MATTER

#3:2025 Varia
Dahlqvist, Diers, Hamidi Isacson, Haller and Østergaard

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Matter#3. Varia

The third issue of *Matter* contains a collection of articles describing and illustrating different aspects of theatre and performing arts. Dramaturg and curator Tanja Hylling Diers' article discusses how a place can develop into something meaningful and authentic in contrast to the impersonal in society and many art institutions. Taking her project *Hjem* – an art space for locals and artists to meet and make together as her example, she argues that a home is not just a physical place but an ever-changing web of relationships. Diers reflects on the ethics and care of a project where both the artist and the participants are affected and engaged, and the article concludes with thoughts on the future, the importance of sustainability and how the community can become more participatory.

In his text, playwright and director Jörgen Dahlqvist discusses how time can be used as a dramaturgical tool in playwriting. He draws on historical and contemporary examples where the structure of time is challenged to portray existential and societal issues. Dahlqvist analyses his play *Trädgårdsgatan*, depicting three generations of women and their living conditions over fifty years. By weaving together different time layers and allowing characters to meet over time, the play becomes a place for reflection on choices, heritage and social change. Dahlqvist demonstrates how form and content become inseparable, allowing the audience to experience the flux of time.

Costume designer Charlotte Østergaard describes the ethical dilemmas that emerge when people are invited to wear interconnected costumes in urban environments. She reflects on her responsibilities as a researcher and how she creates situations where participants feel safe to explore their own and others' boundaries. The article emphasises that her research is about learning, listening and reflecting on how far we can reach out to others without overstepping our boundaries. Through active participation, she blurs the roles between researcher and co-creator to learn together with the participants.

The theatremakers Jörgen Dahlqvist and Fredrik Haller introduce the conversational theatre, an interactive theatre format that engages audiences in dialogue about societal challenges. The format was developed with Dramaten, Institute for Futures Studies, and Malmö Theatre Academy. The format seeks to turn the theatre into a collective reflection and discussion arena. In this approach, the line between audience and stage is blurred, allowing the audience to be heard.

Playwright Vanja Hamidi Isacson presents her research on composing stage texts with several languages and found material. Central to her work is polyvocality, in which different languages, dialects and social voices can co-exist in a single piece. She also uses found material, such as pre-existing texts, documents and sounds, which are reused and placed in new artistic contexts. Hamidi Isacson emphasises the importance of allowing linguistic diversity to shape the performing arts as a living, dynamic entity.

HJEM

KUNSTRUM

A Place to Call *Home*
By Tanja Hylling Diers

In this text, I reflect on how artistic processes can contribute to forming local communities and meaningful places? What makes a place into a home what role in place- and meaning-making can artists play. These questions are asked with 'existential sustainability' as an overarching backdrop.

From 2021 to 2023 I made a curatorial project I called *Hjem,* Danish for 'home'. It is partly a gallery and partly a workshop, situated in my own home. The space is a former shop room located on a corner with large windows facing the street and a glass door. With this project I wanted to understand how artists and locals could meet and share artistic processes.

Artistic Processes for a Body in Play

I had recently moved to a new neighbourhood and wanted to be in conversation with the place and the people who lived there, next door to me. The aim of Hjem was to respond to my local area. But during the same time another internal process had begun. I was pregnant, so I was also facing the job of creating a home for a little new human being. At first, I didn't give so much thought to this fact, but through the process I realised how making this project was also about making a place for belonging and meaning making for myself. I applied for local funding[1] to start the project and invited three artists to facilitate workshops with locals in co-creative processes. The works were then to be exhibited in the windows in the month following each workshop and marked by a vernissage open to the public. The artists were Charlotte Østergaard, Marie Rosendahl Chemnitz, and Hvass & Hannibal, they chose three very different methods for their workshops: the first workshop focused on various crafting techniques: knitting, knotting, and crochet. The methods used in this work led by Charlotte Østergaard is very

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1 Local funding came from the municipality and a five-year project supporting different initiatives in my local area, more specifically: Copenhagen Municipality, Områdefornyelsen Sundby, and 'Kultur der forbinder' (Culture that Connects).

much prolongation of her work as described in her PhD Crafting material bodies – exploring co-creative costume processes[2]. The second was a photo-collage workshop, and in the third we worked with papier-mâché creating flower-like sculptures. My theory was that by coming together around a table and doing creative processes mainly using our hands, conversation would arise. And it did; people start talking when they do things together. The conversations were both big and small – about the making process, the neighbourhood, neighbours, memories, and experiences. Drawing on Merleau-Ponty and his understanding of 'body knowledge' – our existence as body before mind – it was the work of the hands that prompted the mind to associate and make conversation.

The outcome of the project was both for the few and the many. The curious and brave few would engage in intensive workshops with full focus, close encounters with other locals and artists, and an element of care, in the sense that they were invited inside my private home to meet me and my family and enjoy homemade cake and coffee together. The workshops would, if only for a short time, offer an arena for play and, through play, for losing oneself, in Gadamer's understanding. In this sense, the workshops have the potential to change the participants who take part in the artistic process, because the embodied experience of making the artwork is meaningful in itself. H. G. Gadamer writes in *Truth and Method*:

> Instead the work of art has its true being in the fact that it becomes an experience that changes the person who experiences it. The 'subject' of the experience of art, that which remains and endures, is not the subjectivity of the person who experiences it but the work itself. This is the point at which the mode of being of play becomes significant. For play has its own essence, independent of the consciousness of those who play. (2006:103)

Meanwhile, the wider public could encounter the artworks when passing by the shopfront on foot, bike, or car – some only once, others on a daily basis, hopefully getting a sense of an artistic process and feeling a hint of an aesthetic experience, albeit brief.

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2 Østergaard, C. 2025. Crafting Material Bodies – Exploring Co-Creative Costume Processes, https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/3184425/3184426 [Accessed 20th March 2025]

Workshop on crafting techniques (2021), Photo: Charlotte Østergaard

Becoming a meaningful place

In opening up my home for the local community I was aiming at making my artistic practice more including and accessible. I thought that if people could walk in from the street the threshold of experiencing art would make more people want to interact. I also had the presumption that people would be curious to go into another person's home and maybe to some extent this was true, but for most of my local community curiosity was not pre-dominant. I propose that the art space *Hjem* may be considered a kind of *chora* in Plato's understanding; It is at once a place of *becoming* and itself *in becoming*. Creative processes of art-making have taken place, and through these experimental processes the space has likewise undergone a transfor-mation process, exploring what it is and can be in addition to a home for a family. The locals who took part in the workshops and the vernissages had unexpected and unique experiences. Several returned to take part in more events. Thinking alongside Yi Fu Tuan, it is possible that the experiences have turned the art space into a 'place' for these individuals: 'What begins as undifferentiated space becomes *place* as we get to know it better and endow it with value.' (1977:6) Similarly, Tim Cresswell describes: 'What

experience does is transform a scientific notion of space into a relatively lived and meaningful notion of place.' (2009:4) An experience of value is what creates a sense of meaning, and a place where we encounter meaning is a place we will return to. Another reason why the art space *Hjem* becomes a place is its status as a home. In contrast to most art spaces, it has a relaxed atmosphere, with lots of things on the walls, many colours, many plants, various places to sit or lie down. And in contrast to many homes, it is a place for work with many books, music instruments, tools, and materials, rather chaotic and serving many purposes. No minimalism, no white cube, no clinical or cold simplicity. Hence, for me, this project is also a reaction to a world in general, and an art world specifically, which lacks experiences and places of authenticity. Much more can be said about the concept of authenticity, not least against the backdrop of 'documentary theatre' – a genre I work with extensively and believe in, despite its obviously paradoxical and oxymoronic name. I turn to Edward Relph and his critique of a world increasingly 'disneyfied', 'museumified', and inauthentic (Cresswell, 2009:6). In a world that lacks authenticity and produces *placelessness*, a place like *Hjem* might offer something unique and authentic – a place that wants people to feel a sense of meaning, care, and home in a process of creation. The creation process can in itself be meaningful, but when it is shared with others, it has the potential to increase its impact, because a relation is created, not only to the place but to other people.

Ethics of care and affect
The encounter between artist and local is one of unpredictability where both have to be open for the unforeseen. Secondarily the situation where the local takes part in the creative process of making is an encounter marked by imperfection and playfulness. Any encounter constitutes an ethical situation, also when it happens in process in an art space. In Ida Sandström's analysis of Jubileumsparken in Gothenburg (Sweden) and Superkilen in Copenhagen (Denmark), she suggests how different approaches to ethics, and I might add aesthetics, can create different kinds of relationships and communities (Sandström, 2020). Sandström terms the two different strategies the park projects utilize in their approach to community-building in public space 'ethics of affect' and 'ethics of care'. I find these two ethical frameworks very useful for understanding what kind of potential is created in the *Hjem* project, and I see how in a project like this, both approaches are valuable, because they allow for different levels of engagement. They also provide an

ethical understanding of moving beyond unity and sameness in community-building. Sandström calls the two strategies antagonistic (2020:175), but in the case of *Hjem* I find them complementary – a double strategy that allows for a larger group of people to engage, and a way to be attentive both to people who want a deep relation now and to those who might want that in the future. Sandström writes: 'Jubileumsparken invites people to connect with the spaces in this dual sense, asking its visitors to care about the space, but also to take care of the space by investing work into it – following the belief that the level of commitment will increase proportionally with the time and work invested in a space.' (2020:175) It is this kind of commitment that is offered in the co-creative workshops and prolonged by the exhibitions, where the hours spent are transformed into art that is shared with the public. The exhibition in the windows for the passersby to look at is a 'space' that is made to affect and confront people – to make them slow down, perhaps stop and take a closer look, to revise their idea of what art is and what their relation to it can be. Affect in this sense regards how an art object can evoke emotion and the opinion about the art object the viewer feels she might form. The 'ethics of affect' plays out as a potential wonder in the passersby. The 'ethics of care' is formed by doing something together and by investing time in the place. Care as *a doing* is described by Puig de la Bellacasa, drawing on both Donna Haraway and Joan Tronto (Puíg de la Bellacasa, 2017), and to extend her line of thought, we may say that care is ethical in a way that should not end at the phrase 'the personal is political', though this remains part of it. But our understanding of care needs to exceed the personal and overcome any simple opposition often set up between 'political/ethical', 'Individual/collective' and 'social/biological' (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017:136).

Speculating about future perspectives
Hjem has been running for two years now. The funding I applied for to start up the project has now run out. The conclusion of this first phase and the lack of new funding have somehow pacified me. After my readings on place, I have renewed energy and realize that I must take the project into a new phase, rethinking it through 'fabulative speculation' (Haraway 2016) in order for it to become more sustainable, both for my own life situation and for the neighbourhood.

