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**CARE AND SHARED AGENCY IN ACTOR TRAINING:
A NEW TRANSFORMATIVE DEPARTURE (SETS OF
PRACTICES)**

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy (Theatre)

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Abstract

Care and Shared Agency in Actor Training: a New Transformative Departure (sets of practices)

Hool ning jagatud agentsus näitlejatreeningus: uus transformatiivne lähtepunkt (praktikate kogum)

This dissertation proposes training strategies (sets of practices) for actors envisioned through and in discourse with a theoretical framework of post-psychophysical acting. The post-psychophysical provides alternative conceptualizations of the performer's work that are based on socio-material relational dynamics, mechanisms, and networks that situate that activity in the overlapping contexts of living and practice (Camilleri 2020: xxi). By devising training evolving out of the post-psychophysical discourse, this artistic research aims to encourage other practitioners to step in and find their strategies to devise processes deeply connected to the instances of a post-human condition.

The methodology of this dissertation consists of practice-as-research, literature review, and autoethnography. It includes a theoretical analysis of the notion of post-psychophysicality in relation to actor training, focusing on the relevance of new materialism and posthumanism in tracing the transformative trajectory of actor training as a mixed practice of conflict and care. In exploring how to link the performative process of acting to concepts drawn from 21st century studies, this research describes the development of four works: a theatre performance with a posthumanist dramaturgical approach; a theatre pedagogical process based on principles of both psychophysical and post-psychophysical approaches; site-specific research on socio-material relational dynamics; and a site-specific, multidisciplinary performance based on the concept of assemblage.

This research concludes by proposing a set of strategies to develop the actor's sense of self and agency in a way that is open and attentive towards human and non-human developments and fulfils the promise of maintaining a (critical) connection with the basic notion of psychophysical training.

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1. Introduction

It's past midnight. I am sitting in the dark, in my office in Tallinn. I am attending a Zoom seminar titled: *Holding Spaces*. K, the host, is guiding the meditation from a sunny cabin in Australia. She is a practitioner in the field of mental health who offers deep-diving self-inquiring workshops. She leads us - more than a hundred participants - with a gentle authority on a journey inward, emphasizing the significance of residing within our bodies, and swiftly introduces techniques to centre our consciousness. As I traverse the meditation, guided by her voice, I jot down snippets of her wisdom: exist in the now, accompany yourself, construct a shield, wield your imagination, inhale, and self-contain. These instructions echo my actor's training vocabulary, deeply rooted in the psychophysical, itself a reflection of Eastern meditative traditions. And so, as she voices them over and over, I witness my body-mind promptly engaging.

Once the meditation is over an aspect of this curious experience captures my attention. I can sense that, due to my body-mind training, I have been processing effortlessly the meditation. So that my attention could wander to ancillary aspects of the experience, the technological medium, the discourse, and the interception of social networks at which my midnight office meditation was occurring. Somehow unintentionally, I had caressed the exciting idea of an extended consciousness, leading the performer simultaneously into two depths in perhaps not mutually exclusive directions: the self and the material world. Finally, a recurrent question emerged: how to braid a body, the mind, and the world? I had no strategies.

1.1 Why read it?

In the traditional sphere of acting, human agency – the ability of actors to control their performance through their physical and mental capabilities – is considered crucial. To obtain this control, there are several available strategies. They all have one thing in common: the idea that control is achievable through training. Historically, actors have been trained to harness their spacial awareness, vocal ability, physicality and to own body and mind to bring characters

to life. This form of training has anchored the actor's role in the centre of theatrical work, underscoring their autonomy over their art.

Today's world, however, presents new challenges that question the sufficiency of this anthropocentric approach. With society's fabric being increasingly interwoven with technology and scientific advancements shaping our understanding of human cognition, the relevance of traditional actor training is put to the test. Actors now face the daunting task of aligning their age-old practices with the rapidly evolving technological landscape, the political discourse on inclusivity and the expanded knowledge base of how the mind works.

This tension is particularly felt among emerging actors and audiences, who are often socially and politically active. They are caught in a struggle between staying true to their convictions and adapting to practices that may seem to dull their sensitivity to important issues provoking in them “anxiety, depression and panic that characterise the multiple senses of contemporary eco-crisis, climate, pandemic, technology and posthumanism” (Lucie 2020: iv).

While post-dramatic theatre has addressed some of these concerns, primarily by revolutionizing creative processes (Lehmann 2006), actor training in schools has largely remained static. This lack of progression in training methods coupled with constant cuts in resources, is at odds with the innovative ways in which today's performances are produced (Auslander 2022: 12).

This dissertation aims to bridge the gap between established acting pedagogies and the demands of contemporary theatre acting students. It advocates for a training system that not only empowers the actor with agency and therefore control, but also sensitizes them to the external forces that have an irreducible impact on the human ability to control the action.

By testing and exploring the potential for traditional acting methodologies to adapt and thrive in conjunction with new production techniques, the most recent philosophical turns, and political global concerns, this work underscores the necessity for new strategies that embrace an evolution reflective of and responsive to our era. The key to success lies in questioning and expanding the connotation of training beyond achieving control, or letting the term go for something else that would encompass a wider, richer, less actor-centric set of practices.

1.2 Motivation

In my practice, I am constantly engaged in an ongoing exploration of laboratory work, education, and the intricacies of post-dramatic creative processes. My connection with practice as research began intuitively, largely in non-institutional settings. This trajectory was built upon my experiences as an actor trained within Anatoli Vassiliev's laboratory system (Pitches 2007: 196), experiences gathered at the Grotowski Centre in Poland and in Venice at Isola della Pedagogia.

In 2010, I founded *Fuoco alla Paglia*, a laboratory structure active in Italy, Switzerland, Israel, and Germany, which I have directed for approximately a decade. This entity is devoted to a continuous research laboratory practice that delves into the nature of action within the theatrical sphere. *Fuoco alla Paglia* bifurcates its investigative efforts into two streams: 'Etudes' and site-specific performative actions, both of which probe into the improvisational aspects of the action phenomenon.

My initial foray into doctoral research sought to interrogate the phenomenon of action, within Vassiliev's ludic practice. I wanted to explore what ultimately determines the ludic action within the play between performers. Nonetheless, this inquiry reached an impasse as the prevalent literature seemed to divert me towards a focus that, due to my work experience in Hamburg as a post-dramatic theatre director, and the exposure to a new generation of acting students, appeared anachronistic and lacking in artistic and academic resonance. I soon realised what I was interested in researching could not be reduced to a study of what happens between two human bodies. Focusing my attention exclusively on psychophysical practices provoked in me a state of anxiety. Despite this, these preliminary academic efforts undeniably laid the groundwork for the investigative direction I am pursuing today.

Upon embarking on my doctoral studies, I brought with me four years of practical experience within the German theatre milieu, including a focus on directing post-dramatic theatre. An observation became apparent: my local contemporaries, despite a decade-long tenure in the profession, often possessed limited exposure to classical dramatic theatre. They rarely played within psychological realism. On the other side, the classical training provided by academies failed to equip them with skills reflective of the fast-developing post-dramatic trend happening in the industry.

In such a context, psychophysical training emerged as a pivotal tool for many, offering a point of reference to sustain stage presence within a fragmented and unfamiliar system of references (Whyman 2016: 13). Post-rehearsal reflections illuminated a lack of adequate vocabulary to encapsulate the complexity we were manifesting on stage. The traditional lexicon, rooted in character work and psychological interaction, seemed obsolete. Most onstage challenges stemmed not from acting but from a more fundamental 'doing together' (Lehmann 2022: 45) – one that needed to harmonize with various concurrent elements.

In the contexts in which I have had teaching experience during my time in Germany the approach to bridging the divide between professional environments and actor training evolved. Schools began to align more closely with industry trends by incorporating new learning objectives into the acting curriculum (Lehmann 2022: 40). These were informed by professional actors' experiences during rehearsals, theory, and observable trends in numerous post-dramatic productions. Key elements of this updated teaching approach included character fragmentation, non-psychological physical scores, frequent shifts in registers, blending of authorial voices, and the extensive use of video technology.

