an institution as a whole adapt in order to change its processes? Both sides are presented; the individual's responses and evaluation and the institution's working practices.

The learning challenges of institutional theatre will be examined on three levels. The first level concerns the general production models, and processes such as schedules and divisions of labour. The second and third levels concern the more individual side of productions: rehearsal processes, leadership and actors' points of view. The analysis will focus on two experimental productions from one institutional theatre. I will present a longer-term overview of the case theatre. In order to demonstrate this, both productions analysed in this article map the long-term picture (2008–2011) of how the case theatre handled non-hierarchy within collaborative processes and practices.

I use Cultural Historical Activity Theory and Developmental Work Research as a theoretical framework. In order to answer the research question I examine the contradictions, dilemmas, problems and new solutions that arose in two artistic experimental productions. I map a longitudinal overview of the theatre's change efforts with two narratives.

Keywords: Theatre, Institutional theatre, Devised Theatre, Collaborative Practices, Text-based Theatre, Development, Activity Theory, Developmental Work Research

## 1. Introduction

The quotation presented in the title, "I need a door onstage through which I can enter", was jokingly said by one of the actors involved in the study. He explained that he is a "drama man", meaning that he is used to text-based theatre making. He found practices that did not involve "traditional" working with a character very demanding, claiming that he is not used to "that kind of language". The door in the quotation symbolises a hierarchy based on a text – as a text and its meaning act at the top of the hierarchy of tools in drama productions. The meaning of a text is perceived as one of the most important elements in theatre making, especially in dramatic traditions. This quotation nicely encapsulates one aspect of the learning challenges that might be met when subsidised institutional theatres start integrating more collective approaches into their theatre making processes.

The study<sup>206</sup> started in 2008 when I became an interventionist-researcher<sup>207</sup> in a publicly funded project, the aim of which was to support the development

<sup>206</sup> This research has been undertaken as part of the ArtsEqual –project funded by the Academy of Finland's Strategic Research Council from its Equality in Society –programme (project no. 293199).

<sup>207</sup> Doing this type of intervention research (see: Jansson, 2015a) means that personnel and the interventionist-researcher experience and go through a research-based development process together (Engeström, 2011; 2007 Virkkunen & Newham, 2013; 2005; Alasoini & Ramstadt, 2007). In the research-based development process, personnel have a double role (Alasoini, 2005). On the one hand, personnel are an active part of the developmental process as they collaborate with studying and developing their work practices, and then on the other hand, they are objects of study (Jyrkämä, 1999, 139). Research-based development generally has two aims: 1) to develop organisations by producing research data, 2) to produce research results by developing organisations (Alasoini, 2005). The interventionist-researcher uses methodology that is based on activity theory (Engeström, 1985; 1991; 2004a; 2004b), which means that the same kinds of analytical tools are used during a developmental process as in academic publications (see more: Engeström, Sannino, & Virkkunen, 2014).

of Finland's northern-most professional theatre Rovaniemi Theatre – Lapland Regional Theatre, situated on the Arctic Circle in Lapland. I ended up asking why it seems so difficult for subsidised institutional theatre professionals to broaden their theatrical practices, as this issue came up in the project. I started to analyse problems, dilemmas and solutions experienced in the production processes as part of the potential and more extended longitudinal accommodation process happening in the Finnish theatre field. Most Finnish and Swedish subsidised theatres in Finland are organised in such a way that production models support making theatre using dramatic text, with the script as a starting point. This has led most of the agents to perceive the main purpose of an institutional theatre being the creation of theatrical performances that bring the playwright's output on stage as a dramatic piece or a ready composed piece of musical theatre. The dominance of this perception affects the division of labour and production models within theatres. Still, some directors are keen to bring in more group-oriented working practices as part of their artistic visions. In these cases, the director's visions are not only about the end result, but also about the processes of building a theatrical performance. In this way the processes are part of individually formed theatre aesthetics. When more process-oriented directors gain positions within theatres, it seems that theatres start accommodating more process-oriented practices.

In this article I will study the challenges a subsidised institutional theatre faces as theatre-making processes and artistic practices, which take in more collective and non-hierarchical theatre-making approaches are accommodated. My aim is to answer the research question: *What should be learnt in order to broaden theatrical practices in subsidised theatre?*

The learning challenges of institutional theatres will be viewed on three levels. The first level concerns the general production models and processes such as schedules and division of labour. The second and third levels concern the more individual side of productions. I would like to pinpoint the questions being asked by actors who meet these challenges in their work as rehearsal processes and directors' actions diverge from dominant literary theatre traditions. I will also document the challenges directors face, and pose, in terms of their communication and leadership skills.

The analysis will focus on two experimental productions from one institutional theatre. The case theatre is a typical example of a regional theatre in Finland, with quite limited audience groups and drama based working practices. I have tried to present a longer-term overview of the case theatre, since the hypothesis is that the long-term perspective on accommodating theatre practices is related to the institutional theatre's learning challenges. In order to demonstrate this, both of the productions analysed in this article map the long-term picture (2008–2011) of how the case theatre handled non-hierarchical elements within collaborative processes and practices.