Workshop on paper mâché by Hass&Hannibal (2023), Photo: Jonas Boas Thaysen

I have argued that the *art space* has the potential to become a *place* through collective creative processes, but what has not been discussed in the above is how care is situated in this context, given by someone to someone or something else. In this case, the care I personally have given to the place and the people has been at the expense of time and energy given to my family, so the danger is that my personal resources run dry when opening my home to the neighbourhood. Further, with the funding now spent, I also risk having to do it all at my own expense. For this project to be sustainable in the future, I must think about how the local community can become more involved, so they too can take part in the work of care and maintenance. To do this, however, I need to understand my own position. Puíg de la Bellacasa says, with reference to Donna Haraway: 'responsibility for what/whom we care for doesn't necessarily mean being *in charge*, but it does mean being involved'. (2017:90) The next step toward creating a more sustainable place could be to invite neighbours in and allow them to both perform care and be affected by it, figuring out all together what *Hjem* could be in the future. With recourse to Doreen Massey, I could think of *Hjem* as a place 'not as area(s) on maps but a constantly shifting articulation of social relations through time'. (Massey, 1995:188) The question about what makes a place sustainable is in no way answered fully – one can only hope to achieve that by the end of this course – but a path has been laid out toward a more shared space, for more to care about.

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Artist websites:
https://www.charlotteostergaardcopenhagen.dk/
http://marierosendahlchemnitz.dk/
https://www.hvasshannibal.dk/

Video:
A short video made by Agnes Saaby from the workshop and vernissage with Charlotte Østergaard can be found here.

Bio
Tanja Hylling Diers is a Danish dramaturge, curator and theatre maker based in Copenhagen and Malmö currently holding a PhD position at Malmö Theater Academy and Lund University with a project called Who Cares? An Embodied practice of Caring and Listening in which she is investigating how lived experiences can be transformed into artistic material. As artist researcher she is interested in pedagogies of community building and practices of bringing listening forward in artistic processes and in meetings between artists and public.

Strategies for Temporal Layering in Dramatic Writing

By Jörgen Dahlqvist

> Time is a storm in which we all are lost
> *Selected essays* (1954), William Carlos Williams

In *Poetics* (n.d/1997), Aristotle differs between the epic and the dramatic in how they relate to time: "tragedy endeavours, as far as possible, to confine itself to a single revolution of the sun, or but slightly to exceed this limit, whereas the epic action has no limits of time" (Aristotle n.d/1997, p. 7–8). This definition is a specific quality that defines the art form, but it also sets limits as to what can be presented on stage. Throughout theatre history, the relationship to time has affected dramatic writing—both as a benchmark and as a constraint—playwrights from different eras have had to deal with or to fight against when wanting to address life conditions in novel ways.

The German playwright Roland Schimmelpfennig states in an interview that "turning a political situation or a human disaster into a theatrical theme is extremely complicated" (Jansson, 2019, January 12, my translation). Nevertheless, it is important, because:

> The reality cries out for something more than what theatre can offer because reality is about life and death. So, you must try to find a new language, or deal with the theme in a way that breathes and encourages the audience to find a new way of looking at everyday life and reality. (Jansson, 2019, January 12, my translation)

The relationship to time seems to be crucial for Schimmelpfennig. He claims that "theatre bends time all the time, theatre dominates time" (Trueman, 2017), and in his plays "time often loops back on itself [...] the past seeps into the present" (Trueman, 2017, May 19). It appears that he is not dismissing the time frame that defines drama altogether, but rather suggesting that there is more than meets the eye when it comes to the concept of time in

dramatic writing—something that also can be seen in his plays. This experimentation with form, structure, and time is also present in my own practice as a playwright. I have written and staged more than fifty plays, and in the last few years I have felt a need to find strategies to expand the use of time as a dramaturgical tool in my writing; mostly out of an interest to use theatre, and dramatic writing, as an arena to address societal and political challenges.

This article starts with a discussion of the constraints of time, followed by a brief outline of how contemporary playwrights' layering of time is used as a method to portray existential life conditions, but also how it makes it possible to address, explore, and challenge social norms. A structural analysis of my play *Trädgårdsgatan* (2021) is then used to discuss the different strategies used to address the existential and social conditions of working-class women in Sweden. *Trädgårdsgatan* premiered at Helsingborgs stadsteater in 2021 and portrayed three generations of women and their struggles to make ends meet.

The point of departure in the writing process was an interest in how attitudes towards work had changed over the last fifty years, and how the work environment affects the life situation of Swedish women. In the 1960s, Sweden had an economic growth of 7%–8% annually and was one of the richest countries in the world. However, by the late 1970s, globalisation forced a restructuring of the industry in the country, and even though economic equity was at its peak in the 1980s, a change could be seen just a decade later. In the 1990s, young people had a hard time finding jobs but could live on generous unemployment insurance. In recent years, as a result of the political situation in Sweden, the government and parliament have begun to dismantle and change labour market institutions such as the Swedish Public Employment Service and the Swedish Social Insurance Agency, even though Sweden still has very high unemployment numbers. At the same time, a report from Försäkringskassan (the Swedish Social Insurance Agency) (2020) shows that psychiatric diagnoses have become the main reason for longer sick leave in several economically developed countries, which is also the case for Sweden. The study also shows that women are at significantly greater risk than men of stress-related mental illness. To address these issues, the play would need to cover a period of more than fifty years.

This wide socio-historical, and therefore temporal, scope provided the writing process with challenges on how to structure time in the play. These challenges were both how to capture the social changes—how working conditions for women had changed over time—as well as the existential chang-

es—what impact these changes had for these women's life conditions and mental well-being.

Time as a Constraint

In *Theory of the Modern Drama* (1987), the literature theorist Peter Szondi claims that drama represents events first-hand and because of this, its time is always the present; "In the drama, time unfolds as an absolute, linear sequence in the present. Because the Drama is absolute, it is itself responsible for the temporal sequence. It generates its own time" (Szondi, 1987, p. 9). He states that breaking up temporal structures in the dramatic text means that there is an external world to which the drama relates, and this reduces and relativises the significance of the individual scenes. Only by one scene organically generating the next can a forward motion be created. Szondi recognises how this view on temporality had become an aesthetic confinement for playwrights in the beginning of the 20th century and therefore needed to be addressed to portray stories that stretched over a longer period. In his book, Szondi presents how different playwrights had tackled this problem to find a solution to this durational challenge. One example is Thornton Wilder's play *The Long Christmas Dinner* (1931). In the play, a one-hour Christmas dinner traverses ninety years to encompass several generations in a family's history: when characters are born, they appear at the table, and when they die, they leave for the door at the other end of the room. Through this, time becomes present as both form and theme in the play.

First, a concern that I have of Szondi is that he is using a definition of drama that is too narrow to allow for an in-depth discussion of the relationship between form and content. His definition of drama—based on the unity of action, time, and space—seems to exclude playwrights such as William Shakespeare, Georg Büchner, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, and Friedrich Schiller, i.e., many classic plays in the Western context. Many of the dramas written by these playwrights already experiment with time and space. Second, this is not the only criticism regarding Szondi. In the book *Postdramatic Theatre* (2006), Hans-Thies Lehmann argues against Szondi's ideas. Lehmann claims that the attempts to break free from the constraints of time in drama was only a temporary phenomenon which obscured a development towards theatre that is not even based on fictive dramatic conflict.

However, Lehmann's ideas have also been disputed. In an article literature scholar Élisabeth Angel-Pérez claims that the 21st century is marked by a revival of verbal theatre. In the article, she discusses how plays by Sarah

Kane and Martin Crimp collide with the notion of the postdramatic theatre, and how it is also concerned with the deconstruction of the dichotomies between fiction and reality. Even if Crimp's *Attempt on Her Life* could be labelled 'postdramatic' it relies on the fictive character Anne or Annie (even if the character is absent in the play). The other example is *The Author*, a play by Tim Crouch. His play, and the staging of it, further destabilise the notion of fiction and reality by introducing different temporalities. This allowed Crouch to layer different factual and fictional storylines. Angel-Pérez argues that this kind of "deconstructionist post-dramatic techniques somehow inject some drama back into postdrama" (Angel-Pérez, 2013). She suggests that the postdramatic should not be seen as a rupture, but rather a continuation of theatre traditions.

However, this continuation has also brought novel methods to playwriting. It seems that Sarah Kane, Martin Crimp, and the other postdramatic playwrights have had an impact on contemporary drama, introducing a toolbox on how to deconstruct time and character, as well as how to blur the boundaries between fiction and reality. The effect of this could also be seen in more traditional dramas, where other playwrights, less inclined to In-yer-face aesthetics, have started to use these techniques to instead portray existential life conditions.

Time and the Existential Condition

In *Narrative across media* (2004) the narratologist Marie-Laure Ryan defines narrative with an existential approach as an act that enables humans to "deal with time, destiny, and mortality" (Ryan, 2004, p. 2). According to Ryan, one of the central features of a narrative is to create a temporal dimension to change and thus place the narrative world in the flux of history. This is also true of many classic and contemporary dramas. However, the scope of time needs to be considered when portraying characters dealing with existential questions over time. One way to keep the play within a limited time frame is to juxtapose situations where the same people at different ages can be presented simultaneously. The Norwegian playwright Jon Fosse has several plays where he blends situations from various times to contrast his characters' view on life at a young- and old age. Both *Dream of Autumn* (2002a) and *A Summer's Day* (2002b) are examples of this. Another example is *Death Variations* (2002c). The play revolves around a young woman's suicide. A divorced mother and father meet in unnamed grief when the woman brings the news of their joint daughter's death. In parallel, we get to meet the same

parent couple as young people when they are still together and expecting children. Shortly after the daughter is born, they divorce and the young girl gets to know a friend, who is the ubiquitous death that is beyond time. Through the play, the young girl grows up and becomes an adult. At the end of the play, she decides to follow the friend and take her own life, something she, now dead, regrets soon after.

In the Swedish playwright Lars Norén's later plays, there are also examples where the same characters are doubled. *Terminal 3: Ett rekviem (Terminal 3: A Requiem)* (2014b) has a similar dramatic setup as *Death Variations*: two couples meet in a waiting room where the younger couple is expecting a child and the older couple is there to identify their son's dead body. During the play, it is understood that the meeting takes place with a nineteen-year time difference. The parents who are expecting the child are the same couple who are there to see their dead son who has taken his own life. In another of his plays, *Terminal 7: Sönderfallande* (*Terminal 7: Disintegration,* my translation) from 2014, a vigil for a dying mother is depicted. In the play, the son is played by two different actors, where 'son 1' is said to be 51 years old, and 'son 2' is portrayed in three different ages—as 14-, 15-, and 23 years old. In the same way, the mother is doubled, where 'mother 1' is 47 years old, and 'mother 2' is 37 years old. Throughout the play, the characters move through time, guided by their memories.