The emergence of new learning objectives inspired by various professional post-dramatic theatre-making practices, along with significant political shifts driven by movements such as #MeToo and Black Lives Matter, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the rise of artificial intelligence, has raised critical questions: Who has determined what is considered important in actor education, and for what reasons? What are the implications of training concerning gender, race, and power structures? How do we define 'being present' in an era characterized by social media, constant distractions, and the ongoing effects of COVID-19?

Moreover, in both traditional dramatic and evolving post-dramatic theatre contexts, what skills are most essential today? Where are these skills being taught, and what aspects of training could be approached differently? These developments necessitate a re-evaluation of the fundamental components of actor training.

Reflecting on these questions, that opened my mind and can't find a proper answer in this research, my burgeoning interest in the phenomena of the action within a critical examination of actor training – specifically the dichotomies of inner/outer and body/mind – is evident. These insights have come to define my academic and creative pursuits, shaping my approach to understanding the transformative potential of theatre training.

The intersection between the specific experiences that have shaped my skills and interests over time, and the artistic and political shifts within which my work as an artist and teacher has unfolded, forms the basis of the research proposed in this thesis. This research focuses on the post-psychophysical, an emerging field engaged by researchers who recognize and, to some extent, defend the validity of psychophysical training, while also striving to transcend its ideological boundaries. Even at the cost of potentially losing methodological clarity, these researchers advocate for a shift from a mind-body framework to a mind-body-world framework.

1.3 Research question and theoretical framework

As both a teacher in an academic institution and a director operating within the free scene and institutional settings, I ask: **how can post-psychophysical discourse be translated into practical sets of practices within creative and educational environments?**

The main research question requires a series of subquestions to clarify its scope and address its practical, conceptual, and ethical dimensions:

1. How can post-psychophysical discourse be applied to training and creative processes in theatrical and artistic practices without compromising individual agency?
2. What ethical considerations, particularly those grounded in an ethic of care, emerge when using post-psychophysical techniques in cross-cultural and interdisciplinary collaborations?

In the context of this research, a set of practices refers to a collection of carefully chosen approaches or methods (a strategy) aimed at guiding participants toward achieving specific artistic, physical, or intellectual goals. It implies coherence and intentionality in their selection and application. For example, within this research on post-psychophysicality, a set of practices for actor training might include:

- Warm-ups to align body, mind and world.
- Improvisation exercises to enhance awareness and connectivity with the material world.
- Feedback sessions to foster critical reflection on reconfiguring the acting framework and, when necessary, following up on the impact of an action on the world.

In my research, I delve into the domain of theories encompassed by what is commonly referred to as “21st century studies”. While I am fully aware that these interdisciplinary fields have been extensively explored in connection with dance (Birringer; Fenger 2019) and live art, it is worth noting that, within my specific field of study, theories such as Posthumanism, New Materialism, Agential Realism and Assemblage Theory emerge as relatively new paradigms.

My approach is inspired by the seminal work of Frank Camilleri in *Performer Training Reconfigured, Post-Psychophysical Perspectives for the 21st Century* (2019). More precisely, Camilleri's theoretical extended framework it's what inspired me in the first place to change my practice focus from exploring the *body-mind* to exploring the *body-world* framework (Camilleri 2020: xv).

The concept of *body-world* merges Phillip Zarrilli's idea of the body-mind (Zarrilli 2005: 4) with Don Ihde's understanding of the lifeworld¹ (Ihde 2002: 64), creating a new theoretical framework. This model views the environment not as a passive backdrop but as an active part of the performer's assemblage. It emphasizes the environment's role in somatic training, where cognitive processes extend beyond the individual to involve the surrounding world. In this view, physical objects and technological interfaces are integral to bodily practice, shaping and interacting with the performer.

Body-world highlights how training becomes an interactive process, transforming the environment into a co-participant, thereby blending the performer's body with its surroundings in a dynamic, reciprocal relationship.

Moreover, this research has gained valuable insights from various fields of practice. Although these perspectives are not fully explored within this dissertation, they have significantly influenced its development. For example, cognitive sciences offer a basis for re-evaluating the perceived independence of the human mind from its surrounding environment. Somatic studies provide frameworks for understanding the interaction of movement with and through objects. New materialisms challenge conventional dualistic thinking by encouraging consideration of energy and material interactions. Assemblage theory contributes perspectives on non-

¹ The lifeworld, as a concept, refers to the pre-scientific, everyday world that humans inhabit, which is shaped by cultural and historical contexts. Ihde extends this idea by exploring how technology mediates and transforms this lifeworld, affecting human perception and interaction. This perspective is crucial for understanding the pervasive impact of technology on society, as it highlights the ways in which technological artifacts become integral to human experience and social structures. The connection between Ihde's lifeworld and Zarrilli's body-mind concept can be seen in the embodied nature of technological interactions.

hierarchical and dynamic networks, while speculative philosophies invite a re-examination of the role of objects in shaping our understanding of reality.

1.4 Aims

Within this intricate complexity, there exist multiple motives and critical points of pressure advocating for a transformation of traditional acting conventions and the expansion of its currently limited theoretical framework. It all solicits a departure from the prevalent psychophysical training discourse, which has been the mainstay of the past two decades (Whyman 2016: 2).

Yet, this departure means no refusal of neither the theoretical nor practical achievement of the “psychophysical”. Again, following up on Camilleri’s considerations, what is here attempted is to research the potential of a post-psychophysical framework offering a shared focus between body-mind and human-non-human discourses/practices with two distinct yet interconnected main aims:

- offering a more holistic integration of the material world into the training process.
- allowing a critical position towards anthropocentric perspectives in training.

While the first aim might be pursued by integrating into training practices ideas derived from New Materialism, the second aim draws more heavily from posthumanism. More in detail, this thesis researches and envisions a world-body-mind braiding with multiple gateways and a special emphasis on those prompted by the performer’s interaction with:

- the social environment
- technology
- objects and materialities at large

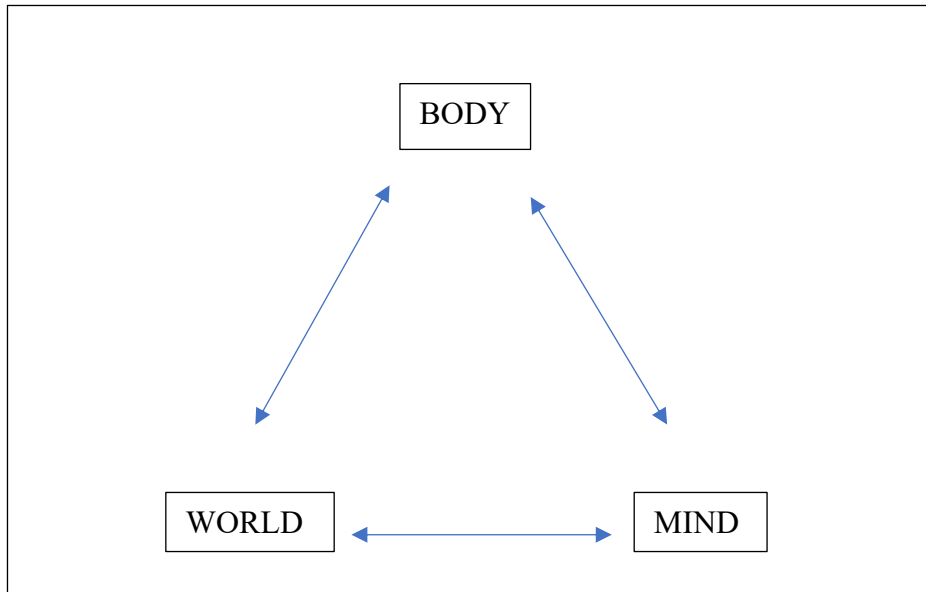


Figure 1. A world-body-mind system adapted from Camilleri (2020).

1.5 Methodology

This research adopts a qualitative approach, combining interviews, autoethnography, theoretical analysis, and practice as research (PaR) to explore the post-psychophysical. The methodology is designed to provide both empirical and theoretical insights into how post-psychophysical sensibilities might be cultivated in training.

Theoretical connections: drawing on theories from acting, post-humanism and new materialities, the research makes connections between established acting methodologies and emerging post-psychophysical theory. This involves engaging with the works of key theorists such as Manuel DeLanda's assemblage theory, Karen Barad's agential realism, and Jane Bennett's vibrant matter. These theoretical connections serve to bridge the gap between traditional acting approaches and the evolving demands of posthuman performance.