I am introducing a new type of theoretical framework for enriching comprehension of the accommodation practices that are happening in the field of the-

atre. This work is carried out through several articles<sup>208</sup> and a dissertation summary<sup>209</sup>. The theory is called Cultural Historical Activity Theory and Developmental Work Research<sup>210</sup>. The methodological framework will help to create a systemic image of the theatre's traditions at a macro-level. The stage directors, actors, scenographers and technical personnel are part of a systemic constellation that explains why, in fact, work practices are so difficult to change. The concrete analysis will focus on micro-level productions as the conventions reveal themselves at that level. The theoretical framework helps to conceptualise the components that are involved when a theatre's practices are diversified.

## 2. Challenges of Accommodating Devised Theatre into Subsidised Institutional Theatre

In Finland, there are a little less than 60 subsidised theatres altogether. The professional theatre network is financed by the national government and local municipalities. Much of the average municipal cultural budget is channelled towards maintaining local institutional theatres.

In Northern Finland, theatres, such as Rovaniemi Theatre, are targeting their performances to meet local needs and tastes. This is done because in Lapland the audience structure and the amount of audiences differ from those in metropolitan areas. Statistically, most professional theatre and performing arts audiences in Finland are women aged 45 to 64 years with a higher education degree and living in Southern Finland. Yet, students have increased their theatre-going by about 10% over the last five years.<sup>211</sup> However, in the case of Rovaniemi Theatre, the overall audience is still quite small. Rovaniemi Theatre also acts as a touring regional theatre, so its audiences are in fact spread all over Lapland municipalities, in which higher education isn't actually that typical. Rovaniemi is a small university town with about 50,000 inhabitants. Student theatre is very strong there, as is demand for entertainment by an improvisation group, which holds sessions at local restaurants. In Finland, some institutional theatres and their managements are aiming at renewing theatre practices and bringing new insight into theatre work. However, the location and size of the theatre, the conventions as well as the audiences (e.g. education, age and expectations and habits regarding theatre attendance) have their effects on how much theatre practices can be renewed at once (or how much renewal is reasonable).

Most of the theatres contractually bind actors for a certain period, typically two years. The case theatre employed a total of 13-14 actors at the time of the developmental project. However, most Finnish stage director's work as freelancers. Such a set-up can cause challenges as ensembles and directors don't necessarily have the possibility to develop their working methods together in the long-term.

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<sup>208</sup> Jansson, 2014a; 2014b; Korhonen, 2012.

<sup>209</sup> Jansson, 2015a; Jansson 2015b.

<sup>210</sup> Engeström, 1987; 1991; 1998; 1999; 2004a; 2004b; 2007; 2011.

<sup>211</sup> Suomen Teatterit, 2012.

Finnish institutional theatres still typically function as drama or “literary theatre”<sup>212</sup>, the main purpose of which is to represent a text through a theatrical performance. The institutional production model is built around this drama paradigm that makes all processes subordinate to literature, creating what’s referred to as the hierarchy of text.<sup>213</sup> Actual practices and the division of labour during productions are built to serve the vision that the director and the working group have extrapolated from the text and the production model functions as the perceived ideal for performances.<sup>214</sup> Essentially, the work of the director and the ensemble is subordinate to conventions and taken-for-granted ideas of what a play is and what processes are used to make a production (see: Fig. 1).

Rovaniemi Theatre has gradually taken in more collective and participatory working practices. One might call the two experimental productions described in this article fairly typical devised theatre processes<sup>215</sup>. Devised theatre is the collective creation of theatrical art through a variety of processes and methods. The workgroup has the power to choose the working methods and processes. The theatrical product can be created using methods such as “research, discussion, ‘workshopping’, material, improvisation, the use of a writer, or visual experimentation”.<sup>216</sup> Devised theatre is an approach rather than a method.<sup>217</sup>

Institutional theatres are called “production theatres”.<sup>218</sup> Theatre companies and their organisational structures are organised around functional divisions, meaning that the work process is organised by coordination, instead of more collective collaboration. A rigid structure was observed in the case theatre in 2008 in the form of the scenographic process starting many months before the actors joined the process. This meant that the stage sets and costumes for the production were already decided upon before actors had a chance to start their role work (see: Fig. 1).

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<sup>212</sup> See Lehmann, 2006

<sup>213</sup> Ibid..

<sup>214</sup> Korhonen, 2012

<sup>215</sup> However, the two productions analysed in this article should not be labelled merely as devised theatre. The theatre directors who directed the two plays don’t themselves use the term “devising” for describing their aims and working methods. Both of the processes aimed at bringing collective working into the productions.

<sup>216</sup> Oddey, 1994, 12.

<sup>217</sup> Oddey, 1994.

<sup>218</sup> Hofman, 1998.

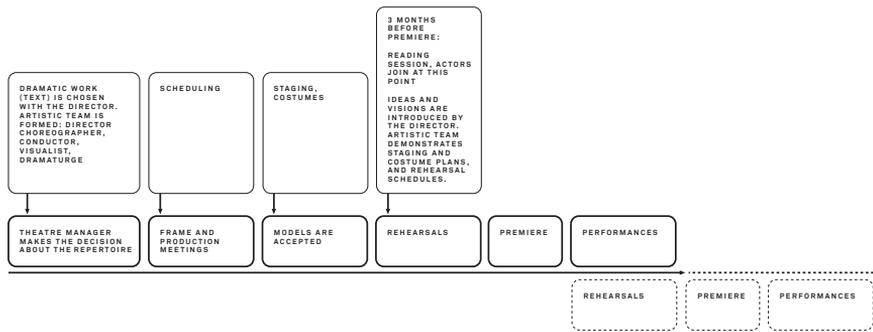


Fig. 1: Generic text-based production model of Rovaniemi Theatre in 2008.