Destabilising Chronological Time to Challenge Norms
If Fosse and Norén write about characters dealing with existential conditions, such as a child's death or time spent waiting by a dying mother's side, temporal layering could also be a method of addressing and challenging cultural norms. An example of how this is used in novels is discussed in the article 'Circular Time', by Professor Madhu Benoit, where she writes about the narrative techniques in *The God of Small Things* (1997) by the author Arundhati Roy. The novel moves forward and backward in time and the temporal structure "compels the reader to reconstruct the text as she/he would piece together a jigsaw puzzle as the story of three generations unfold" (Benoit 1999, p. 98). Benoit explains that narratology accepts independence in the temporal ordering between the timeline in story and discourse. In the novel, there are two storylines that are constantly juxtaposed and combined into a single story. To do so, a third achronological storyline based on the presence of history in the form of the cultural codes dominating the action must be added. This allows for shifting perspectives and temporal levels when the

narrator moves between the different storylines. This construction also allows the author to *use* the story, rather than merely tell it, to question a given discourse: "Fragmentation of chronological time highlights the importance of achronological time, allowing Roy to deconstruct, as it were, the cultural codes she is attacking" (Benoit 1999, p. 5). According to Benoit, the reason for the book's multiple-time structure is to address societal problems: "Roy chose this particular temporal mode because she is writing an angry book, a book which is a political statement" (Benoit 1999, p. 5). Benoit concludes that through this fragmentary form, where the division between reader and author is blurred, the act of creation is shared. The act of reading becomes an act of composition, as the reader must write the overarching narrative based on the different storylines told through the different temporal layers.

The use of layering time to explore social norms could also be found in some contemporary plays. In *Anatomy of a Suicide* (2017), by the British playwright Alice Birch, the audience is confronted by three generations of women; a mother, daughter, and granddaughter. Their life stories are told simultaneously on stage. The play deals with the aftermath of a suicide and poses the question whether mental illness could be inherited or is a reaction to circumstances in the outside world. In an interview with *the Guardian* (Hoggard, 2017, June 4), Birch explains that she was interested in exploring whether trauma can be passed on through generations; i.e., the social effects, rather than the existential effects, of a person's suicide.

Another example is the play *Winter Solstice* (2015) by the German playwright Roland Schimmelpfennig. In the play, a family gathers the night before Christmas Eve, and joining the company is a stranger who is invited there by the mother of the family. In the conversation that takes place during the evening, fascist ideas are put forward by the invited guest which all seem to embrace. The only one who notices this shift is the son in the family, but he is unable to do anything about it. The play uses repetitions, retakes and time shifts to portray how politically charged opinions are negated through the need of social consensus within the group. When staging the play, stage directions are to be read aloud as narrated text, commenting on the character's background and view of the world, while also controlling and explaining the characters' actions.

Both these plays layer temporalities, further emphasised by the two playwrights by the suggested staging—explicit in the dramatic texts—to let the audience be presented to the here and now of each situation, but also,

through the different narratological techniques used when writing to learn about the social impact these situations have for each character.

Structuring the Temporal Events

Trädgårdsgatan was written with the ambition of combining these two different approaches presented above. The play had the intention of presenting the existential and social conditions for working class women over a time span of fifty years, and to do, so the play portrayed three generations of women living in Helsingborg—the 'grandmother', the 'mother', and the 'daughter'. The latter appears in two different ages: in her late teens, and in her mid-thirties.

The work started with a chronological overview of the events that were important for the fictitious characters:

1966: 'Grandmother' marries after being pregnant. Gives birth to 'mother'.

1972: 'Grandmother' divorces her husband and gets a job at the Tretorn factory.

1979: 'Grandmother' loses her job when the factory is outsourced.

1986: 'Mother' gives birth to 'daughter'.

2000: 'Mother' attend journalist education

2001: 'Mother' divorces her husband.

2003: 'Mother' passes exams during her education and goes to work as a journalist at Helsingborgs Dagblad

2004: 'Daughter (young)' takes exams in senior high school. She does not get a job and starts drinking.

2005: 'Daughter (young)' has a mental breakdown and is admitted to a mental hospital.

2006: 'Daughter (young)' gets a job as barista at ZPoegas' café.

2016: 'Daughter (old)' gets a job at the Swedish Social Insurance Agency.

2018: 'Daughter (old)' suffers from fatigue and depression. She is later assigned a placement job at the Swedish Public Employment Service

2019: Swedish Public Employment Service is defunded by the government, so the daughter must stop her internship there.

2019: 'Mother' dies and is cremated.

Making this overview helped structure the main events in the play. It provided a backdrop to understand what formed the three women's lives, and it also helped pinpoint which of main situations should be included in the

play. As can be seen in the list, these events are both social and existential. They have to do with marriage and death, but also how to provide for oneself in times of societal change. It is also possible to see how the events reverberate and influence each other—when the 'daughter' loses her job, it has an impact on her mental well-being.

Creating a Main Narrative

A challenge when writing *Trädgårdsgatan* was how to organise all the events so it would be coherent for an audience. Also, because the daughter appears at different ages in the play and is portrayed by two different actors, it made it even more important to have a simple structure to make comprehensible which time each situation was taking place.

To make it coherent, the dramaturgy used from one main storyline for each of the two acts in the play. This helped organise the progression in the acts. In act one, the main storyline revolved around the scenes between 'grandmother' and 'daughter (old)', when they were on their way to the cremation of 'mother'.

Here is an example from the play:

Daughter (old): Are you coming? Or are you not?
Grandmother: Wait. You're always in a rush.
Daughter (old): I am just trying to survive.
Grandmother: You have always been the same, ever since you were a child.
Daughter (old): In a situation like this.
Grandmother: Always rushing.
Daughter (old): Must get there before they...yes.
Grandmother: And yet time is still there, no matter how much of a rush you're in.
Daughter (old): Before it is too late.
Grandmother: Too late for what?
Daughter (old): They probably have a schedule to follow.
Grandmother: Can they not start before we get there?
Daughter (old): They will need to get the coffin in some time. They probably have better things to do than waiting for us.

The main storyline comes back from time to time to remind the audience of the structure.

> Daughter (old): We must go now. Otherwise, we are going to be late.
> Grandmother: We will make it on time.
> Daughter (old): They are not going to wait. The ceremony starts at three. They said it is important that we are not late.

The first act ended as the two were to spread the ashes down by the water. The stage directions in the play states:

> ['Grandmother' opens the urn to spread the ashes but cannot bring herself to do so. This happens one more time. In the end, 'daughter' must go up to her and pry the urn out of her grip. It ends with all the ash falling to the ground.]

The second act focused on the grandmother's wedding to her husband. The audience learns of her hopes and worries throughout the act. In the play she becomes increasingly hesitant about the wedding, when understanding how tough life will turn out for her daughter and granddaughter. In the end of the second act, time has dissolved altogether, letting the conversations reverberate between the generations, but also between the 'daughter' in different ages.

In the end of the play the 'grandmother' decides to go through with the wedding, persuaded by her family (even though they aren't born yet).

Adding Social and Existential Perspectives into the Main Narrative
Along with the two main narratives, the play also consists of several intermediate storylines. This allowed for deepening the relations between generations. It made it possible to show, for example, how the state of the dying 'mother' affected the family, but also how the mental health of the daughter deteriorated over the years, and as an effect of this, how she was trying to avoid using alcohol to self-medicate.

However, it also provided the opportunity to allow the three family members to reflect on their attitude towards work, and for the audience to learn how it differs between generations.

> Daughter (old): I have not had a job since I was put on sick leave from the social security agency and when I got a work placement at the Employment Service, then everything went to shit. […] Do you want to know how it feels? It does not feel good. This is how it feels. NOT GOOD.

The daughter blames the political situation for her lack of well-being. Even if she is trying to provide for herself, the societal conditions make her life situation additionally precarious. The 'mother', coming from another generation, has a more individualistic approach to the work situation: one must try to adapt to the circumstances. It is not enough to blame the system.

> Mother: I try to adapt. To learn new things to fit in. To get to keep the job I have. I started writing about culture and now I write in the family section, and, unlike you, I am glad that I was able to keep my job when they merged the newspapers. It is the same for me. I have also fought. My life has not been easy either.

For the 'grandmother', brought up during the period when Sweden was a rich country and when living standards were consistently increasing, it is hard to understand the societal changes and why the factory had to move due to globalisation.

> Grandmother: They said that the factory was doing well, but that is apparently not the case anymore. I do not know who to believe. Who to trust? What is going to happen to Helsingborg if they move the factory? The factory, the boots, and the raincoats. It is the heart of Helsingborg. Will everyone just move away from here and not be able to work anywhere?

Blending a manifold of situations and storylines made it possible to present different perspectives on the same subject, both the changes in society and the impact they have on each of the characters[1].

Transitions between Different Dramatic Situations and Storylines
In the play, the events taking place years apart were presented by layering temporal structures. The transitions between these intersecting narratives were enacted in different ways. One strategy was to use crossfades between the storylines. In the very first scene of the first act, the main narrative of 'grandmother' and 'daughter (old)' going to the crematorium was blended

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1 The article "'You can't build to hide poverty'": The representation of Helsingborg in the theatre performance *Trädgårdsgatan*" (2021) elaborates on how addressing societal changes through the play made it possible to contribute to current political and societal discourse in Sweden.

with a situation where the 'daughter (young)' comes home after an examination at school and is greeted by 'mother'. These two events take place fifteen years apart:

Daughter (young): Fantastic!
Grandmother: Do you have the urn?
Mother: What?
Grandmother: The urn? Do you have the urn with you?
Daughter (young): That it is all finally over.
Daughter (old): Damn!
Grandmother: What?
Daughter (young): School.
Mother: Congratulations on graduating. Let us see.
Daughter (old): Damn! Nothing, I just said damn. Damn, damn, damn, damn. Nothing else.
Grandmother: Surely you can swear at a time like this?
Mother: 2.8 isn't that bad in the social sciences, is it?

Another strategy was to make clear cuts between different situations and times. Below, underlined, is an example of this.

Daughter (old): We must go now. Otherwise, we are going to be late.
Grandmother: We will make it on time.
Daughter (old): They are not going to wait. The ceremony starts at three. They said it is important that we are not late.
Grandmother: I am coming. <u>I am just…Is she sleeping?</u>
Mother: I will give her at least another hour. She breastfed a while ago.

Here the 'grandmother' is once again on her way to the funeral, but she desperately wants to postpone the visit. To do so, the dialogue is cut mid-sentence and the situation changes to another that took place thirty-five years earlier when 'mother' came home from hospital with the daughter as a newborn baby.