Practice as Research (PaR): The study employs Practice as Research (PaR) as the core component of its methodology. Through iterative cycles of training, performance creation, reflection, and adaptation, the research investigates how actors can engage with posthuman concepts in a practical setting. This practice-based approach allows for the exploration of new materialities, hybridisation, and assemblage within the actor's training and performance

processes. By integrating theory and practice, the research aims to develop actionable insights and for post-psycho-physical training, towards a practice of care and shared agency.

To present the case studies, I organized the information according to the guidelines for Practice as Research suggested by Kershaw (Kershaw, Nicholson 2011: 64–67). I was inspired by my peer, Ana Falcón Araujo (2023: 14), who employed the same minimal constituents in her work but replaced the category of aesthetics with practical methods. The other minimal constituents are: starting point, transmission, location and team, and key issues.

Autoethnography positions the researcher as an integral part of the research process rather than a detached observer. This approach incorporates the researcher's emotions, experiences, and cultural background while encouraging the use of storytelling techniques to construct a narrative from the data (Chang 2008). At the beginning of my research, this method enabled me to engage with forms of writing, such as creative writing, that felt more familiar to me than traditional academic styles.

In this dissertation, I incorporate autoethnographic elements primarily to frame my positionality within the research and to interpret data through a personal lens. While I do not fully adopt a creative writing style, I interweave relevant stories (e.g., see p. 6) from my past into the academic discourse, connecting them meaningfully to the research focus.

Interviews: semi-structured interviews were conducted with practitioners who engage with contemporary acting practices, new materialities, and posthuman theories. The interviews aimed to gather diverse perspectives on how actors perceive and experience the intersection of their work with the body-world concepts. The interview data were analysed to identify common themes, divergences, and insights that inform the development of new sets of practices.

The combination of interviews, theoretical analysis, and practice as research enables a comprehensive exploration of how to bring the *body-world* concept into training practice. This methodology not only examines existing theoretical frameworks but also proposes new practices for actors that align with post humanist perspectives.

The four creative works are meant here as steps taken in different directions in a wide territory of research. The practical research combined with theoretical research is meant to cover as much territory as possible to reach the subsequent concrete objectives:

1. Devise a post-psychophysical set of practices for training a posthuman acting sensibility (Appendix 1)

The primary practical objective of this dissertation is to develop and trial strategies aimed at fostering a new sensibility in acting. Developing a *sensibility* in this context means fostering an actor's ability to intuitively and dynamically perceive, process, and integrate stimuli from their internal and external environments into their practice. While inherently qualitative, it can be assessed through observable changes in the actor's responsiveness, adaptability, and creative output during exercises, as well as through reflective feedback, peer evaluations, and the actor's own articulated experience of transformation over time.

These practices will include warm-up routines, improvisation exercises, and feedback sessions, integrating elements of psychophysical practice with more experimental performative approaches. The approach of disassembling and reconfiguring the psychophysical is grounded in the argument that psychophysicality can be transformed rather than discarded. The aim is to provoke a deliberate transformation – a mutation – of traditional psychophysical acting, evolving it into a hybridized form that acknowledges, engages with, incorporates, and cares for the world surrounding the practice of acting.

2. Devise a series of warm-up exercises to train a form of deep listening² that encompasses the non-human (Appendix 2)

A second practical objective of this work is to devise basic warm-ups to activate a form of deep listening that encompasses non-human elements in theatre practice. This includes but is not limited to, how in general, objects, spaces, affects, social networks and digital interfaces can be co-actors in the performative space and how they influence and contribute to the creative output.

² Pauline Oliveros' concept of 'deep listening' (Halstead; Hilder 2024) has emerged as a transformative approach in contemporary music practices, education, and social justice. The concept, rooted in Oliveros' work, emphasizes immersive, embodied, and ethical engagement with sound, offering a framework for understanding its impact across diverse domains. For this research, however, the term only loosely refers to Olivero, instead focusing more on Lorna Marshall's concept of a 'body speaking,' and, therefore, to an idea of a non-human metaphorical voice—often nearly imperceptible—that can be learned to listen to. The term 'deep' is added here, as it implies the desire to invite the performer to listen beyond their body and immediate surroundings into further energy fields, becoming receptive to all kinds of information.

3. Offer an account of how concepts drawn from 21st-century studies can transform actors' training. (Chapter 3, Conclusions)

As previously stated, in this dissertation, the general aim is to transform training practices by integrating the interstitial space between the human and the non-human. One of the research objectives is to give a partial account, through storytelling, of the vibrant exchanges that take place in this borderland to support their inclusion in the discourse on acting. The investigation will be conducted through intuition and applied methodologies, documented and organised in case studies to provide practical insights into the intricacies of maintaining an actor training practice while emphasising the adjustment of agency required by a non-human network.

4. Offer new insights through acting in other fields (Conclusions)

It evaluates Camilleri's hypothesis, which posits the possibility of a convergent focus within the assemblage (Camilleri 2020: 12), by testing it in a practical setting. This examination will not only serve to validate or challenge the hypothesis but also contribute to the broader understanding of assemblage theory, affect theory and new materialism in theatre practices.

5. Foster a debate around acting education in theatre academies

Lastly, it will engage in a reflective practice that considers contemporary theoretical discussions on actor training, especially within the framework of an acting academy. This reflective practice aims to understand and possibly redefine the traditional notions of training against the backdrop of current and emerging trends in performance studies. (Chapter 2)

1.6 How to read this dissertation

The thesis is structured into five chapters, encompassing an Introduction and a Conclusion. Below, I will outline the content of the core chapters.

Chapter 2 is named *21st century Studies and Acting* and is divided into two subchapters. The first section "Introduction to 21st-Century Studies and Their Relevance to Actor Training" introduces foundational ideas from *21st-century studies*, focusing on *new materialism* and *posthumanism* to reshape actor training. It explores how these theories decenter the human and

promote integrated performance. *New materialities* critique frameworks prioritizing representation over the material and somatic, while *new materialist perspectives* challenge boundaries between humans, objects, and spaces, redefining performance as co-creation. *Posthumanism* emphasizes interconnectedness between humans, nonhumans, and technology, expanding the actor's role beyond human-centric narratives.

The subchapter 2.2 *Acting, from a personal digression to the specificities of the post-psychophysical* bridges theory and practice, examining traditional and evolving methods. *Psychophysical training* emphasizes the mind-body connection, awareness, and presence but critiques actors' focus on agency. *Post-psychophysical training* expands this by integrating body-world relationships and concepts from cognitive science and technology. Actors are encouraged to engage with material and social environments, moving beyond traditional training through improvisation and technology.

Chapter 3 consists of the *Analysis of Creative Works*.

3.1 *Solitude*. This case study explores a performance inspired by a man who spent ten years in isolation, challenging human agency and performance structures. The protagonist is envisioned as part-human, part-object, embedded in a still environment. It examines how radical inaction and stillness expand actor training, with reflections on escaping conventional acting and supporting posthuman methodologies.

3.2 *72 Days*. Developed through 72 days of psychophysical training, this experimental work reenacted images through objects and clothing as active partners. It explores tensions between traditional acting and post-psychophysical practices, highlighting intimacy on stage and integrating material agency to expand the actor's role beyond human expression.

3.3 *Archiving Melpignano*. Set in a southern Italian town, this residency fostered performances emerging from public spaces and community life. Through intuitive tasks like the *Coin Task*, performers engaged in spontaneous actions and rich social interactions. The project highlights the challenges of bridging traditional training with non-theatrical environments and the need to incorporate technology and documentation.

3.4 *A Safe Space for Male Bodies*. Commissioned by Steirischer Herbst in 2022, this site-specific performance explored militarized masculinity through male non-professional

performers, mostly soldiers. Blending military and artistic training, it addressed vulnerability, heroism, and the socio-political realities of war, advocating for politically aware post-psycho-physical methods.

The following chapter 4 *Results and Discussion* argues that theory alone cannot bring change, as practice reveals unforeseen challenges. The case studies demonstrate how post-psycho-physical methods integrate actors, objects, and environments through improvisation and playfulness. It calls for a shift in theatre education toward “structured spaces for learning,” fostering care, attentiveness, and interconnectedness over rigid training.