### 3. Applying Activity Theory for Viewing Processes and Modification of Practices

The theoretical and methodological approach used in this study is based on Cultural-Historical Activity Theory and Developmental Work Research.<sup>219</sup> The activity theoretical framework was introduced in 1920 by a group of Russian researchers who were interested in explaining people’s psychological behaviour by using premises other than behaviourism, which had been the main theoretical framework until that point.

Human beings have produced cultural artefacts, tools, languages and notations, all of which affect the psychological development of present and future generations. Objects are observed through “tools”, in other words, objects are always mediated, and change over time.<sup>220</sup> People are also involved in different activities that are historically formed and collective in nature. The object can be said to be the direction of the collective practices. The collectively constructed object motivates people but, even though activities are collective in nature, they consist of individuals’ actions that are linked to personal goals.<sup>221</sup>

To expand the whole collective activity to take in more devised types of practices creates a demand for the theatre’s entire team of personnel to redefine the object of work and the toolkit used (*the idea of a play and the theatre making process*). This article also seeks to bring forth the perspectives of actors and to analyse their personal learning challenges, as the perspectives become evident in data and interviews. The challenge of moving from literary theatre to devised theatre practices in an institutional theatre setting can raise issues about how to handle changes in individuals’ motivation levels, actions and emotions.

The hypothesis for this study is that when theatre expands to more collective theatre making practices this requires rethinking the activity system, meaning

<sup>219</sup> Engeström, 1987; 1991; 1998; 1999; 2004a; 2004b; 2007; 2011.

<sup>220</sup> Vygotsky 1978.

<sup>221</sup> Vygotsky, 1978; Leontjev, 1978.

tools, the group, division of labour and rules. Rethinking and developing, then again, affects the individual's working practices, which must be changed in order to expand the repertoire of working practices. This requires learning and making new kind of connections and insights concerning one's work. Concepts derived from activity theory and developmental work research help us to study and analyse learning challenges in these situations.

Meaning-making happens in the relation between personal sense (one's life and goals) and reality. An individual's personal mind is attached to their present activity<sup>222</sup> e.g. dramatic play traditions. If the work carries on in the way an individual has envisaged in their personal mind it will arouse feelings of success as things are happening as planned.<sup>223</sup> The subjects who have an ability to develop the object of their work see "the object through the perspective of their own motives, that is, in the perspective of personal sense".<sup>224</sup> The case theatre organisation's bringing in of new types of activity models was experienced on the personal level.

Detaching from the "old" object and redirecting one's actions can be quite painful. Modifying theatrical practices can contradict one's personal mindset, i.e. an actor's concept of their work. Rynell (2008) has analysed actors' actions and the cognitive aspect of creating a character from a script, which involves realising specific actions (BSI - background-situation-intention). BSI changes in devised theatre performances – internalised tools don't work in the same way as usual. However, having experiences that stem from new approaches is the first part of involvement and possible change. Changes can also cause experiences of critical conflict, that is, situations "in which people face inner doubts that paralyse them in front of contradictions between motives unsolvable by the subject alone"<sup>225</sup> (e.g. "I don't want to commit to these 'new' performances"). At the personal level, experienced risks and tensions might uncover contradictory motives, which in turn might enhance professional development when they are solved.<sup>226</sup>

#### 4. Long-term Data Gathering and Analysis

In order to capture longitudinally the learning challenges that the Rovaniemi Theatre was faced with, I followed Rovaniemi Theatre and its practices for several years, from 2008 until the summer of 2011. After two years of gathering longitudinal data from several productions I realised that in theatres the artists and technical personnel habitually observe their work per production. They have problems analysing their activity longitudinally. This is one of the explanations as to why changes in work practices are difficult to manage.

The data was gathered as part of an intervention research project. In 2008 I conducted 21 individual interviews, four group interviews and held 9 develop-

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<sup>222</sup> Sannino, 2008.

<sup>223</sup> Mäkitalo, 2005.

<sup>224</sup> Sannino 2008, 239.

<sup>225</sup> Sannino 2008, 240. See also Vasilyuk 1988.

<sup>226</sup> Sannino, 2008; Vasilyuk, 1988.

ment sessions. Most of the interviews were conducted during February and April. The ethnographical data gathering period took place in the spring of 2008. In 2011 I interviewed seven artists, one director (a second theatre manager), one performance dramaturge and five actors that were part of one production. I also undertook some ethnographical observation of the rehearsals. I narrowed down the focus and took the two theatre productions as my object as they were described as “experimental productions” where different kinds of work practices were initiated.