A third strategy was to make time and space interchangeable:

Grandmother: Where are we now?
Daughter (old): We are here.

> Grandmother: I mean when are we now? In which time we are now? Are we here now? I mean right now, or was it some other time or is it some other time?
> Daughter (old): I do not understand what you are talking about.
> Grandmother: And what do we do here? Why are we here?

The fourth strategy was to blur the boundaries between the temporal structures all together. In the proximity of a dying family member, time ceases to exist:

> Grandmother: How are things with her?
> Daughter (old): She sleeps most of the time. She was awake for a little while, but they are giving her morphine.
> Grandmother: What does the doctor say?
> Daughter (old): They do not know whether she is going to survive the night. They do not believe so.
> Grandmother: A child should not die. A child should live. This is what the law says. Or should say if it does not say it.
> Daughter (young): Forgive me, mum. Forgive me all I have said and done. Forgive that I said I wanted you to die.
> Daughter (old): I have regretted that my whole life.
> Daughter (young): That I said that.
> Daughter (old): Or thought that.
> Daughter (young): I know that you can hear me. Even though you cannot answer.
> Daughter (old): You are with me mum.
> Daughter (young): You have always been. All the time.
> Daughter (old): You are inside time.
> Daughter (young): You have always been.

This way of dealing with time allowed for dialogue taking place between the generations throughout time. At the end of the play the two versions of the daughter sit beside each other by the dying mother's side, and she is portrayed as having a conversation to herself in different ages.

Time as a Landscape
The dramaturgy in the play was constructed through a mix between the main events and social reflections guided by associations: the memory of

something that happened in childhood evokes the memory of something that happened during school or work and that, in turn, evokes a memory of something someone said last week. In the play, the characters move back and forth in time to come to grips with their own lives. How did they become the persons they are now? Could they have made other choices? It is as they remember things one way and others in the family remember them completely differently. The past, present, and future are in constant change.

Through this notion of time, the form of the play also becomes its content, and vice versa:

> Daughter (young): Time is the landscape where everything exists simultaneously, and you fall through the darkness and time and try to live your life through the darkness.
>
> Mother: And you play down at the church yard. And suddenly you die.
>
> Grandmother: And all children who die should be prohibited in law and all mums who die and all their daughters and all people and all sorrow and we get married and get divorced and try to manage as well as we can and I, I learn everything from you about life and I am lost but we still find our way home and time passes and when the time comes and you are grown up then you will have your own child but it certainly was a long while ago and it is certainly a long way there, and a long time and during that time we will enjoy life and hope that we can keep the darkness away and just. Just exist. And live our lives. Cannot stay here any longer.

The play moves between different historical events that blend seamlessly into and out of each other and sometimes run in parallel. In the end of *Trädgårdsgatan,* it is said that all times exist simultaneously. It is like looking out on a landscape: the terrain is not static, and what can be seen therefore changes. The characters have altered the way they understand time during the play. This is also presented to the audience—by moving in time, it becomes possible to experience how time is ever-changing but how some things remain the same.

Conclusion
Experimenting with temporal structures could be one way of writing about people dealing with existential crises. Placing people in the same dramatic situation makes it possible to show the passage of time, and how the charac-

ters have been shaped by it in their lives. Another possibility with layering is to allow a wider temporal scope to present how social issues affect individual lives between generations. In this article, I have presented how these two approaches were adapted in the play *Trädgårdsgatan*.

The play was an examination of how the possibility of work has changed over time, and how globalisation and political decisions affect people, and simultaneously a description of three generations of women struggling to make a life for themselves amidst marriage preparations, funerals, lost jobs, and mental illness. To bring these different perspectives together, different strategies were used. First, the narrative events that shaped the characters socially and personally were listed. This was done to be able to create a main narrative for each of the two acts. These narratives were simple, going to a funeral and preparing for a wedding. Intermediate storylines were added that served as perspectives and complements to the main narrative. Creating crossfades between different storylines made it possible to move from one situation to another. Another way to shift perspective was to create clean cuts between different situations. These methods made it possible to present situations, even if they took place in totally different times. In the end, time and space became interchangeable.

The layering created a web of situations and storylines, told from parallel perspectives, enabled the characters to meet and consider their life choices and the results of them as if time were a landscape. The fact that the characters in the play were born twenty years apart, and therefore have different ways of relating to the world, gave the audience an opportunity to compare and portray different attitudes towards work and social mobility over time without losing the quality of the dramatic text as defined by Aristotle.

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Bio

Jörgen Dahlqvist is a Swedish playwright and director. Since 2003, he has been the artistic director of the performing arts collective Teatr Weimar, which has performed in Sweden and internationally. His works have been shown in Brussels, Paris, Berlin, Vienna, Ghent, Oslo, Reykjavik, Copenhagen, Hanoi, and Seattle. He held the position as the Head of Department of the Malmö Theatre Academy between 2009 and 2012, where he also worked as a senior lecturer. Since 2025, he has a PhD in artistic research in theatre.

Ethical dilemmas of *stretching towards* human others in costume fitting situations

By Charlotte Østergaard

'Responsibility begins from the acknowledgement that we are all part of the world. And that we cannot distance ourselves from it or assume a stance of innocence in our relationship with others.' (Bozalek & Zembylas 2017: 68)
In the Critical Costume 2020 presentation *The Fitting Room – Communities of practice and the ambiguity of touch* I argued that fitting, in itself, is a practice (Østergaard 2020). In this article my ambition is to stretch the situatedness of fitting, including studying the impact of this stretch. Or, in other words, I will study the ethical dilemmas that emerge in situations (located in urban environments) where participants are invited to fit into a costume that connects them to another participating person, a co-wearer.

Ethnographic scholar Tim Ingold suggests that 'by investigating phenomena *through practice* rather than mere observation, one can capture the experiential nature of the practice and knowledge becomes transformational rather than documentational' (Groth C. et al. 2020: 4). As Ingold suggests, as researcher I do not position myself as an outside observer but as an active embodied participant in the experimental situations or events that I conduct in my research. For me, knowledge emerges through my artistic practices and through my body.

Feminist scholar Donna Haraway writes that 'situated knowledge are about communities, not about isolated individuals' (Haraway 1988: 590), which I read as an acknowledgement that knowledge production is relationally sensitive and that research always involves embodied dialogues with gendered others. I not only appreciate but honour the people who have participated in my research events – through their generous engagement they contributed with critical and valuable knowledge to my research. Haraway reminds me that in research 'translation is always interpretive, critical, and partial' (Haraway 1988: 589). Thus, it is through the lens of my situatedness as researcher, costume designer and active participant that I study the events. It is through my situatedness that this article derives.

Community Walk (2020), Photo: Benjamin Skop

Crafting connecting-costume versions

In my research I craft costume that connects participating people. I intentionally name the participants *wearers* since the connecting-costumes travel between different events where different wearers wear the costumes. The events are not situated in 'traditional' theatre spaces, hence the costume is not intended to serve or fit, for example, a specific text or choreographic score. Consequently, the wearers are not limited only to people who are trained as performers.

The connecting-costumes that I craft can be worn (on top of whatever the wearers wears) by two to four wearers. In the following, I will focus on the duo versions. I craft two different duo versions: one version where two bodysuits are connected and another version where two shirts-like parts are connected. The two versions have almost the same length of connection (1.5 metes) between the wearable parts. Each version (of the two versions) is crafted in either one stretchable material or in a combination of different stretchable materialities[1] (with different one-way and bi-stretch qualities). Hence, none of the connecting-costumes are identical.

Due to the stretchable materiality the wearable parts of the connect-

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1 I use materials that I have in stock, which means that the connecting-costume versions are in different colours.

ing-costume versions potentially fit any wearer regardless of body type/size, gender and age (the limit is the mobility of the wearer). Hence, in my research fitting seems to have another connotation. Fitting seems to be a matter of how wearers fit one another in the situation. In this article my ambition is to study the ethical dilemmas that I, as researcher, face when I craft situations that potentially provokes wearers to explore how able or willing they are to stretch their fit-ability towards or alongside different others. In such situations, do I (the researcher) or/and we (as wearers) potentially share responsibility for each other's stretchability?

Ethical dilemmas of crafting
The quote that opens this article argues that we, as world-part-taking humans, have responsibility.

This indicates that in the events (that this article is based on) we – the participants and I – perhaps and potentially share responsibility. What the quote clearly points at is that I, as researcher and designer, cannot escape responsibility for the connecting-costume versions that I craft, including the way in which I invite wearers to wear the costumes, for example where the wearing and costume-explorative situations are situated or located.

In my research *crafting material bodies* I use the word craft instead of design – not to prioritise or place one hierarchically above the other. Craft indicates that I, as designer, am actively involved in the process of crafting (producing the connecting-costume versions), whereas design might imply that someone else (for example a tailor) crafted and produced the costume that I have designed. Design could imply that I envision and somehow control the way in which wearers embody my designs. Craft (the action that involves skilful making) is also somewhat problematic in the sense that crafting could indicate that I, through my skilfulness, can control how specific materialities craft or 'perform' on wearers. The question is: While I craft, can I control, predict or imagine how or in which way the crafted textile materialities will craft wearers' bodies, for example what wearers' embodied experiences will be and how wearers fit one another?

In *Navigating in the Landscape of Care: A Critical Reflection on Theory and Practice of Care and Ethics* Eva Skærbæk writes about Løgstrup's philosophy of the ethical demand that 'ethics is the responsibility of *I*, the demand is personal. […] The ethical approach of Løgstrup, his claim of interdependence, offers a productive framework in that it is open to different ways of responding to the "ethical demands" of the Other. Interdependence means that every one

of us are Is as well as Others' (Skærbæk 2011: 45). Skærbæk's words resonate as an acknowledgment that in the events or situations we (the wearers and I) are interdependent. The 'inter' in interdependence suggests that it is through what is between us that I and we must respond. Through the in-between-ness we can explore our individual or collective fit-ability and stretchability through and with the connecting-costume.

The ethical demand suggests that in order to avoid that the wearers 'only' become embodied materialisations of my connecting-costume visions, I am responsible for crafting the conditions that make the wearers become Is. Hence, I must craft situations that make the wearers response-able (Barad 2007) to the costume and the explorative situation. As researcher, I must be critical aware of the wearers that are present in the specific situations, while at the same time I must decentralise myself as an attempt attune my aware-ness, attention and sensitivity towards the wearers' experience and responses. As I interpret the ethical demand it is a call towards me (the researcher and designer) to offer space, to listen and to learn from fellow wearers.