Appendices include *Set of Strategies* and *Radical Attentiveness*, offering practical strategies and exercises for post-psycho-physical training.

2. 21st century Studies and Acting

2.1 Introduction to 21st century studies and their relevance to actor training

The 21st century has brought about profound transformations in our understanding of the world, driven by rapid advancements in technology, heightened ecological awareness, and a critical reassessment of the traditional boundaries between humans, nonhumans, and the material environment. These shifts have led to the emergence of 21st-century studies, an interdisciplinary field that seeks to explore and interrogate the new paradigms shaping contemporary life. These studies engage with various critical frameworks, including posthumanism and new materialism, which reorient our perspectives on existence, agency, and interaction in ways that resonate deeply with the performing arts and could transform actor training.

For actor training, these new paradigms are invaluable. They have not found their place yet, because they challenge the historically dominant, human-centred models that position the actor as the sole driver of creative expression and control. In contrast, 21st-century studies emphasize the interdependence between humans and the material world, encouraging a shift from mastery to dialogue—where the actor becomes part of a larger, interconnected system of influences. These frameworks offer fresh insights into how actors engage with their bodies, objects, space, and the nonhuman entities present in their performance environment. By adopting this expanded view of interaction, actors can develop a more nuanced, responsive approach to their craft, where, at times, attentiveness and co-creation replace control and dominance, and care is juxtaposed with conflict.

In this chapter, I will first explore some specific core ideas of 21st-century studies, such as the decentering of the human, the dismantling of the nature-culture binary, and the ethical implications of working in a post-anthropocentric world. These ideas will later be examined in relation to actor training, demonstrating how these theoretical approaches can inform and transform the practice, offering new pathways for performers to engage with their work in more inclusive and interconnected ways. This will also set the stage for practice-led research that

will translate these theoretical considerations into actual creative strategies and sets of practices.

This introduction serves as the foundation for understanding how these broad intellectual movements provide the tools necessary to rethink the very principles of acting, inviting performers **to move beyond individualized expression** and into a space where they engage in a shared dialogue with the world around them.

2.1.1 New materialism and shared agency

New materialism is an interdisciplinary field that emerged around the turn of the millennium, aligned with the post-constructionist and material turn. This approach, championed by thinkers like Karen Barad (2003), Rosi Braidotti (2013), and Jane Bennett (2010), is rooted in feminism, philosophy, and cultural theory, but intersects with both human and natural sciences. New materialism critiques the dominance of language, culture, and representation in social constructionist frameworks, arguing that these perspectives often neglect the material and somatic dimensions of reality.

While acknowledging the importance of ideological critique, new materialists highlight the limitations of an anthropocentric view, which reasserts the nature-culture divide. They argue for a renewed focus on matter—both in human bodies and nonhuman entities—emphasizing its active role in shaping social worlds, human experiences, and processes. Rather than seeing matter as passive or socially constructed, new materialists propose that it has its agency, working interactively with discursive practices.

This theoretical stance challenges both postmodern constructivism and positivist materialism, offering a more nuanced understanding of the entanglements between matter and meaning. This growing body of work has expanded across disciplines, influencing the human and social sciences, natural sciences, and the arts.

In the evolving landscape of performance studies, the notion of 'new materialism' has emerged as a profound concept, challenging traditional boundaries between animate and inanimate, subject and object. This subchapter delves into this notion, unravelling its implications within the realms of acting and actor training. It further situates materialities within the broader

discourse of post-humanism, one of the numerous philosophical movements that decentralize the human perspective in favour of a more integrative approach to existence. By interweaving these concepts, I aim to illuminate their synergistic potential and limits in redefining performance and to reassess traditional notions of agency within the theatrical practice.

The contemporary materialist approaches mark a departure from the classical historical materialism of Marx, which concentrated on the evolution of social institutions and practices within a vast framework of material production and consumption. The classical focus introduced an analysis steeped in concerns for 'structural' or 'macro-level' dynamics emanating from the production of social relations; power was understood as a hierarchical phenomenon, manifested through the supremacy of a ruling social class over a subordinate working populace. In contrast, the shift towards matter in recent materialism draws upon insights from post-structuralism, feminism, post-colonialism, and queer theories (Anderson 2016: 6). These perspectives critique the limitations of economic and structural determinism for adequately addressing issues of patriarchy, rationalism, science, and modernism, and for providing a foundational critical and radical viewpoint necessary for advocating social justice and diversity.

New materialism conceptualize matter as diverse, dynamic, and autonomous, transcending traditional natural-social dichotomies and eschewing reliance on any external, deterministic forces such as systems, mechanisms, God, and evolution. New materialism advocates for a post-anthropocentric perspective that moves away from placing humans at the centre of inquiry. This shift not only liberates the emotional and affective potential of non-human entities but also establishes an ethical framework capable of engaging constructively with human culture, other forms of life, and the broader spectrum of inanimate objects (Braidotti 2013: 60).

This approach introduces a unique ontology that is often described as 'flat' in contrast to a 'dualist' perspective. It challenges traditional separations and significantly, the divide between mind and matter (van der Tuin; Dolphijn 2010: 153). Interestingly, despite its 'flat' ontology, this viewpoint does not advocate for a universal or singular understanding of society or individual subjectivity. Instead, it embraces a vast diversity and multitude that surpass and eclipse the binary distinctions it seeks to replace (Jones; Woodward; Marston 2007: 264). A flat ontology shifts the focus away from underlying or overarching hierarchies, systems, or structures that transcend the immediacy of daily activities and interactions. Within the framework of new materialist ontology, there aren't any predefined structures, systems, or

mechanisms in operation; rather, it posits a continuous flow of 'events.' These events represent the combined material outcomes of both natural and cultural forces, collaboratively shaping the world and the course of human history.

The new materialist approach acknowledges the complex, intertwined, and often non-linear nature of materialities and their interactions, which could be characterized as 'messy' due to their resistance to simplistic categorization or analysis. This aligns with the idea of assemblages that develop in unpredictable ways, where affects 'flow' between different materialities, akin to an underground rhizome that branches, multiplies, breaks, and reconnects. The 'messiness' here is inherent in the dynamic and emergent properties of matter and its interactions, which defy the neat separations and classifications that traditional dualistic or reductionist frameworks might impose. In this sense, new materialism embraces the 'messiness' of reality as a site of potentiality and transformation, where the flow of affect within assemblages is the means by which lives, societies, and histories unfold, adding capacities during interactions. This perspective is crucial for understanding the material-cultural entanglements and for fostering movements for emancipation and social transformation that focus on broadening and deepening capacities to think, feel, and act (Bennett 2010: 110).

At the heart of the new materiality discourse is the contention that matter – often considered passive and inert – is indeed vibrant and full of life, contributing actively to our interrelations with the world (Barad 2003). Within actor training, this translates to a paradigm shift: objects and environments are no longer mere backdrops or tools but are dynamic entities that interact with and inform the action. This shift introduces a blurring of the game's boundaries. As participants multiply, the act of playing becomes messy. However, players gradually adapt, and this mess transforms into the very field of the game itself, from which new transformative games – rooted in a deepened and broader ability to perceive – emerge.

Engaging with materiality on such a profound level inspires actors to actively recognize, respond to, and celebrate the energy and narratives inherent in the physical elements of their performance spaces. All matter plays a role, not merely as a supporting presence but as an active contributor that informs and propels the action. Ultimately, the applause is not solely for the actors but for the entire material interplay that co-creates the performance.

An example can help clarify how these theoretical ideas of shared agency translate into behavioural changes in actors. Consider the scenario of playing with a ball. Actors might focus

on different aspects of the experience: one might concentrate on their projected intention while the ball is flying through the air, or on the expectation of receiving it often due to being perceived as a skilful player. However, a ball itself is devoid of opinions, goals, or aspirations. Its path simply reflects the impetus it has been given.

In transitioning from one individual to another, the ball communicates precisely what has been imparted by the thrower. This communication may not align perfectly with the actors' initial intentions, yet the ball faithfully embodies the commands it receives. The trajectory of the ball becomes a tangible, physical representation of the exchange of energy between participants. By carefully observing this trajectory, both the sender and the receiver can gain insight into the true dynamics of how energy is transmitted, received, and transformed, free from the influence of personal intentions or expectations.