Activity theory and developmental work research explain how changes in work practices cause developmental contradictions.<sup>227</sup> These contradictions are felt and experienced as problems in daily work and routine. On a personal level, they are felt as conflicts, dilemmas and new meaning makings.<sup>228</sup> In order to apply activity theory and developmental work research, I started operationalising the idea of developmental contradiction by tracing marks or notions related to changes in the working practices and activity. Problems, dilemmas and new solutions describe the adjustment between a previous, stable activity model and new models that are just about to develop. Problems, dilemmas and new solutions are concrete ways how developmental contradictions emerge. This is a way of studying work-related learning as people try to develop their working practices and solve problems that they face in their work. I did this by focusing on problems and dilemmas and solutions that arose during the two productions. Engeström<sup>229</sup> has defined the concepts of problem, solutions and dilemma. Problems are best identified as ruptures in the fluent workflow, while solutions are ways to solve the situation at hand.<sup>230</sup> A dilemma is recognised as comprising issues or things that are in conflict by their nature.<sup>231</sup>

I gathered all the data together, related to problems, dilemmas and new solutions, per production. I used these data as material to create two narratives, following the idea that a narrative requires a chronological plot, which makes events complete and whole.<sup>232</sup> I then utilised three levels of production in my analysis; 1) leadership; 2) the rehearsal process; and 3) the production model. (see Fig. 2). I formed these three different levels in order to break down the narratives, as the perspectives of the interviewees produced a multi-layered description. The hypothesis for further analysis is that some parts of these three levels change or at least there is a requirement for change when performances are produced in ways more akin to devised theatre practices.

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<sup>227</sup> Engeström, 1987; 1991; 1998; 1999; 2004a; 2004b; 2007; 2011.

<sup>228</sup> Engeström & Sannino, 2011.

<sup>229</sup> Engeström, 2004a.

<sup>230</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>231</sup> Engeström & Sannino, 2011.

<sup>232</sup> Czarniawska, 1998, 2.

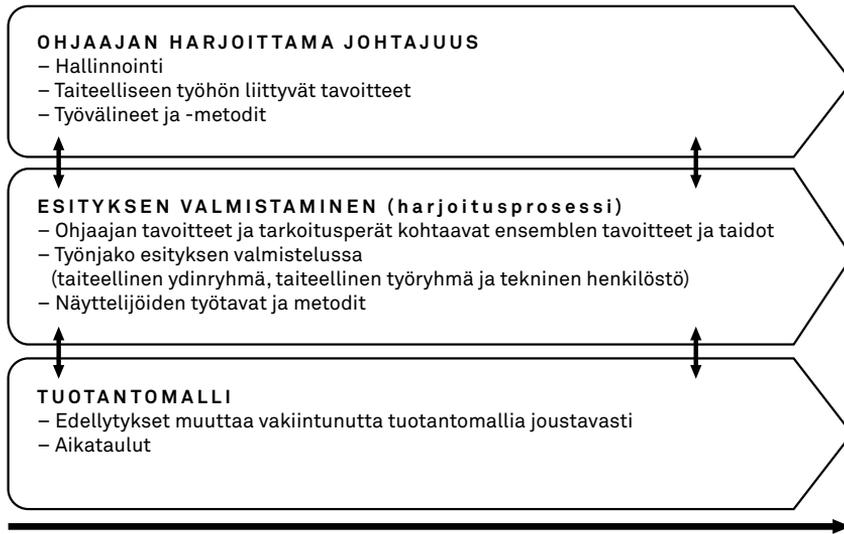


Fig. 2: Three levels of learning as a subsidised institutional theatre takes in more group-based practices.

I have constructed two production narratives by operationalising developmental contradictions as problems, dilemmas and new solutions. I call these narratives Production “multiple leaders” (2008) and Production “collaboration as a starting point” (2011). Narratives provide an insight into the longitudinal blending of new types of practices and the artists’ reactions and reflections concerning these processes.

## 5. The Slow Adoption of Devised Theatre Practices

### The Production “Multiple Leaders”

The theatre manager was eager to create a new model for the theatre and she wanted the whole theatre’s personnel to participate in planning the future. She organised discussion sessions for 50 people. The theatre also planned to start an evacuation period so that the theatre building could be renovated. This was the initial reason for starting the development project. The manager was also keen to revise conventional text-based practices, as she had a long career in the field of improvisational theatre. The aim was a challenge for some of the actors, who had not had much chance for further education.

It became clear that the manager (director 1) was struggling in various ways with her vision for making theatre. Her vision was that professional theatres could also produce performances without commitment to psycho-realism or drama theatre. The problematic aspect of her vision was that most of the theatre’s personnel did not share the same practical and aesthetic ideas. Some of the oldest actors and technical staff really had to process these ideas. Experimental productions

had demonstrated how difficult these productions were in light of the new types of working practices. Previous productions that were experienced as being problematic had increased doubts about new types of theatre methods and practices.

One production can be considered as one of the first experimental productions. It was prepared for the main stage and did not follow the traditions of drama theatre. I call it the production “multiple leaders”. In that production there was not one sole director but a core artistic workgroup consisting of a director (director 1), a set designer and a circus artist, who together led the production. The production started with improvisational workshops with the ensemble. The idea was to make a non-verbal performance for the main stage with plenty of circus tricks. The theatre manager at the time (director 1) described the production as one of the most process-led productions they had ever tried. Unfortunately, the performance didn’t make the opening night – at least not in the first year. The opening night was cancelled a week before it was scheduled to take place, and this caused quite a stressful situation. The whole autumn had been very busy and problematic since the production personnel had tried to assemble the performance together. There were plenty of minor and major problems during the process and these overwhelmed the technical and artistic personnel, causing resistance, anxiety and issues of wellbeing.