In *Meeting the Universe Halfway – Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* Karen Barad writes that 'being in once's skin means that one cannot escape responsibility' (Barad 2007: 392). As researcher, I am re-sponsible for the situations that I craft and the way that I craft the situations points towards my responsibility. Barad continues that the 'responsibility en-tails an ongoing responsiveness to the entanglement of self and other' (Barad 2007: 394). This implies that I need to respond to and be responsive in the situations since I am part of the mutual exchange in the costume explorative situations.

Community Walk (2020), Photo: Daniel Jeremiah Persson

Active participation

In my research I often partake as an active wearer alongside a co-wearer and/or alongside other wearing duos. Through the active participation my intention is to break the hierarchies between me (the designer and research-er) and the fellow wearers. Another intention is that wearing allows me to explore and experience the embodied impact of the connecting-costume that I have crafted. In the active engagement I (the designer and researcher) potentially 'meet' or encounter the connecting-costumes in new ways and from other perspectives than while crafting them. In the active participation I argue that as researcher I must become a 'novice' as an acknowledgement that (1) I cannot control or predict what the connecting-costume versions craft in the situation and (2) that every (costume) encounter is an arrival to a new situational constellation of, for example, participants, duration and location. Hence, as novice I must be open-minded and curious in my em-bodied approach to learn, un-learn and re-learn throughout and with every encounter. Thus, in the situational encounter I (the researcher and crafting designer) am the responsible host, and at the same time I (as wearer) must dare to stand 'in the open' as a novice.

However, the impact of my active engagement is that fellow wearers can

find it hard to distinguish between me as researcher, designer and participating wearer since my 'roles' are intertwined. I must therefore make my position clear to my fellow co-wearers, for example by sharing the knowledge I have of the connecting-costumes that I have crafted. Therefor as the participating host invite fellow wearer(s) to co-test and co-explore the specific connecting-costume version's stretchability. As participating host I have realised that it is productive to stress that if a specific connecting-costume version tears it is never the co-wearers' responsibility. I underlined that if a tear appears it is my responsibility to act, respond and learn from the situation.

As participating novice I offer space by listening and learning with my fellow wearers' embodied responses to the costume encounters. However, 'acting' as novice is potentially problematic since some wearers might assume that I, the researcher and participating host, hide my intention or expect something specific of my fellow wearers. Hence, I must clearly articulate that my intention, as host and novice, is to co-study and co-explore our costume encounter and share that I presume we will most likely engage or tangle with the connecting-costumes in different ways. Hence, as researcher, I must embrace that in the explorative costume encounters we tangle in polyphonic ways, while at the same time I must constantly cultivate my 'novice-ing skills' by critically learning from my (and our) fit-ability and my (and our) stretch-ability towards specific encounter.

In the following I will unfold how the connecting-costume versions craft 'prototyping' situations.

Prototyping temporal situations

In my research I do not conduct 'traditional' fitting sessions since, as mentioned, the connecting-costume versions fit almost any wearer. In addition, the explorative wearing situations involve travel between different events placed in different urban environments. Hence, fitting seems to point more towards the experimental nature of the costume situations.

In *Probes, toolkits and prototypes: Three approaches to making codesigning* Sanders and Stappers argue that prototypes are designed (or crafted) to 'provoke or elicit response' (Sanders & Stappers 2014: 9). This indicates that the purpose of prototypes is to stimulate experimental situations that induce creative ideas and responses in participants. Through the participants' responses the designer can learn about, for example, the impact of a prototype, as well as gain knowledge of how to develop the next prototype version. In what follows I suggest that the connecting-costume versions act more as stretchable

prototypes than as fixed or finished products. This implies that I, as designer and researcher, must stretch towards what a specific prototype in a specific situation potentially elicits in specific wearers.

While crafting the different connecting-costume versions I envisioned that the wearable parts (bodysuit and shirt-like parts) would indicate a specific way of wearing and/or a specific placement on the wearers' bodies. However, in the events I did not dictate or force my visions of, for example, a specific way of wearing them onto the wearers. Instead, in every event I invited the wearers to interpret and improvise, for example by inviting them to dress as they wanted and to co-test the limits and/or stretchability[2] of the specific connecting-costume version together. In different events I experienced that some wearers' ways-of-wearing interpretations (especially the shirt-like versions) was more multifaceted than I imagined while crafting. For example, in some situations the shirt-like versions were worn on the legs as some kind of trousers. In other situations a wearer would wear two shirt-like versions (for example one worn on one side of the body and another worn on the other side of the body), whereby this wearer was connected to two co-wearers. Other than that, during each event the wearers' physical explorations stretched the materiality, thereby the version was slightly altered.

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2 In every event and as an introduction to the materiality of the connecting-costume version I invited wearers to co-test the limits or stretchability of the specific version.

AweAre workshop (2022), photographer: Charlotte Østergaard

To name the connecting-costume version *prototypes* informs that they crafted the wearers' explorations and interpretations – and vice versa. The crafted connecting costume versions crafted temporal situations that, for example, evoked different ways of wearing. Additionally, new prototype versions often emerged as an effect of critical, creative and embodied responses and reflections from wearers' experiences. Other than that, in the specificity of the events it became obvious that the prototypes' stretchability elicited different embodied impulses and responses from the wearers. In the following, I will study how the wearers' intra-actions (Barad 2007) through the prototype elicits different embodied impulses that, at the same time, orient and affect the embodied negotiations between the wearers.

Orientations and effects of the costume explorative situations
As mentioned, the prototypes travelled between different events that were situated in different urban environments.

In *Orientation Matters* Sara Ahmed writes that 'bodies as well as objects

take shape through being orientated towards each other, an orientation that may be experienced as the cohabitation or sharing of space' (Ahmed 2010: 245). This suggest that it was through the object as the prototype that the wearers could orient towards each other. It is *through* and *with* the explorative encounter (prototype, self and co-wearer) that a shared space could emerge. However, in almost all the events none of the participating wearers had worn any of the prototypes prior. In contrast to, for example, fitting situations, where a performer's first encounter with a costume-in-process is situated in a more imitate and private setting, in the events the wearers' first encounter with the prototype was in a public environment. Acknowledging that fitting situations can be quite vulnerable,[3] the dilemma was as follows: How do I, as researcher and host, craft a situation in an urban environment that allows wearers to fit into their part and to co-fit in the prototype?

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3 'Traditional' fitting situations seem to contain some kind of judgement or evaluation of a costume-in-process (which might or might not be outspoken). A designer's judgement juggles between fitting the costume-in-process according to, for example, the functionality (the 'need' of the performer), the performance concept (serving a director or choreographer's vision) and the economical or contractual agreements (for example how much time is available for producing each costume). While dressed in the costume-in-process the performer is, for example, confronted with the tactile touch of the material, the functionality of the costume and self-image. Hence, what a designer and a performer judge or evaluate in fitting situations are potentially quite different. However, I assume that what they or we (designer and performer) *do* have in common in fitting situations is that they or we (consciously or unconsciously) wonder and potentially worry about the judgements or evaluations of others such as colleagues, audiences and critics. I would argue that in fitting situations, due our different ways of judging and evaluating, we need to develop our sensitivity towards each other's judgement and the vulnerability that these judgements might imply.

Collective dressing: the departing wearer dresses the arriving wearer, screenshot of livestream from *Community Walk* (2020), videographer: Benjamin Skop.

In interviews that I conducted after the event *Community Walk*,4 almost all of the wearers reflected that they had a not so pleasant feeling of exposure in the moment of dressing.5 The sense of exposure seemed to elicit a newly entered wearer's self-awareness as a kind of wondering or worrying about their appearance in relation to outer gaze. Hence, the immediate effect of dressing (and in the first length of time wearing) provoked an orientation towards 'sticking out of' the norm, indicating that the prototype had a kind of queering effect on the wearers. At the same time, the sense of exposure indicated that in order for a temporal shared space to emerge between us we had to negotiate the queering effect by stretching our orientation to include more than the overshadowing attention of a specific but often more undefined or imagined outer gazes. As participating host I was responsible for crafting the condition for the co-wearers to become fit-able to co-inhabit the prototype.

In *Community Walk* it seemed like the physical invitation to co-explore the nature of the prototype oriented the wearers'6 attention towards the stretchability and spatiality of the prototype. For example, while stretching a specific prototype to its 'limits', the wearers explored that the materiality would carry their weigh without breaking. The stretching 'exercise' was quite playful and created a sense of safety and freedom in the prototype and in the further exploration. Hence, the stretching seemed to transform and orient a newly entered wearer towards the in-betweenness of their (shared) encounter. The orientation towards the costume and the encounter created a trustful atmosphere between the wearers that somehow transformed or oriented their approach to become openminded and playful towards co-exploring different ways of co-inhabiting the costume.

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4 Community Walk (June 29, 2020) was a part of the festival Walking Copenhagen – a festival concept that was developed and organised by Metropolis (Copenhagen's International Theatre). Community Walk was a twelve-hour co-costume performance that locomoted through the central area of Copenhagen. For twelve hours I co-wore one of the connecting-costume prototypes with twelve different co-wearers – one hour with each of the twelve participating wearers.

5 The dressing was a part of the transition where one participating wearer was leaving and the next was entering. Due to reasons of practicality the locations (where the dressing took place) were quite central, for example at squares and by stations. Hence, the locations were potentially quite busy and exposed. Even if in the moment of dressing we tried to be private there would still be people passing by.

6 I include myself in wearers since through practice I have realised that I, as host, am always affected by a co-wearer's sensation of exposure even if I do not feel the exposure in the moment. The co-wearer's orientation orients me 'outwards', including towards my co-wearer's attention directed at an outer gaze.

Community Walk (2020), stretching the costume, screenshot from video documentation, videographer: Benjamin Skop.

A different experience of dressing or fitting into the prototype emerged in the event *Connect.*7 In contrast to *Community Walk*, where I had invited specific wearers to wear the costume, in this event audiences and/or passers-by were invited to explore the prototypes. Even if the event was programmed at a specific location,8 this setting fostered a new dilemma or challenge: How should I approach potential wearers and how could I create conditions for dressing and fitting into a prototype that was not too uncomfortable and exposing for potential wearers? Even if the event was announced with specific time slots and even though the location was busy with audiences, very few people seemed to have pre-planned or even considered participating in *Connect*. Additionally, it seemed difficult and even transgressive for people to approach us. During the first time slot the two assistants9 and I realised that, instead of approaching people by inviting and then 'handing over' a prototype, it seemed gentler and more playful to approach and invite people to try a prototype (with us or with the people they were in company with), while we were wearing a prototype ourselves. At first many people

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7 *Connect* (May 7 and 8, 2022) was a part of the SWOP festival (international dance festival for children and adults). *Connect* was programmed two times each day during the weekend of the festival. In the programme *Connect* was described as a participatory event that invited the audience to 'investigate and experience what happens when two people are physically connected. [...] Participation requires no prerequisites other than being able to move.'