As the number of balls being juggled increases, the act of juggling shifts from a controlled exercise to one inherently imbued with chaos. Regardless of the jugglers' proficiency, unavoidable interactions among the balls in the air or the effects of perspiration on grip introduce elements of unpredictability that no underlying principle can fully eliminate. Within this complexity, jugglers can be trained in different directions. They might be instructed to conceal the effects of uncontrolled events—by, for instance, directing the audience's attention elsewhere. Alternatively, they could be encouraged to embrace these stochastic occurrences, perhaps even highlighting moments when three balls align in their aerial trajectories, with applause!

This threshold of complexity marks a space where complete control is relinquished, yet meaningful participation remains possible. Embracing this reality subtly affirms a flat ontological perspective, where all elements are equally significant and contributory to the broader narrative. Through exercises like the one explained, an actress is guided to incorporate care and attentiveness into their practice, connecting with and making visible for herself and others the actions that emerge from the power of non-human entities. Engaging with such a multifaceted environment cultivates both an actor's situational awareness and an ethical understanding of existence.

Informed by these principles of new materialism and the different stages of practice-as-research documented in Chapter 3, the actor training proposed in this research Appendix 1 and 2 acknowledges the vitality and agency of both human and non-human elements within the

performance space. Inspired by the theoretical shift offered by the ideas of thinkers such as Bennett and Braidotti, the training model shifts away from traditional approaches that centre human experience and control, instead encouraging actors to engage with the materiality of their own bodies, objects and environments in which they choose to practice as active participants in the creative process.

This alignment with new materialism means that training should fully embrace the unpredictability and "messiness" of real-world interactions, fostering a performance practice where objects, space, and the actor's body co-create meaning. Just as matter in new materialism is understood as dynamic and agentic, so too must actors approach their craft by recognizing that every material element—whether an object, a space, or their own physical body—is integral to the narrative, actively influencing and shaping the performance. This expanded awareness demands a flat ontology within actor training, where no single element, be it human or non-human, is hierarchically dominant, and all are seen as contributing equally to the unfolding of events.

While this expansion of agency and interconnectedness might initially seem overwhelming, this thesis frames it as an opportunity to be proactively embraced in positive terms. Messiness should not only be accepted but intentionally cultivated within the environments where theatre is practised. The case studies presented in Chapter 3 all invite a kind of mess, challenging conventional ideas of what a rehearsal environment should consist of and what should direct the creative process.

Rather than being seen as a disruption, messiness can be approached as a generative force that enriches and fuels narratives. By exposing actors to this vibrancy, the process creates a dynamic container for both training and the creative act, where every vibrant entity can play an integral role as part of the "cast." Through this material-discursive entanglement, the actor becomes a participant in a shared web of energy, learning to respond to the agency of matter in a fluid, open-ended manner. This framework enables actors to cultivate a deeper ethical and performative understanding of existence, moving beyond mastery toward a more integrated, responsive, and dynamic practice.

If this future actor training approach were to be named in a way that aligns with our current scientific understanding and avoids fostering the illusion that energy is literally flowing through actors, it could aptly be called here **training care**. At its core, the practice would focus

on cultivating attentiveness – to the self, the body, and the material world through a practice based on the integration of a multifaceted understanding of what the term care might imply when directed towards the non-human.

All forms of study, often focused on human-to-human relations, can, in this context, be redirected toward the material and immaterial world at large as a prompt for action. This thesis, recognizing its multiple layers, addresses care in its multifaceted nature. Care aesthetics (Stuart Fisher; Thompson 2020) offers a starting point by valuing care as an aesthetic quality, providing a stimulus to integrate care into artistic interactions. From a dramaturgical perspective, the Dramaturgy of care (Groves 2017) structures care within the narrative and process of performance. Key concepts such as touch and consent, which are currently being revisited to ensure safer environments for touch and intimacy (Coetzee; Groves 2023), can also offer imaginative pathways for rethinking subject-object relations. Finally, reciprocal care (Conn 2024) understood as collective tending to the performance, emphasizes mutual support and negotiation. This can help reimagine the scope of creativity and the new recognition it might imply. By embracing care as a fundamental aspect of making art—specifically in acting—and by understanding care as reciprocal, toward fellow performers, one's body, and the world, artists and creators can foster meaningful connections. These connections generate works with powerful resonance that not only appeal to the aesthetic sensibilities of an audience but also address significant political matters.

Rather than seeking to dominate or control his attention, the performer would learn to engage and become part of the flow of affect within assemblages (DeLanda 2016), paying close attention to the subtleties of each interaction, without falling into misconceptions about energy transfer between bodies.

Energy in acting, particularly within the framework of psychophysical training methodologies, can be defined as a multifaceted concept that bridges the mind, body, and emotions. Psychophysical training methodologies emphasize the integration of psychological and physical processes to develop the actor's capacity for expression and presence. Energy plays a central role in this integration, as it serves as the bridge between the actor's internal experiences and external expressions. The cultivation of energy is achieved through various exercises and techniques that aim to awaken and balance the actor's physical and mental energies.

Several key concepts are central to the understanding of energy in psychophysical training:

1. **Ki-Energy:** This concept, rooted in traditional Asian martial and performing arts, refers to the vital energy that flows through the body. It is often associated with the danjeon area, a point in the lower abdomen considered the center of energy. The integration of breathing with ki-energy is a fundamental aspect of psychophysical training, enabling the actor to project energy spatially and develop a „dilated body“ through sensory awareness (Hwang 2023).
2. **Breath and Empathy:** Breath is considered a primary source of energy in many psychophysical training methodologies. It is not only a physical process but also a means of connecting with emotions and the audience. The rediscovery of breath as a locus of performance energy has led to the development of methodologies that integrate breathing techniques with emotional expression and empathy (Prasad; Kamatham 2022).
3. **Motion and Rhythm:** The relationship between motion and energy is explored in various training methodologies, particularly in the context of dramatic verse and metrical analysis. The Motion in Poetry metaphor, for example, understands verse rhythm as purposeful movements of the human body, experienced as psychophysical sensations of dramatic action. This approach emphasizes the importance of rhythm in channeling and expressing energy (Askew 2017).
4. **Improvisation and Presence:** Improvisation-based training serves as a means of accessing and expressing energy in the present moment. By focusing on the unfolding of the creative process, actors develop the capacity to inhabit a terrain of creative freedom, exuding presence and fearlessly accepting the unexpected. This approach requires a deep trust in the actor's ability to meet and absorb the unexpected, freeing them from the need to control the future (Britton 2007).
5. **Presence Energy:** Presence Energy is a concept that refers to the charismatic force that attracts the audience's attention and characterizes the actor's capacity to act. This energy is cultivated through training and rehearsal, altering the actor's proprioception and observational power. It is not merely a theatrical concept but also a path to charisma and awareness, with implications beyond the stage (Camurri; Zecca 2015).

The psychophysical framework traditionally emphasizes the interconnectedness of the body and mind, viewing them as a unified system. However, the post-psychophysical framework extends this concept by incorporating the external environment, recognizing the body as an entity deeply entangled with the material world. This perspective is rooted in the idea that the

body is not an isolated entity but is constantly interacting with and influenced by its surroundings. As such, the post-psychophysical framework provides a more comprehensive understanding of human existence, one that acknowledges the reciprocal relationship between the individual and the environment.

The term "bodyworld" emerges as a central concept in this framework, referring to the performer's entangled engagement with the material world. This concept revises and expands the psychophysical notion of "bodymind," which often leaves the human-nonhuman dichotomy unchallenged. By contrast, bodyworld emphasizes the constitutive and reciprocally shaping human-nonhuman relationalities.

In a way, one could say that by training their awareness according to a psychophysical framework, the performer integrates the world into their act too. However, this remains a limited world, composed of a finite set of additional points of attention towards which the actor expands in an effort of presence—such as the audience and the perceivable materiality of the theater stage during a performance or the training room and fellow practitioners in the case of training. Yet, the world and its multiple dimensions are not taken into account beyond their function of enhancing the performer's expressive power.