### **Leadership in the Production “Multiple Leaders”**

The decision to have the performance directed by three artists - director, set designer and circus artist - created some problems. The artistic core group did not discuss the division of labour, so everybody did what they thought was their core competence. At first they thought that the performance would not need a plot and they focused instead on the visual aspects. The artistic and technical personnel suffered from the chosen approach because someone has to make the final decisions, regardless of things being discussed together and agreed on by the group. The production was considered very problematic because of its lack of a foreman/forewoman. The three directors gave different answers to the same questions.

Theatre generally is felt to be one of the most hierarchical and authoritative organisation types, and the director’s power and responsibility is enormous. Such a hierarchy can cause frictions, yet ultimately some element of authority was in this case perceived to be required, otherwise the process would stagnate. Issues related to hierarchy and authority won’t change in one production even though they may change in the future.

### **Rehearsal Process in the Production “Multiple Leaders”**

Normally a rehearsal process starts with a reading session. In these meetings a director introduces his/her ideas, and a miniature model of the set is discussed. In this particular production there were none of these elements. The workgroup

had exactly one month time to make the performance ready to meet an audience. The synopsis was given verbally to everybody.

The performance was too open, dramaturgically and structurally, to meet production schedules. Beside this openness there were too many open technical problems that could not be solved. The plot was dramaturgically completely scattered. Different scenes had no connecting points. The performance was experienced as problematic in a structural and dramaturgical sense. During rehearsals there were many successful moments in their first run-through but the scenes were not connected together. The workgroup tried to solve problems in various idea sessions and workshops and the people who were involved said that there was maybe too much brainstorming. From the beginning of the rehearsal process the workgroup repeated:

Excerpt 1: I just didn't get it. "This isn't going to work" was the first thing in my mind. (Technical staff 1, interview conducted on 28.2.2008 at Rovaniemi Theatre).

Both artistic and technical personnel tried to manage each other too much during the process. Generally, many of the theatre staff recognised these aspects as a sign of catastrophe. The performance would not become 'alive' on stage, if people would not commit themselves to making and rehearsing it.

The actors felt that the actions that the directors wanted them to perform weren't familiar to them and that they did not have tools with which to judge their success. In fact, they did not have any habitual tools, such as characters, in this production. The rehearsals took many different forms as they explored and experimented with interesting physical movements. Two of the actors were very talented mimetically, but the aesthetic goals did not fall within their comfort zones. They practiced heavily and showed themselves no mercy. The circus artist, one of the directors, couldn't help wondering about the actors' obsession with not believing how good they were. The actors didn't believe in themselves even though the directors repeatedly encouraged them. Some of the actors wondered why nobody had asked them what kind of methods they had previously used in their work and whether they would be interested in exploring new methods.

### **The Production model in the Production "Multiple Leaders"**

The idea was that actors would get inspiration from different settings or objects, for instance from a painting, and adapt their theatrical methods in accordance with the input from other art forms. The aim was not to bind scenes together, but just to arrive at them. The challenge was that it was impossible to plan this in advance, as the content was to be produced in the rehearsals. The directors didn't make any rehearsal plan and this caused disturbances because the technical staff did not know what they should be doing and when.

Instead, the goal was to produce all sorts of material that would be put together later on. Nobody had any idea that this type of material producing activity would need much more rehearsal time. Besides this need for time, these productions demanded hard work and could not succeed without everybody committing themselves fully to the process and the outcome. If the idea is that things are done completely differently, the production personnel need more time to learn.

Afterwards, the technical and artistic personnel said that these kinds of productions needed new types of schedules, and that you cannot simply start with literary theatre production schedules and models. The technical staff had no clue what kind of a “play” they were making and why. The set workshop and wardrobe had no timetables and they were uncertain about when the designers would give them the plans. Otherwise, they had quite fixed deadlines and timetables with other productions: this particular production was not the only one they were preparing. Falling behind meant that there was going to be a huge rush at the point when the designers would be ready to give the plans. The technical personnel felt neglected.

### The Production “Collaboration as a Starting Point”

In recent years there had been some changes in the Rovaniemi theatre. The oldest actors had retired and representatives of a new, younger generation had been hired to the theatre. After 2009 Rovaniemi Theatre introduced plenty of performances that could be labelled group-based and devised processes. Two managers shared the post of theatre manager and they started their job in 2010. The managers proclaimed their mission: to find new audiences for the theatre. They wanted to achieve this by rethinking the mission of institutional theatre.

When I entered Rovaniemi Theatre again after a pause of two years, I noticed very soon that the theatre had continued with the vision of blending in new types of artistic approaches. At this point, they were struggling with the audience reaction. The oldest audience members had left in the middle of a performance in a few cases, probably because they felt that the logic of the performance was too strange for them. Some of the local newspapers started to publish not-so-glowing critiques, and letters to the editor continued to pan the theatre and its mission. The theatre managers and the marketing personnel tried to solve the situation by organising some audience events where they discussed and opened up the theatre pieces and their aesthetics.