8 *Connect* took place at the square in front of the theatre Aaben Dans. Aaben Dans curated and planed the SWOP festival. During the festival the square was busy since it acted as an information space, other programmed events took place and audiences/people were hanging out at the square.

9 Hired by the SWOP festival.

rejected[10] our invitation. On the other hand, most of them 'stuck around' to watch us and other wearers' (the few people who immediately accepted our invitation) costume explorations. After a while almost everyone returned to join in. It seemed like they – by watching – realised that the invitation was a proposal to tangle (with the costume and with the co-wearer) in quite a free and playful manner. This suggests that watching other wearers' explorations transformed people's (who at first rejected the invitation) hesitation and insecurity. Watching at some distance seemed to affect several people – it somehow stretched their curiosity to dare to be actively exploring the wearing or exploring the 'inside' perspective. Additionally, at this event it seemed that more than two costumed duos (exploring alongside each other) shaped quite a playful atmosphere at the square, with the effect that more people had the courage to engage. Other than that, one duo's explorations seemed to orient and affect another duo's explorations – and vice versa. Hence, in the orientation towards each other the duos affected each other creatively and they bounce on and off of each other.

Connect (2022), photographer: Ditte Valente

As in the examples above, throughout all the events the attention towards the queerness of the prototype provoked a sensation of exposure, while at the same time the prototype's stretchability and spatiality evoked a playful

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10 I wonder if the people who rejected our invitation, like the wearers in *Community Walk,* felt that by wearing they would be uncomfortably exposed in the urban environment, including that they felt insecure if they were expected to 'perform' something specific.

atmosphere between the wearers. In *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* Sara Ahmed writes that

the location of sensation on the skin surface shows that the sensation is not 'in' the object of the body but instead takes shape as an effect of their encounter. […] Bodies as well as objects take shape through being orientated towards each other. […] What gets near is both shaped by what bodies do which in turn affects what bodies can do. (Ahmed 2006: 54)

As I read Ahmed, this suggests that wearing a prototype is an encounter of the skin surfaces of the prototype, the self (the wearer) and the other (the co-wearer) affected or orientate them towards exploring the costume. For example, when leaning away from each other the distance between the wearers grew. At the same time, while stretching or leaning, one side of the wearable part dragged towards the co-wearer, which created a pressure on the other side of the wearers' bodies. In some situations the impulse to stretch the materiality was not a collective decision but was an impulse initiated by one of the wearers. In these situations the stretch would 'ripple' onto the co-wearer, affecting the co-wearer in some way or another, which often led to some kind of a response. However, how wearers would be affected by an impulse, including how they would respond to each other's impulse, seemed different. This suggests that the wearers' embodied experiences of the costume encounter were informed by individual impulses *and* affected by how the co-wearer responded to, for example, a pull or a drag in the materiality.

*Connect (*2022), photographer: Ditte Valente

This indicates that a specific prototype's stretchable materiality oriented the wearers towards each other's creative and improvisatorial impulses. Howev-

er, it was often hard to detect whether an impulse was an effect of another impulse, hence whether an impulse was a response to a co-wearer's impulse. Nonetheless, it seemed as if the effect of the impulses oriented the wearers towards each other, an event that created a sensation of a shared space.

This suggests that the wearers co-shaped the co-orientation the effect of their costume encounter or exploration. In the explorations the wearers depended on and were affected by one another. Through the costume exploration the wearers had to navigate, negotiate and stretch towards each other in order to explore in which way they fitted one another. In the exploration the co-wearers became interdependent. Other than that, the wearing duo's individual orientation in their encounter potentially affected them differently, which, at the same time, affected what they could do individually as well as collectively, for example if they (as a duo) could or wanted to stretch themselves towards tangling with other duos.

Connect (2022), photograher: Ditte Valente

Ahmed continues that 'bodies also take shape of what they "do do", where the "do do" does not simply keep the future open, but also *restricts possibilities for action in the present* (Ahmed 2006: 130). I suggest that prototypes or the encounters shaped what the co-wearers could 'do do' in at least two ways. The stretchable in-betweenness oriented the wearers towards a shared space which acted as a kind of shield or protection from the outer gaze. At the same time, the queerness that rthe encounter elicted exposed the co-wear-

ers, preventing them from blending in or becoming 'invisible' in the urban environment.

In an interview (*Community Walk*) one wearer reflected that 'in our daily life the urban environment including architectural elements are often transparent'. Through the encounter with the connecting-costume the wearers had to navigate in the urban environment – for the interviewee the costume became a playground that changed their perspective. They reflected that 'if you are a person in a wheelchair some urban elements that are invisible for many people become visible obstacles. I think our awareness was sharpened because we [through the entanglement] were in an unusual situation.' This comment suggests that the stretchability and spatial quality of the prototype somehow queered the wearers in the urban environment and that, at the same time, the queering became a 'material tool' that transformed the co-wearers' orientation in a manner different to their daily life.

Community Walk (2020), screenshot from video documentation, videographer: Benjamin Skop

I argue that it was not the wearable parts *but* the connecting or spatial stretchable part of the prototype that (as a material obstacle or tool) invited the wearers to stretch their orientation towards each other and collectively stretch towards 'making kin' (Haraway 2017) with elements (through tangling) like trees, columns, lampposts and the wind – offering these more than human elements agency in a different manner than in the wearers' daily life. *Connect* seemed to have the same kin-making effect. Additionally, in the presence of several costumed duos, the duos were not only aware of but often oriented towards each other. In the orientations towards each other

the duos not only affected other duos' orientation. In their explorations on several occasions two or more duos tangled and became a bigger entangled group.

Conclusion or ethical dilemmas of *stretching towards* Others
Sanders and Stappers writes that prototyping 'confront[s] the world, because the theory is not hidden in abstraction' (Sanders & Stappers 2014: 6). This indicates that through the practice of fitting and prototyping I, as well as fellow wearers, was confronted with the consequences of the connecting-costume version that I have crafted. As researcher I am confronted with the ethical dilemmas that the situatedness of the explorative costume encounters provoked. In this article I have unfolded aspects of how costume encounters (where costume connect two wearers) can stretch wearers' sensibility and fit-ability *towards* tangling with a co-wearer, with other costumed duos and with more than human elements.

Skærbæk writes that 'knowledge is to me an ongoing co-creational and situational process enacted in dialogue between gendered embodied human beings' (Skærbæk 2009: 63–64). Skærbæk's words is an acknowledgment that I, as researcher, am dependent on my fellow wearers as well as the fact that in the explorative costume encounters we are interdependent. Through our active engagement knowledge arises between us as a co-creational process. Collaboratively we explore, study and unfold potentials of our connecting-costume versions through wearing the wearable parts in different ways, co-testing the physical effects of the materiality and spatiality of the prototype, exploring different ways of following or being led by each other's impulses/responses, and tangling or making-kin with different others. Through the experimental nature of the situations and as a continual co-creational process I (as researcher) can learn through what we (wearers) 'do do' in specific situations. Hence, as researcher, through the different events, I gain knowledge of the connecting-costume versions in polyphonic ways, of the manner in which they crafted wearers' fit-abilities and stretchability in polyphonic ways and of how wearers crafted and stretch the costume encounters in polyphonic ways.

Community Walk (2020), screenshot from video documentation, videographer: Benjamin Skop

As mentioned above, it seemed like the stretchability and spatiality of the prototype became a 'material-tool' for wearers to stretch themselves towards others (human and more than human). Ahmed writes about towardness that 'towards is "not me" […] The otherness of things is what allows me to do things "with" them' (Ahmed 2006: 115). As I read Ahmed, this suggests that stretchability is a (physical) orientation that directs wearers' attention towards others and through the towardness the wearers can include others in their inter-action in one way or another. I argue that the wearers' towardness depends on the wearers' individual and collective orientations in the situation. Hence, the wearers' orientations will or will not affect them to stretch themselves towards different others. Additionally, the wearers' stretchability depended on the conditions and the situatedness. I argue that through their interdependentness the wearers share responsibility for each other's stretchability in the situation. In the explorative costume encounters it seems like the wearers first and foremost stretch towards their partner, the co-wearer. As such, I suggest that the prototype's stretchability and spatiality craft an inter-relational third space between the wearers. In the shared third space the wearers can stretch their orientation towards including or excluding others in their costume encounter.

Moreover, in the events it was obvious that the wearers' orientation towards the queerness of the situation (wearing a connecting-costume version in an urban environment) constantly slips in and out of the wearers' attention during their embodied explorations. However, a duo's orientation towards the queering effect affected the wearers differently. For example, even if one wearer's orientation was on the queerness and the co-wearer's orientation was not, their different orientations would affect both of them in one

way or another. Hence, situated in an urban environment, wearers' fit-ability and stretchability towards others is complex in the sense that the connecting-costume versions fosters temporal encounters of touch of skin surfaces that include an orientation towards outer gazes. Depending on the wearers, the prototype and the situatedness of the encounter, the costume explorations elicited or provoked polyphonic effects including that the specificity of an encounter affected what wearers could 'do do'. This suggests that situating fitting or stretching towards situations in urban environments including the queerness of the connecting-costume version transformed the wearers' orientation in one way or another.

Even if I had crafted the prototypes and the conditions for the situations, I argue that the queerness of the connecting-costume version, including the effect of the queering, was somehow out of my control. However, as Skærbæk writes 'independence without any link to dependency leaves both parts ignored, invisible and unloved' (Skærbæk 2009: 49). Skærbæk reminds me that if I (as researcher, designer and participating wearer) do not show that I depend on and care for fellow wearers experiences, the wearers become invisible in the situation. Invisibility can arise in situations where the wearers' orientation towards, for example, the queerness of the costume encounter is not welcomed or heard. Invisibility will affect the wearers' orientations and potentially make them un-fit-able to stretch themselves towards their partner, the co-wearer, and towards different others. The ontological question is how far we (as wearers and as humans) can stretch ourselves towards different others without stretching ourselves beyond our limits or boundaries.

As researcher I am responsible for the explorative costume encounters that I craft. In some situations, wearers might cross some boundaries. On the other hand, I never force anyone to wear a connecting-costume, and I will not dictate a specific way of wearing. This approach, however, does not leave me 'off the hook'. As Donna Haraway writes, in practice as well as in research I am 'in the belly of the monster' (Haraway 1988: 581). Hence, as researcher I must attend to the ethical dilemmas I face in the explorative costume encounters or situations that I craft, which includes that I must question my own stretchability. The question is how far I (as researcher and as human) am fit-able to stretch towards wearers experiences? In my attempt to stretch my stretchability towards tangling with others, what do I not see, hear and sense? What are my blind spots? How does my situatedness inform my stretchability? How do I write about stretchability? These are just some of the questions that are an effect of writing this article.