In this regard, the holism proposed by this thesis's post-psychophysical approach differs from the holism of a psychophysical approach. It implies a complex and irrefutable entanglement of the body with the world that goes way beyond the dimensions that are merely functional to the actor's craft and challenges the divide between the world and the human body, displacing the actor's relation to the action.

The layered concept of energy promotes a different holistic understanding of the self, one that acknowledges the interconnectedness of the body, mind, and environment. By integrating the personal, relational, and environmental layers of energy into the psychophysical layers that denote its traditional definition, the performer can move beyond the limitations of the bodymind and experience the world as an extension of the self.

A cultivated attentiveness is what ultimately facilitated a shift from an ego-driven, anthropocentric perspective to one that embraces the co-creative nature of performance, in my research. By caring for the materiality of the world around them, actors who were involved in my research became more attuned to the forces at play, allowing the performance to emerge

organically from the relationships between all elements, human and non-human alike. In this sense, the practice of care is not just a technique but an ethical and philosophical framework that encourages humility, openness, and responsiveness in the art of performance.

During *Archiving Melpignano*, one of the projects explored in Chapter 3, my team and I engaged deeply with the local community. Initially, we were more focused on ourselves, our creative process, and the excitement of taking risks by performing in the streets of a small town without a clear framework. We were learning to enjoy making a mess and being in the mess. However, as time passed and we began to reflect on our actions from various perspectives, we recognized the importance of following up on the events we had triggered and the relationships we had inadvertently initiated.

Care became the guiding principle through which we shaped our creative process. For instance, if we decided to hold a movement session in the main square one day, the next day, some of us would sit at a local bar, enjoying a glass of wine to show our appreciation for the community's tolerance (e.g., not calling the police). Meanwhile, others would visit the church on the opposite side of the square to hear the priest's thoughts on our actions and perhaps ask how he envisioned the square coming to life.

Later, our approach evolved even more drastically as we realized the importance of first connecting with the community before devising our performative explorations. This shift allowed the community and the spontaneous knowledge they generated to guide our practice. For example, we participated in card tournaments, joined the local harvest, or took part in the fresh pasta club. These experiences became integral to shaping our responses and informed the trajectory of our creative process.

Yet this act of care requires training that goes beyond sentimental motivations. It must be cultivated on foundations that are not tied to the performer's self-perception or emotions surrounding the act of taking care. Instead, it calls for objective attentiveness—a form of awareness that positions the actor not only as an individual but as an engaged participant within broader structures. To achieve theoretical coherence, this thesis offers a clear preliminary repositioning of the performer—a stance that will undoubtedly need to be challenged and refined in the future but, for now, provides a critical point of departure from the centre. The performer, both as an artist and as a human being, recognizes themselves as part of a diverse,

oppressed majority of entities—living within systems where genuine representation and voice are consistently marginalized.

In recognizing this, the act of care becomes a political and ethical practice that extends beyond personal sentiment. It involves understanding how one's own vulnerable body and position are shaped by larger forces—cultural, social, and material—and how these forces intersect with those of other beings and objects. This realization encourages the performers to see themselves as part of the collective that requires support and solidarity by default and builds alliances out of mere necessity. Alliances that have mutual benefits and are vast, diverse, and inclusive.

This future training requires a careful, critical examination of how the performer fits into these networks of power and oppression, how and if they recognise and act upon their specific privileges and disadvantages, and how they can engage in creating spaces for others, too, to be seen and heard. It moves the focus away from individual expression and ego, toward an active participation in a shared ecosystem of voices, materials, and experiences.

Once again, an example can help illustrate the matter in terms of actor training and creative process. Let's imagine a performance rehearsal where the performers are invited to interact with stones. According to conventional practices, the stones would be handled as props and the actors would find them ready for use in the rehearsal space. The director would have a series of ideas on how to use the stones, and the actors would be free to improvise, playing with the stones at their leisure, in search of images that fit a poignant aesthetic. At the end of the creative process, the stone would be stored for further use or set aside.

If approached from the perspective of a practice of care, the project of working with stones could hypothetically begin with a trip to the riverbank, where the stones might be found. The actors could be invited to spend time walking along the riverbank, allowing their attention to potentially fall on a specific stone. The next step might involve asking the performers to take responsibility for documenting the exact location where the stone is collected, with the aim of eventually returning the stones to their original place once the project is completed.

In the rehearsal space, actors would not be asked to improvise with the stones but rather to gradually cultivate an awareness of these entities as scene partners. This approach could hypothetically involve a series of tasks designed to help performers uncover the stories held by the collected stones and explore their capacity for action. For instance, one task might involve

researching the geological history of the stones. Alternatively, in the context of human-nonhuman interaction, performers could allow the stones to inspire their tactile curiosity, potentially prompting movement. Another hypothetical approach might include performers discovering strategies to present themselves alongside the stones as equals, in dialogue with an audience. The process could continue to evolve from there.

In my research, these approaches have been repeatedly tested, leading to surprising outcomes where the human presence does not vanish—this would be impossible—but instead adopts a different proxemic relationship with materialities. These materialities, initially perceived as mere objects, began to be approached as entities. For instance, during the residency in Melpignano, we had a performer, Birte Schnoink, spend several days and nights in coexistence with a stone. She brought the stone to a wedding as her plus one, slept with it, and took it daily to the sea, carefully placing it in the exact spot where it was found and spending time there.

Her life became entangled with the stone's materiality. Her perception of time and mobility shifted. The stone sparked various amusing situations as well as some highly impractical training sessions. Birte divided her time in a way that allowed her to involve the stone in her actions while also immersing herself in the stone's existence. For example, she spent several days on a rooftop, doing nothing but keeping the stone company, attempting to connect with it through the stillness she perceived emanating from the stone itself.

These strategies have the merit of setting a different tone opening up a space for creativity that begins with appreciation and responsibility for the involved entities, creating an ethical and aesthetic space for operations.

Through this disciplined and expansive form of attentiveness, the performer can learn how to build alliances with diverse identities, objects, and environments—alliances that transcend cultural, species, and material boundaries. This requires the actor to navigate beyond the limitations of personal sentiment and to foster an ethical framework that is inclusive, responsive, and grounded in the recognition of shared vulnerability and agency. Ultimately, this form of training becomes not just a practice of care but a practice of radical empathy and political engagement, where attentiveness leads to a deeper understanding of interconnectedness and collective empowerment.

2.1.2 Posthumanism and Agential Realism

Posthumanism is a theoretical framework that challenges traditional human-centered perspectives, emphasizing the interconnectedness of humans, nonhuman entities, and technology. It gained prominence in the late 20th and early 21st centuries alongside growing ecological awareness. Non-Western cultures have long embraced this interconnectedness, while Western posthumanism critiques Eurocentric humanism, incorporating insights from critical race theory, animal studies, and technology studies.

A key idea in posthumanism is rejecting the Nature/Culture divide, arguing that humans, nonhumans, and technology co-evolve. It explores human enhancement, AI, and the ethical implications of these advancements. Popular culture often reflects these themes, portraying cyborgs, hybrids, and techno-dystopias (Na 2022: 80). Posthumanism also treats animals and plants as companion species, examining the deep entanglements between human and nonhuman life (Haraway 2008: 16).

Posthumanism fundamentally rethinks the anthropocentric worldview, shifting away from the notion of humans as the centre of meaning and power, and instead recognizing the interdependence of human and nonhuman entities (Braidotti 2013). This shift calls for an acknowledgement of the shared agency between humans, technologies, and other nonhuman forces, creating a more distributed form of subjectivity. For actors, this approach requires reimagining their role within the performance space – not as autonomous creators, but as participants in a larger, interconnected system of existence.

Actor training, when informed by posthumanism, promotes a form of attentiveness that embraces the actor's relationship with these nonhuman counterparts, fostering a performance culture that moves beyond the individual body and into a shared space of interaction (Zarrilli 2002). This encourages actors, both in the way they practice and the way they talk about their practice, to be attuned not only to their internal processes but to the dynamics of everything that surrounds them, from other performers to objects, atmospheres, the socio-material circumstances in which the process is happening, and even virtual elements.