Next I will introduce one production that took place in 2011. The production “collaboration as a starting point” – unlike the previous example – made use of a script based on a novel and relied heavily on spoken text.

## Leadership in the Production “Collaboration as a Starting Point”

The director told me that he started the whole process by making an initial agreement with the actors. This was done to guarantee commitment to the upcoming process. It was important that the actors trust the process and devote themselves to the various ideas and methods that were presented to them. The director introduced his way of thinking; the whole performance would grow until the opening night, as the material was added bit by bit. The director had no presupposed vision of the text or theme. He had no plans on how they would continue working and no plans for the scenes. The idea was to process the material they gathered and go scene-by-scene through the rehearsals until they developed a better idea. He thought that the concept of the performance should be composed according to all the material and people who are involved in it. The aim was to put these materials into a dialogue with each other.

In the beginning of the process the director said that he wanted the actors to be on the stage throughout the rehearsal period. Usually those actors who were not having their turn on stage would have drunk coffee backstage or tried to memorise the script. The strategy of everyone being on stage was a very concrete way of reinforcing the community. Some of the actors felt it was a good idea because it gave them a strong feeling of owning the process and the result – they were in the same boat, they were telling the same story.

One of the actors said that these types of collaborative processes brought them together and that they ensured that on the opening night there would be no surprises for the actors in the form of “oh, so this is the type of play we’ve created!” It was experienced as very important, but also quite exhausting that the actors didn’t just play their own part in the process but were also expected to produce material for the whole performance. Even if the process sounds quite collective, there was still quite a big gap between the director’s participatory ideals and his actual actions. Some of the actors felt they didn’t have any influence on the content or the solutions. Their ideas were rejected. These types of collaborative processes could be seen to operate counter to the envisioned goal, since they may create sizeable expectations in the actors that their collaboration will be highly valued and acted upon. Instead, directors often fall into old habits – being authoritarian and neglecting collective input – and are unable to submit to genuine dialogue.

Even though they produced material together, a few actors thought that they were all still the marionettes of the director. They tried out scenes repeatedly with the help of the somewhat tough director. There was a lot of repetition, particularly of short scenes or moments (e.g. entering the stage). It was hard for the actors to concentrate on such small sequences for a long time, for example, 1.5 hours on one short scene. One actor explained this:

Excerpt 2: I feel that if we do this for 1.5 hours it's much harder than a piece of text that you rehearse. I made a decision, even though I know that this kind of thing gets on my nerves. I thought that I wouldn't whinge between rehearsals because that will put other people off. My actions became more positive after I decided to take things more positively. (Actor 1, interview conducted 25.2.2011 in Rovaniemi).

## Rehearsal Process in the Production "Collaboration as a Starting Point"

The idea of the performance was that the play was not going to be a basic theatrical drama even though there was a ready-made text as a starting point. The theatre hired a performance dramaturge to rewrite the text with the director and with the input of the actors. The text evolved during the process, and therefore it was quite normal that in the mornings the dramaturge gave the workgroup a new version of the script. Most of the actors didn't mind this, however some were quite irritated, as usually in a production the text is not modified, although single scenes and lines can be changed.

At the beginning of the rehearsal process, the director made the actors do different kinds of demonstrations and tasks. For example, he gave them a mission to do anything, a scene or a bodily performance, with the title "water". One of the actors demonstrated with real snow and water how a tsunami forms. They also wrote essays about recycling. It was uncertain how these tasks were related to the outcome. Nonetheless, one of the actors said that it didn't really matter because the tasks functioned to forge the actors together as a group.

At the beginning of the rehearsal process the actors paid little attention to the characters. In this particular production it was too early to think of such things. A few of the actors struggled with this type of approach since, at least in my opinion, they were dealing with changed work practices. According to Leontjev<sup>233</sup>, the subjects who are developing the object of collective activity are dealing at the same time with their personal sense. The development aims can cause critical conflicts,<sup>234</sup> which are experienced as an inner doubt. Inner doubts are unsolvable by individuals alone. The following excerpts demonstrate this issue. One actor explained the situation:

Excerpt 3: It's like you've done theatre for twenty-five years and you have learned a certain language with regards to how to do an actor's job. If you bring a totally new language next to the old one, it's not going to be the same any more. It's strange, and you find yourself wondering can I do this, am I going to be ok with this? There is nothing certain about your actions. (Actor 1, interview conducted on 25.2.2011 in Rovaniemi).

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<sup>233</sup> Leontjev, 1978,

<sup>234</sup> Vasiliyuk, 1988.

The actor's case is an example of experiencing inner doubt. The actor also said that (an interest in) drama had initially been the reason for him to come to the theatre sector – he wanted to do different kinds of roles. In these productions drama had not been used as a starting point and the roles hadn't been an essential point of the performance. He had been thinking a lot of the reasons why he became an actor and what kind of processes and performances he was used to working with. The quotation gives an idea how experimental productions such as "collaboration as a starting point" can be experienced as quite overwhelming due to identity issues related to working. He continued:

Excerpt 4: It's been difficult since you have to think why you arrived here, what is it that you like, where you're going at the moment, what is this that we're doing and do I even want to do these performances? (Actor 1, interview conducted 25.2.2011 in Rovaniemi).