In this article I unfolded aspects of the ethical dilemmas I face as researcher. Writing this article has oriented me towards new and important ethical questions that I now (as I write these last words) and in the future will stretch myself towards – to study and linger upon.

Community Walk (2020), photographer: Benjamin Skop

This article is a slightly edited version of the article 'Ethical dilemmas of stretching towards Others in fitting situations' that was published in 2022 in *Russian Fashion Theory,* special issue in performance and clothing, issue *66*, page 35–51.

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Bio

Charlotte Østergaard is a Danish testile artist and artisitc researcher in the fields of costume, textile, and performing art. Charlotte has designed costumes for more than 80 performances —several of which have received theatre awards— for among others Danish Dance Theatre, Skånes Dance Theatre and Rambert Dance Company. Her costume-driven performances has been shown at, for example, at PQ2023, SWOP festival (2022, 2024), Metroplios' festilval Wa(l)king Copenhagen (2020) and Carlsbergfondets performance festival Up Close (2020). Her performance-project AweAre was nominated for the biennale prize at The Biennale for Craft & Design, Denmark (2019) and received an Excellence Award at From Lausanne to Beijing - 11th International Fiber Art Biennale, China (2020).

Charlotte has received several grants from the Danish Art Foundation and her artworks are represented in the collections of Danish Design Museum and The National Gallery of Denmark.

Charlotte's phd thesis *Crafting Material Bodies - exploring co-creative scostume processes* (2024) is published on Research Catalogue https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/3184425/3184426

Skapa Demokrati (2021), Photo:: Hans Malm, for Dramaten

The Conversational Theatre: An Introduction

By Jörgen Dahlqvist & Fredrik Haller

This article introduces 'conversational theatre', a performative dialogue format developed through collaboration between Dramaten, the Institute for Futures Studies, and the Malmö Theatre Academy. In 2021, the two performances *Skapa Demokrati* and *Öva Demokrati* premiered at Dramaten in Stockholm and were conceptualised and directed by the authors of this article. Since then, other performances have made use of the same format. *Du Contrat Social* (2022–2024) explores how theatre can contribute to a reflection on social prejudices related to race and ethnicity. The performance was a collaboration between researchers from Malmö Theatre Academy and the Department of Psychology at Lund University. The performance *Komma till världen* (2023) at Orionteatern turned Jonna Bornemark's philosophical perspective in the book J*ag är himmel och hav* on its head and allowed children to reflect on questions about their relationship to the world.

The theatre scholar Peter M. Boenish argues that while theatre has always been preoccupied with the audience, there is now a new focus of critical enquiry and academic debate in contemporary theatre in which audiences are to be liberated from their role as allegedly 'passive' consumers (Trencsényi & Cochrane, 2014). These theatre productions should be seen as part of this discussion: as performances that enable dialogue that "is not embodied in an object but lies in the encounter between the art and the audience, and between the audience themselves" (Leadbeater, 2009, p. 9). In the development of The Conversational Theatre, interaction with the audience has therefore been central. The aim has been to engage a theatre audience in conversations about social challenges. This means that the focus has not only been on the role of the audience, but also on how narratives are constructed in an interactive format, and how the conversations and various performative elements create a coherent and full experience of the theme addressed in the performance.

In this article, we will introduce The Conversational Theatre format and

describe some of its characteristics. The two examples presented here is be discussed in-depth in the thesis *In Dialouge with Society* (2025) by Dahlqvist.

A dialogical format with a focus on listening
The Conversational Theatre is reminiscent of Augusto Boal's theatre methods (Boal, 2019), which transforms the audiences into active participants in the theatre experience by empowering them to act to find alternative solutions to concrete political and moral problems highlighted in the performance. It also shares similarities with Brecht's learning plays, which stage various political dilemmas so they can be explored practically by amateurs and students (e.g Brecht, 2003). The difference is that in The Conversational Theatre, the dialogue is the basis for the political and social activity in the theatre space rather than the audience being made to act as political subjects as in the performances by Brecht or Boal.

In *Skapa Demokrati,* the audience is placed in a circle in the room they enter. The performance includes up to 20 people, with an actor or a facilitator leading the discussion between the participants. During one to one and a half hours, the audience will discuss a specific subject introduced at the beginning of the performance. Depending on the composition of the group, different aspects of the central theme will be discussed. The performance provides a framework, in which the participants themselves, with their experiences and view of society, will create the content. The ambition is to give the participants a hands-on experience of the essential issues of the performance, which they can carry with them and reflect upon after the performance.

In The Conversational Theatre, the audience is the persons who buy tickets to the performance. This makes it impossible to know who will turn up; whether there are any socio-economic differences or if everyone is committed to the same political ideology. Therefore, it is important to find ways to avoid consensus in the theatre space. In *Skapa Demokrati*, the actors initiate and moderate conversations where participants negotiate ideals, rights, and freedoms and how these concepts relate to the potential and challenges of democracy: what is the difference between a freedom and a right when it comes to expressing oneself? By emphasising the parts where the audience thinks differently, a more comprehensive discussion becomes possible.

Listening to others is at the centre of the Conversational Theatre. If the audience is to engage with each other, it seems clear that it is important to listen carefully to the various arguments being put forward. Also, as inclusion is central to democracy, listening becomes a fundamental element in achieving

this. The dramaturgical structure provides a framework that allows participants to engage with each other's different life experiences, thus providing the audience with an arena in which they can try out their thoughts about society on others, while being exposed to arguments from others who think differently. Thus, the dialogue needs to be open-ended and is dependent on the audience engaging with the theme and each other.

Based on acting methods

In the two performances at Dramaten, reports that claim that democracy is in decline in Sweden and the world are quoted at the start. To create a personal approach, these overall and general trends are translated to the individual level: what does this mean for me as a citizen? What feelings do these societal challenges evoke in me? The audience is then given the cultural and historical context of what is to be addressed. They are also introduced to the methodology to be used to address this challenge. In *Skapa Demokrati*, ancient Greek direct democracy is introduced as a model for organising the conversation, and in *Öva Demokrati*, deliberative polling—a method developed by democracy researchers to allow citizens to discuss, reflect and negotiate social issues (Fishkin 2011)—is used.

After familiarising the audience with the issue to be discussed, what it means on an individual level and a method to approach the challenge with the audience, a specific outcome is introduced to the audience. In *Skapa Demokrati*, the audience is asked to create a constitution by working together. The constitution is a document that defines democracy, and by discussing the content of the constitution it is also possible to negotiate which parts of a democracy are important. In *Öva Demokrati*, the audience is asked to collaborate on creating a citizens' proposal to the Minister for Democracy on how democracy can be strengthened and developed in Sweden.

This approach of situating the audience, creating a well-defined framework of how to act in the space and a precise goal are methods translated from the approaches of traditional spoken theatre. To engage with a fictional dramatic text, the overall situation of the characters, their intentions, and the goals of their actions must be defined. This structure helps the audience in The Conversational Theatre to engage with the subject being discussed. Which problem is being addressed should be obvious, as should why it is important to solve it, how to go about addressing said problem, and what the end goal is. It helps to create an arena where it is possible to make suggestions

and share thoughts and ideas while listening to others. The format is straightforward and easy to understand.

Aesthetic features

It is important for the audience to get the feeling that it is a theatre performance they are attending and not just an everyday chat. This was particularly important at the two performances at the Dramaten—both internally and externally. In meetings with theatre personnel, it became important to refer to it as a 'performance' and to emphasise similarities with traditional theatre, because the production apparatus of a theatre is built on the idea that performances should be made and look a certain way. This is done in different ways. In the two performances at Dramaten, the productions are performed in a venue that is not traditionally used for performances; the room has served as both a box office and a bar when the institution has organised theatre festivals. It has also served as a storage room and a place to have more or less public talks. As it is important to change the connotations that the venue had within the institution, the room was transformed to feel like a theatre space by approaching it through the lens of a stage designer. Seats from one of the larger stages at the theatre were used and lights were mounted on stands to elevate the room, and to be able to spotlight the actors during the performance.

To further enhance the aesthetic framing, the performance is complemented with audio and video. Video projections are used to contextualise the theme, to introduce the facts needed to move the performance forward, and to keep notes of the ideas suggested by the audience. These notes are an important element of both performances, as it allows the audience to keep track of the input and what is being discussed. Music is used as an atmospheric addition to what is shown on video, or to the actors' introduction and their concluding summary.

All these simple elements contribute to the aesthetic framing. These performative elements also become tools to control the degree of interactivity. If the form is open, video and audio provide simple cues to lead the audience into the next section. If, on the other hand, a more structured progression is desired, audio-visual elements help hold it all together and establish a coherent narrative through the performance, where the conversations then become merely an element in a dramaturgical development that is moving forward.

Introducing a new dramaturgical perspective to the narrative

To create an additional experience of the theme, another dramaturgical perspective needs to be introduced. In *Skapa Demokrati*, conversations are held with the audience sitting in the circle. After just over an hour, the technician is instructed to raise his hand and ask whether he can participate in the democracy that is being formed. On each occasion in which he did this, it led to discussion, and in all cases, he was refused participation, at least initially. The reason is that a sense of community had emerged between the audience members within the circle (through the privilege one gets when buying a ticket to the performance, and secondly, by having become engaged in proposals that were becoming increasingly difficult to keep track of), and this led to the notion that inviting one more person to join in would complicate the process. The incident allowed the audience to reflect on the openness of democracy, the concept of hospitality, and their own positions towards the Other.

In *Öva Demokrati*, the ambition is to show that there are different ways of approaching and distributing the power of the people. In Sweden, we are used to democracy being based on majority decisions. However, in the performance, other ways of voting are introduced. First, the concept of allowing more than one vote per person is introduced. This makes it possible to recognise how passionate a person is about the proposals they are voting on. Second, a draw was made between the different proposals to give the minority a chance to win over the majority. Third, the audience was asked to decide which proposal would win: the majority or the minority. These changes of perspective were important to reinforce the feeling that the audience is taking part in a theatre performance. By introducing procedures and questions that disrupt the dramaturgy, the machinery and mechanisms of theatre could act on the audience.

Furthermore, these dramaturgical shifts of perspectives also contribute to the theme that is being discussed by questioning or adding to the premise of the performance. When the technician is introduced in the first example, it raises a question of who the 'audience' really is. This translates to the idea that democracy emanates from the will of the people, while at the same time discussing who should be included in the notion of 'the people'. The second case highlights that voting and majority decisions are not always the most democratic system; the draw can, in some cases, favour the voice of the minority in a democracy.