This reframing moves the focus of actor training away from the individual as the sole originator of meaning, placing greater emphasis on the networks of relationships that define the performance. By embracing this decentered approach, actors become more attentive and

responsive to the technological, environmental, and material conditions that are integral to contemporary performances. They are encouraged to see themselves and talk about their acting practice as part of a broader ecology of interactions, where agency is shared and constantly shifting (Bogart; Landau 2005)

Posthumanism also engages with the technological and ecological transformations of the 21st century, questioning how these shifts redefine our understanding of bodies, minds, spaces and states of transformation in which we act. In performance, this means embracing the ethical implications of working in a world where humans are not the only actors and acknowledging the impact of technology and environmental change on our modes of expression and existence.

Agential realism, a concept developed by Karen Barad in her book *Meeting the Universe Halfway* (2007), offers a theoretical framework that challenges the dualistic thinking separating subject and object, human and nonhuman, material and discursive. Rooted in quantum physics and posthumanist philosophy, it reframes reality as dynamic and relational, emphasizing that entities do not pre-exist independently but come into being through their relationships. At its core is the notion of *intra-action* (Barad 2007: 33), which replaces the traditional idea of "interaction". While interaction assumes separate entities acting upon one another, intra-action suggests that entities emerge through their entanglements, co-constituting each other. For example, in a scientific experiment, the observer and the observed phenomenon are not distinct but mutually define each other within the experimental apparatus.

Central to agential realism is the understanding that the fundamental unit of reality is not the object but the phenomenon—the relational entanglement that emerges through specific practices. This approach shifts focus from static "things" to the processes and conditions through which boundaries and entities come into existence. In this framework, agency is not an attribute possessed by an individual subject, human or otherwise. Instead, it is distributed across relationships, encompassing both human and nonhuman participants. Materials, objects, and spaces are understood as active agents, simultaneously shaping and being shaped within these entanglements. This perspective invites a re-evaluation of the concept of acting, urging us to question how much agency can truly be attributed to an individual. It suggests that agency might be more accurately understood as something that is always co-created through dynamic interrelations.

Barad also highlights the inseparability of material and discursive practices. In this view, meaning and matter are co-produced, with the ways we define, measure, or represent something (discursive acts) actively shaping the material reality we engage with. This recognition has ethical implications: as boundaries and entities are enacted through specific intra-actions, there arises a responsibility to be mindful of the realities we create and the relationships we foster.

Similar to Bohr, Barad associates objectivity with the process of disambiguation. However, unlike Bohr, who emphasizes intersubjective communication as a crucial component in generating objective descriptions, Barad treats human observation as ancillary (Calvert-Minor 2014: 124). By challenging anthropocentric and hierarchical models of agency, agential realism fosters a deeper awareness of the entangled, co-creative dynamics that shape the world. In performance-making, for instance, it invites practitioners to reconsider their relationship with objects, spaces, and audiences, recognizing their shared capacity to influence and transform the creative process. Similarly, in scientific or ecological contexts, it insists on an ethic of care, acknowledging the agency of nonhuman entities and the responsibility humans have in these interconnected systems. Agential realism, therefore, calls for a more integrated and participatory approach to knowledge, creativity, and ethics, reimagining existence as a continuous process of becoming through entanglement.

Again, an example of how these ideas could apply in practice can help clarify their powerful impact on the future of acting. A key aspect of Barad's work is the concept of complementarity, drawn from quantum physics, which suggests that certain phenomena – such as light's dual nature as both a wave and a particle – manifest only in relation to specific apparatuses. The conditions of observation and measurement determine which of the complementary aspects becomes perceptible (Barad 2007: 20).

From a performance perspective, this idea can be repurposed in the context of this research to challenge conventional perceptions of acting and theatre-making: complementary elements might coexist, but we lack the appropriate apparatus or conditions to fully manifest or experience them simultaneously. However, this limitation does not preclude the possibility of creating spaces where these “dysfunctional coexistences”, where the human perception is held as ancillary, can operate meaningfully.

Building from this, one could envision a theatre practice that actively embraces disturbances – moments of dissonance or contradiction – between different modes of expression, such as

physical movement and spoken text, as generative sources of meaning. Rather than aiming to resolve such disturbances, the focus would shift toward exploring them as dynamic fields of creative potential. These zones of tension could serve to illuminate the limits of perception while also fostering the conditions for a theatre that transcends human-centered logic, opening up a space where seemingly incompatible or contradictory forces can coexist and transform each other.

In practice, this could mean devising exercises or performances where actors deliberately work with the friction between simultaneous but divergent impulses – physical and vocal, emotional and mechanical, human and nonhuman. For example, performers might explore how their movements are shaped by nonhuman materials, objects, or even imagined forces while their spoken texts diverge, contradict, or amplify these interactions. Such an approach does not aim to harmonize these elements but instead seeks to create a performative “apparatus” manifesting complementarity in ways that interfere with our normative standards of perception.

An example from practice can help clarify this point. In *A Safe Space for Male Bodies*, the fourth work of this research, the performance was organized so that no one in the audience could witness the entire work. Soldiers constantly moved from one room to another, following a complex schedule and operating with or without an audience. Meanwhile, the audience was left to make a great deal of choices, deciding which rooms to enter without being given a clear idea of how much time they had to explore the museum where the performance took place. Many actions also occurred in adjacent rooms, creating a sense of disruption. This organization of space, where the soldiers explored their intimacy, positioned the audience in an ancillary role. It was as if the performance was not fully designed for them to experience, creating a sense of elusiveness and leaving the viewer feeling peripheral to the acts of intimacy.

By embracing these disruptions and working within the gaps between complementary phenomena, performers can cultivate a heightened awareness of the relational and contingent nature of their work. This process could lead to new modes of engagement with the complementary forces of action, voice, materiality, and meaning-making, fostering a practice that is both expansive and transformative. Through this lens, agential realism becomes not just a philosophical framework but a practical tool, offering the potential to reshape theatre into an innovative and ethically attuned space of exploration.

While training in Melpignano, we often referred to this disturbance as something that could either irritate the local community, disrupt our work, or both. Yet, we actively sought these impractical forms of coexistence. One day, we began making fresh pasta in front of the political club, where men – only men – were playing cards. As we set up our tables, aligning them symmetrically with theirs on the opposite side of the road, and began kneading the dough, our actions started to draw attention. However, we deliberately avoided directly inviting them to join us; we did not want to disrupt their games.

As we became absorbed in the process of making *orecchiette*, some spectators of the card tournament began oscillating between the two activities, becoming a shared audience for these complementary actions. Suddenly, a group of wives returning from the church approached the scene. Our activity became an opportunity for them to pause in that space, to observe their husbands playing cards, and to engage with us. Gradually, the two settings began to merge, and an hour later, a spontaneous party had emerged.

Letting go of individualism through this lens also challenges the values associated with self-centred performance, such as competition, ownership, and hierarchy. Instead, both actors and directors are encouraged to foster attentiveness, openness, and humility – qualities that align with an ethical responsibility to the shared environment in which they perform. This creates space for an actor and a viewer to engage in deeper connections with both human and nonhuman entities, acknowledging that every element of the performance contributes, in ways that we don't need always to comprehend, to the experience.

Moreover, signs of this potential cultural shift are not limited to how we act but also to the kinds of stories we tell and who will be composing them for the stage. A posthuman sensibility, in this sense, translates into a practice of holding safe spaces – patiently – for the desires and expressions of what has been deeply oppressed or overlooked in our dualistic categorisations to arise and transform into a voice, to be heard. These voices may never fully emerge or might reach us in ways that seem incomprehensible. It might take a time that we are not yet ready to allow ourselves to take. Yet, a great value lies in this practice nevertheless, as holding spaces opens up possibilities for healing and a more equal system of representation.

This change in perspective also extends to how we talk about actor training. A posthumanist approach should encourage a shift in the discourse surrounding the training practice, moving away from an obsessive focus on the actor as the central element of scrutiny and instead

embracing a much broader world of interactions, materials, and dynamics. By adopting these principles, both practitioners and scholars can foster a more inclusive and expansive discourse, revisiting their language and challenging the ways they establish differences in performativity. This shift would capture a more dynamic and inclusive landscape, allowing for multiple valid points of entry, much richer and stimulating conversations, and diverse valid learning outcomes.