Actor 1 continually utilises his toolkit – the methodology behind the way he acts. For him there is both an intellectual side and an emotional repertoire he can tap into. For him it is crucial to use emotions and he feels liberated when he acts according to this methodology. The role gives him a shelter, so that he can behave intuitively, without rationalisation. Yet, in "contemporary theatre productions" as he calls them, where the hierarchy of the text is broken and where the "acting" doesn't necessarily follow traditional routes, he feels that there isn't much to hold on to. In approaching performances through bodily movements he ends up intellectualising the situation and this arouses unpleasant feelings. The quotation captures the premises of acting and the uncertainty that is caused by not approaching the stage performance as expected. This next excerpt sums up the critical conflicts<sup>235</sup> of an actor while performing experimental productions with not so familiar tools:

Excerpt 5: For actors there is both the intellect and the emotions. As an actor I like that I have a lot of emotions when I'm acting. However, in contemporary theatre I don't think there's much chance to take those kinds of emotions with you, it's more about your intellectual side. I think that doing roles with emotions can be at its best very liberating and make you feel as if you were pure and naked. Without fear, you can show your feelings, thoughts and wishes publicly in front of the audience. This I can do very easily. Roles also give you a shelter, and I feel that the contemporary theatre doesn't give me that. There isn't anything to get a hold on, and then it's difficult to have enough courage to do things. (Actor 1, interview conducted on 25.2.2011 in Rovaniemi).

The problem isn't limited to one particular production. Instead, it spreads to the overall repertoire of Rovaniemi Theatre, which has moved more towards non-tra-

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<sup>235</sup> Vasiliyuk, 1988.

ditional productions as the new managers have sought to bring in new audiences and working methods. The actor is meanwhile craving for more text-based theatre processes and productions. He playfully described that he wishes to have a real stage set – “a door” on stage, which he would like to use. By this he means that he misses the situation where the whole performance is subordinate to a literary text, as in traditional drama plays.

Excerpt 6: I have to say that there is this one thought that's stuck in my head, even though I performed; I miss drama. If I did only these kinds of performances, I have to admit, I would miss drama. Lately, I have started to wonder when the next time I can use a dramatic text will be, when I will have a role, a role that I like. I'm joking here, but I need a door (onstage) through which I can enter. By “a door” I mean a play that is built – where the whole stage is subordinate to the drama – even if it is just a picture that you look at from one side. (Actor 1, interview conducted on 25.2.2011 in Rovaniemi).

When doing traditional drama plays, the actor feels that he only needs a script to read and everything starts with that. After reading the text, it is possible to imagine what is going to happen on the stage. The actor is facing problems when rehearsals and the dramaturgy of performances are “broken” and played with. This is troubling because he is not used to handling these types of processes. These new types of methods can in the long run start demotivating him and draining his energy.

Excerpt 7: When you're doing drama plays, you first read the script, for example Anna Karenina, and that's all you need. (Actor 1, interview conducted on 25.2.2011 in Rovaniemi).

During the production there was a library next to the main stage where you could loan books about climate change – which was the topic of the novel and the performance – and post-dramatic theatre. One of the actors thought it was a good improvement. He had read several books about the present condition of both the planet earth and of contemporary theatre. He started to evaluate his own lifestyle and values. He experienced being introduced to the theme through all the material. After reading the literature he started to think that the theatre piece was alive, and the script or text is just one part of it. He said that he had finally understood something new and that this had taken a lot of effort on his part.

## **The Production Model in the Production “Collaboration as a Starting Point”**

The theatre managers decided to leave out one premiere so that they could add more rehearsal time to their productions. It meant that in this particular produc-

tion there wasn't the kind of rush that was witnessed during the process of the production "multiple leaders".

The production schedule was very flexible. At the beginning the artistic core group had the idea that everything should be white, and there should be water on stage in the "main role". This became the starting point for costumes and stage sets. During the process they witnessed some situations where they had to make decisions about sets or costumes or do run-throughs to help the work of the sound designer. These situations worked as a boundary for the production. The production personnel reacted well to the flexibility of building schedules during the process. The stage sets and costumes evolved during the process.

## 6. Learning Challenges in Adopting Multifaceted Theatre Practices

The two narratives afford us an insight into the challenges of building a performance when process-based approaches are used in the theatre-making processes. The narratives demonstrate the kinds of learning challenges that theatre professionals experience during productions with regards to their knowledge and practices. The learning challenges of an institutional theatre are viewed on three levels (see Fig. 2). One level concerns the general production models and processes, such as schedules and division of labour. The other two levels concern the more individual side of productions. I'm interested in bringing forth the perspectives of actors as they meet the challenges in their work as rehearsal processes and the director's actions – leadership – differ from the dominant literary theatre traditions.

Generally, these two productions and the challenges they faced were somewhat different from each other. The first one dealt more with contradictions that manifested at the activity level as many problems and frictions arose. These primarily concerned the production model and work processes. The latter element was mostly related to the problematic role of the directors in terms of having power over others. Also, some actors experienced critical conflicts<sup>236</sup> that could be seen as a part of the learning process at an individual level. In the following I present a more detailed analysis of these productions.