Conclusion

The Conversational Theatre provides audiences an arena to reflect on society and listen to others' thoughts and ideas on societal challenges. It is a format that opens a space for collective thinking and negotiation about concepts that exist in society.

To include the audience in the interactive theatre format, it is important to have a well-defined framework as well as an aesthetic setting by establishing a theatre space. When doing this, light and sound become important elements. Also, video is useful for both initiating and presenting facts and organising conversations between participants in the audience. To further enhance the audience's experience, dramaturgical perspectives can be introduced through simple means.

In The Conversational Theatre, the difference between actor and audience and between stage and auditorium dissolves, and through this, it becomes possible for theatre to facilitate conversations about society and give the audience the opportunity to be heard.

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Bios

Jörgen Dahlqvist is a Swedish playwright and director. He is the artistic director of the Swedish performing arts collective Teatr Weimar since 2003. He held the position as the Head of the Depatment of the Malmö Theatre Academy between 2009 and 2012, where he also worked as a teacher. He has a PhD in artistic research in theatre since 2025.

Fredrik Haller is a Swedish playwright and director. He is currently the Head of Department at Malmö Theatre Academy, where he also worked as a teacher since 2001 in the acting program as well as in the playwright program.

Composing Polyvocal Stage Text: An Introduction

By Vanja Hamidi Isacson

This introductory article will define the key concepts of *multilingualism*, *polyvocality*, *composing* and *found material* in relation to my previous artistic research (2019-2022). A full-length article will follow, discussing how I apply these concepts and methods in my current artistic practice (2023-2025).

The article builds on research conducted within the PhD project *The Potential of Multilingualism in Dramatic Works* (Stockholm University of the Arts, 2022) and the artistic works generated from this research between 2018-2022: *ASIA/ÄRENDE* and *UniZona & PolyZona.* Over the course of these projects, my practice has evolved from a traditional writing approach to one that can be described as *composing*.

Multilingualism vs. Polyvocality

The integration of multiple languages is central to my artistic practice. Since writing my first multilingual play *Stilett*[1] in 2008, I have created around ten multilingual works for children and adults including both immigrant – and minority languages in Sweden such as Arabic, South Slavic, Persian, and Finnish (Hamidi Isacson, 2022).

In the PhD project *The Potential of Multilingualism in Dramatic Works* (2022), the dramaturgical, emotional, political, and communicative functions that multilingualism can serve in a dramatic work and, by extension, in the performing arts are explored. The following definition of multilingualism is used: "Multilingualism is the ability of societies, institutions, groups, and individuals to engage, on a regular basis, with more than one language in their day-to-day lives" (European Commission, 2007, p. 6).

Some theorists argue that the term *multilingualism* reinforces the idea of languages, cultures, and identities as separate entities, whereas the concept of *heteroglossia* allows us to better understand the social, political, and historical conditions of language practices (Blackledge & Creese, 2014, p. 1). The

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1 Premiered at Teater Foratt, Malmö, 2009.

concept has been used by sociolinguists to capture the diversity of linguistic practices in modern society. The term also includes dialects, sociolects and other linguistic varieties. This aligns with Michael Bakthin's theories: "Language is stratified not only into linguistic dialects [...] but also – this is the essential point – into socio-ideological languages: languages of social groups, 'professional' and 'generic' languages, languages of generations, and so forth" (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 271).

Bakhtin also introduced the concept of *polyphony* in literary theory, to describe the multiplicity of voices in a novel. By introducing the concept of *polyvocality* Paul Castagno developed Bakhtin's theories of the polyphonic novel into useful tools for language-based playwrights (Castagno, 2012). The term polyvocality differs from the musical concept of polyphony by emphasizing the multiplicity of voices – rather than musical voices ("stämmor").. Polyvocality brings different perspectives to the dramatic work, and the playwright, unlike a single playwright's voice, can "[...] orchestrate a polyphony of voices across an array of characters" (Castagno, 2012, p. 15). In my present artistic research, I consider the inclusion of multiple languages as part of the concept *polyvocality*, which is why I prefer this term instead of multilingualism.

Within *The Potential of Multilingualism in Dramatic Works* two dramatic works, *ASIA/ÄRENDE* and *UniZona & PolyZona*, were created. Multilingualism is integral to both works and forms the foundation of their dramaturgical and musical structures. The research demonstrates the immense artistic, creative, political, emotional, and communicative potential that multilingualism can bring to dramatic works and performing arts. The project also reveals that multilingual dramatic writing demands non-traditional approaches, which contribute to an expanded practice for the playwright. The creation of these works involved collaborative, transcultural, and dialogic methods, moving between practices of listening and *composing* (Hamidi Isacson, 2022).

Reading ASIA/ÄRENDE, Stockholm University of the Arts, 2019

Found Material

In *New Playwriting Strategies* (2012), Paul Castagno discusses the use of *found texts* in contemporary drama, where playwrights integrate texts that they have not authored themselves. These existing works serve as source materials for new works (Castagno, 2012, p. 19). Building on this idea, I use the term *found material* to describe the broader range of materials incorporated in the stage texts, including both written and oral statements: spoken words and sounds. Since the term *source material* is established in academic research, I use *found material* to emphasize its artistic and performative nature, similar to the concept of the *found object* (*objet trouvé*)[2] in the visual arts. I define *found material* as written and audio content—texts, utterances, sounds, etc.— that already exist in the world and can be repurposed in a stage work.

The difference between *found material* and *documentary material* lies in the fact that the first can include artistic elements such as poems and songs, making it a broader term that also encompasses audio material.

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2 "Objet trouvé." Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary, Merriam-Webster, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/objet%20trouv%C3%A9. Accessed 17 Mar. 2025.

In my practice, *found material* is defined by the following characteristics:

It exists before the creation of the new work.
The source or author is someone/something other than the playwright.
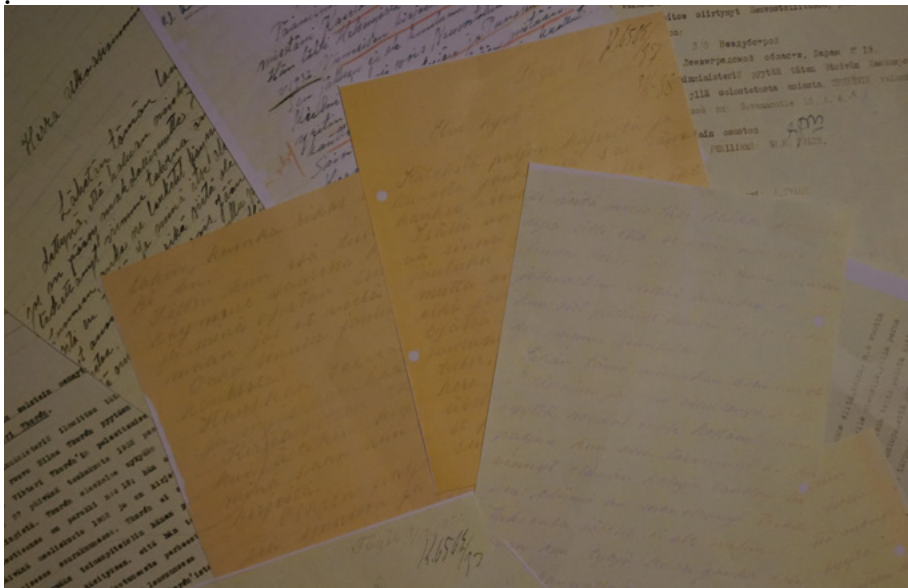It was not created to be included in the new work.
It may include artistic works (e.g., poems, songs) and non-artistic sources (e.g., bureaucratic documents).
It can include audio material like utterances and sounds.
The material is chosen with ethical considerations in mind.
(Hamidi Isacson, 2024)

These characteristics will be discussed in the upcoming full-length article.
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ASIA/ÄRENDE **Found material: letters and documents**

Composition

Working with multilingualism has transformed my artistic practice from a quite conventional writing practice to a composing practice. This shift became clear to me while working on *UniZona & PolyZona*, which were largely based on existing poems. I began to question my own role in the project – what my artistic practice consisted of. If I wasn't writing new text, could I call myself a playwright? Yet I perceived myself as the author of the work as a whole. According to Castagno's view of new drama the playwright can be

seen as the 'orchestrating force behind the text'. 'While writing through the other (often multiple) voices, the playwright remains the creative or orchestrating force behind the text (Castagno, 2012, p. 10). This approach helped me to renegotiate and expand my practice. It is not necessary to be the original author of all textual material to have a central role in the creation of the work. The term orchestration relates to the musical aspect of creation but is somewhat different from the term I have chosen to use both for this work and for *ASIA/ÄRENDE* – namely composing.

Today, the term *playwright* no longer fully captures my practice. I see myself as a *text-composer*, someone who composes polyvocal stage texts with multiple languages and found material. As a consequence, I use *stage text* instead of *dramatic work* to better describe the outcome of my process. In my current works, *Tystnad/Silence/Hiljaisuus*[3] and *Det finns inga ord (There are no words)*[4], I further develop this methodology, which I will elaborate on in the forthcoming article *Composing Polyvocal Stage Text with Multiple Languages and Found Material*.

Reading *UniZona & PolyZona,* Stockholm University of the Arts, 2021

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3 Collaboration with director David Kozma, Helsinki (2022-) https://finno.no/en/articles/david-kozma-and-vanja-hamidi-isacson-selected-for-residency-at-davvi-centre-for-performing-arts/
4 Collaboration with composer Daniel Fjellström (2023-) https://www.iac.lu.se/development-live-composed-hybrid-work

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Bio

Vanja Hamidi Isacson is a Swedish-Finnish playwright and artistic researcher based in Malmö, Sweden. She is an affiliated guest researcher at Malmö Theatre Academy. In 2022, she completed her doctorate at Stockholm University of the Arts with a thesis titled *The Potential of Multilingualism in Dramatic Works*. Her research explores the relationship between multilingualism and its communicative, dramaturgical, political, and emotional dimensions, drawing from her extensive experience as a playwright.

As part of her PhD project, she developed two multilingual dramatic works: *ASIA/ÄRENDE* and *UniZona & PolyZona*, in close collaboration with theaters, actors, and directors in Finland and Sweden.

Hamidi Isacson co-founded and served as dramaturg for Teater JaLaDa, a multilingual theater company in Malmö, from 2013 to 2015. Her multilingual plays for children have been performed on numerous occasions. Besides this, she also writes operatic librettos and regularly teaches, supervises, and leads workshops and lectures on performing arts, dramatic writing, and multilingualism at universities, theatre institutions and independent theatre groups.

Her current research project, *To Compose with Multiple Languages and Found Material*, is a collaboration with composer Daniel Fjellström. Together, they are developing a multilingual performance at Inter Arts Center, Malmö.