The first narrative ("multiple leaders") demonstrates that the established production model is strongly connected with the vision of the director. At the centre of this method is the idea that the director has a theme and a vision, which he or she, with the working group, extrapolates from the text. In this case there was no vision, because the idea was that the material would develop during the process. Because of this situation, there were no shared tools that would mediate the basic idea of the "play" (e.g. a prompt book and a set model) to other professional groups.

Three artists ran the production instead of just one. The idea of creating a multi-professional team was interesting, but it proved to be too challenging to

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<sup>236</sup> Vasiliyuk, 1988.

manage because the team didn't have any clear division of labour, on top of the whole approach being new to them. Problems arose with working on scenes, because the dramaturgy of the performance was evolving during the production process, yet a professional dramaturge was not involved in the production. Problems exacerbated the lack of commitment and the circus approach was experienced as being too challenging for the actors. This highlights how issues such as trust and commitment are important to theatre processes. The key question is: how can you build and maintain trust and commitment during problematic rehearsal processes in institutional settings?

In the second production ("collaboration as a starting point") some of these "problems" were not experienced. The know-how of the actors was also crucial. A few actors were dissatisfied with the work practices because they weren't used to working that way. Unfamiliar rehearsal methods caused some uncertainty, yet the actors' reactions varied.

With the activity theoretical perspective, I'm conceptualising change at the system level, using the term "activity", and then again at an individual level, according to Leontjev's<sup>237</sup> terms of personal sense. Broader developmental contradictions<sup>238</sup> are felt and worked out at the individual level, as the subject's needs demand redirection towards new kinds of objects. This process takes time and is unlikely to be easy since personally experienced critical conflicts<sup>239</sup> – moments where opposite directions and goals meet on a psychological level – should be resolved. The description of "collaboration as a starting point", in particular, reveals how profoundly some actors process their previously experienced truisms, routines and commitments. For them it is far from easy to let go of a familiar "language" and to challenge literary traditions, find new kinds of tools to interpret and create a new language to understand more group-oriented performances.

In the future, issues such as trust, the power and role of the director, the level of participation of actors, the toolkits of the actors, production models and timetables could be taken into account. These productions produced lots of important knowledge about conditions and future possibilities – problems and solutions – that could be used in future experimental productions. Taking into account these factors would be a concrete way to renew institutional theatre practices in the long term. That would mean to continuously ask questions such as: What feels challenging in this production? Why? How could it be solved? What went wrong? What was learnt from previous productions? What kind of knowledge do the technical and artistic personnel need in the near future to overcome these problems? What kind of new solutions have been created?

## 7. Conclusions

The research question for this article is: *What should be learnt in order to broaden the theatrical practices of Finnish subsidised theatre?* The article doesn't offer

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<sup>237</sup> Leontjev, 1978.

<sup>238</sup> Engeström & Sannino, 2011.

<sup>239</sup> Vasilyuk, 1988.

any guidelines but instead ponders what should be taken into consideration in the future and how an institution as a whole has to adapt in order to accommodate change in its processes.

Both sides are presented: the individuals' responses and evaluation and the changes in the institutions' working practices. Hopefully the article could act as a tool for theatre managers and directors. The hypothesis of this article is that the contradictions and learning challenges of theatre are connected to the relationship between literary theatre and more collective types of theatre making processes. Text-based theatre has so far been the basis of activity in Finnish institutional theatres.

The learning challenges faced by subsidised institutional theatre were dealt with on three different levels in this article, at the level of the production model, the leadership level and at the level of the rehearsal process (see Fig 2.). The rehearsal process strongly highlighted the actor's experiences. To conclude, I will look at these three different learning levels in more detail.

The production model was the first and most obvious element likely to limit devised working practices. The two example productions were quite different in terms of their flexibility of timetables and rehearsal periods. It can be recommended that a professional theatre with a fixed production model wishing to examine different types of working practices first focus on changing and developing the conventions of the production model and their production-led perspective. The two examples, both directed on the main stage of the theatre, showed the challenges in rehearsing the performance with a traditional mode of production. A more flexible production model could be worth developing. Also, quite often the perspective of working is somewhat directed towards the here and now, while this type of developmental goal raises questions about the long-term perspective on developing production models and work in theatres.

To make any further claims about how the production model could be improved in different contexts, more analysis would be required. The next step would be to form a generic and flexible devised theatre production model to go alongside the drama production model presented in Figure 1. The most relevant question from the point of view of the collective learning process could be how to find a way to ensure learning from previous productions. At present, much energy is used to work through negative issues and tensions in difficult productions. A culture of blame will not support efforts to merge various methods in an institutional theatre context. Instead, the focus should be directed towards working practices and working groups needing more time and new tools to support and enable positive commitment. Only then can previous processes be constructively analysed and this information used to ensure the success of future productions. Learning requires rethinking the whole process, incorporating the artistic, technical and support teams' points of view, because they have to change their own conception of their roles and practices.

The challenges of Rovaniemi Theatre are not only related to the text-based production model (see Fig. 1) and division of labour, but are also part of much larger issues regarding how professional groups and individuals are involved with

producing plays. The roles of everybody in the working group change as the new work roles are adopted with time and learning. This must happen on an individual level as well as with the collaboration in the whole theatre house. To democratise processes means rethinking the professions within institutional theatre.

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