2.1.3 Messiness, disturbance, and care: pathways for practice as research

This subchapter distills three key ideas drawn from the intersections of new materialism and posthumanism, reframing their relevance to actor training and performance practices. These principles – messiness, attentiveness, and disturbance – offer a pathway for practice as research, inviting actors and researchers alike to explore new relationships between performers, materials, and environments. The main takeaways are:

A) Messiness as a Field of Potential

Messiness, often dismissed as disorder or chaos, becomes a fertile ground for exploration and creativity. In practice, this perspective values the unpredictable entanglements between actors, objects, and spaces, allowing new dynamics to emerge. For instance, juggling, described at page 22, serves as a compelling example: as the number of balls increases, unexpected interactions arise – balls collide, trajectories shift, and the act becomes inherently chaotic. Rather than suppressing this mess, performers are invited to embrace it, recognizing it as a space of potential where creative discoveries can unfold. This practice encourages adaptability and openness, key traits for engaging with the complexities of performance environments.

B) Attentiveness and Care as Driving Forces

Attentiveness and care act as ethical and practical tools, cultivating deeper connections between actors and the materials they engage with. These forces encourage performers to see objects not as passive props but as co-creators in the performance. The example of working with stones (page 26) illustrates this shift: performers begin by retrieving stones themselves, documenting their origins, and committing to returning them to their original locations. This act of care fosters a reciprocal relationship, turning the stones into active participants in the creative

process. Attentiveness sharpens the performer's sensitivity to the vibrancy of nonhuman elements, while care ensures that these relationships are grounded in respect and responsibility.

C) Disturbance as a Decentering Force

Disturbance, as drawn from agential realism, challenges the actor's centrality by reframing performance as a shared process of interaction. Rather than being a self-contained entity, the actor's actions emerge through *intra-action* with their material surroundings. For example, complementary but divergent impulses – such as the tactile and feminine interaction with the fresh *orecchiette* (page 30) influencing our state of being while boyish card games on the other side of the road contradicts it – create moments of tension. These disturbances are not to be resolved but embraced, highlighting the co-creative agency all forces. This shift encourages the actor to move beyond control, entering a space where performance emerges relationally rather than hierarchically.

Having started from 21st-century studies and found connections to the world of acting, it is now functional to restart the path from acting itself. The challenge lies in identifying specific strands of acting that naturally align with these ideas of messiness, care, and disturbance, as well as in mapping how existing theatre practices can better integrate these principles.

Some acting practices, such as psychophysical training, already resonate with these themes by emphasizing the interconnectedness of body, mind, and environment. By revisiting acting's various traditions, the aim is to identify the points where these practices overlap with the principles of new materialism and posthumanism.

This reverse trajectory – from acting traditions back to the broader theoretical frameworks – creates opportunities to refine and expand the pathways for practice as research. By grounding the exploration in the lived realities of performance, it becomes possible to develop approaches that bridge theory and practice, offering performers tools to engage with their craft in ways that are ethically grounded, materially responsive, and dynamically connected to the complexities of the world around them.

2.2 Acting, from a personal digression to the specificities of the post- psychophysical

Reflecting on my early years of acting training, I feel a paradox within my education. Twenty years have passed, and I see now I was trained for a time that wasn't ahead of me, as if my career was destined to advance backwards. It's a common complaint perhaps, that the academies prepare you for a theatre system that is always a step ahead. After leaving the Academy, where I learned about basic blocking and rudiments of representation, I felt the urge to explore further. This desire for a continuous expansion, of one skills and knowledge, is a common call on the path to becoming an actor. I knew I wanted to discover other modes – beyond representation – to explore acting. So, I met with masters, contemporary performers, political activists, physical performers, and artisans. Through these encounters, I found my specific approach to acting, one that highlights the relevance of an actor's experience in the present moment and the importance of training. Not all actors incorporate training into their creative process; some find rehearsal and performance to be sufficient. However, I was one of those who cherished training above everything else.

As I began to take my training seriously, I realized the importance of turning it into a habit. Each day, stepping into the black box to connect with my body and educating myself on harnessing my qi was crucial. The intentional use of the Chinese word for energy here underscores a point. In laboratory theatre, particularly in Western practices, training often borrows from Eastern traditions such as yoga, qigong, and tai chi, to name a few. Those practices are recontextualized into actor training as pre-performative. None of these trainings explicitly instruct individuals on how to perform in the traditional sense associated with adopting a character-based role. Instead, they are more accurately described as conditioning the performer's body and mind for a deeper engagement, enabling them to embody, inhabit, and experience the future performance score with full presence in every moment, where 'sensing' evolves into a form of 'living communion' (Zarrilli 2019: 24).

This form of training necessitates a substantial investment of time and unwavering dedication, often challenging the constraints of conventional production systems. Nevertheless, it provides profound insights into bodily awareness, enabling actors to forge deeper self-connections, cultivate discipline in their artistic practice, and explore the subtleties of energy within a performance. Therefore, until today and across various European research centres, these

training methodologies have been rigorously assimilated, synthesized, combined and modified over time to accommodate diverse creative trajectories.

- preliminary *kalaripayattu* breath-control exercises;
- simple yoga stretching and practice of a range of hatha yoga *asanas*;
- repetition of a short form of the Chinese martial art *taiquan* (Wu style);
- a progressive series of *kalaripayattu* exercises including animal poses (*vadivu*), leg kicks (*kal etupp*), and steps (*cuvadu*) – integrated into complete body-exercise sequences (*meipayattu*) performed back and forth across the floor, and, when working with very advanced students, weapons training;¹⁰
- concluding with a repetition of the preliminary breath-control exercises.

Figure 2. A training sequence combining elements from different Eastern practices (Zarrilli 2019: 25).

As this strand of acting evolves, new generations of practitioners are addressing the critical issues of these pre-performative practices. Over the years, for various reasons, I have explored two distinct paths in the realm of training practices. On one hand, I have sought to replicate the traditional laboratory system, a rigorous and time-honoured approach. On the other, I have endeavoured to innovate by developing new training practices. These innovative practices are designed to demand less time and, rather than requiring the assimilation of disciplines traditionally reserved for martial artists or meditation practitioners, they leverage the performer's subjective experience and imagination. This tension between tradition and a more productive, synthetic approach is part of my practice and is evident among many other practitioners who share a similar background to mine. The journey of transcending the endeavour to forge connections between Eastern and Western traditions necessitated a profound self-inquiry into the nature of training. This introspection revealed that the answer was inherently complex and multi-dimensional from my perspective.

For me, training has evolved into a concept of home – a sensation, a personal space-time where one prepares before stepping into the world and engaging in daily life activities. It embodies an intimate sensation that compels a return to the same threshold each night. This sense of home can materialize in any setting: on my living room carpet during stretching exercises or

on a beach while meditating. It is not limited to any particular space and is remarkably flexible. As Merleau-Ponty explained: “Sensing is this living communication with the world that makes it present to us as the familiar place of our life” (after Zarrilli 2015: 121).

Conversely, training acts as an avenue for growth. Posing the question, 'What is training?' propels me into uncharted territories, adopting practices that are unfamiliar, encountering failures, losing my way, and navigating new landscapes, ecosystems, and collaborations. To inquire is to challenge my preconceptions. Of all these preconceptions, the most fundamental to theatrical acting is my understanding of what it means to be human.

Both the concept of training as a feeling of home and the concept of training as an avenue for growth are fundamental pillars of my own training practice. They define the essence of training as I perceive it through my body and experience. At the end of this dissertation, a practice protocol will be presented in the Appendix 1. It is important to note that in the development of the protocol, that happened through practice, these two have been the only binding and indispensable training guidelines to which I consistently returned whenever I felt uncertain.

2.2.1 Actor training

Actor training can broadly be defined as the systematic process through which individuals acquire the skills, techniques, and knowledge necessary to perform as actors in theatre, film, television, and other performing arts. This training can involve various ways, including voice and speech training, movement, improvisation, character development, and scene study. It aims to develop a versatile and adaptable actor capable of undertaking diverse roles across different mediums.

The differentiation between actor training as a professional practice and as the experience of becoming an actor lies in the focus and outcome of the training process. As a professional practice, actor training is structured and designed to impart specific skills and methodologies that prepare individuals for the professional world of acting. This includes learning techniques from established acting methods, understanding the business aspects of the acting profession, and developing a professional work ethic. Professional training programs, often offered by

acting schools, conservatories, or university programs, emphasize rigorous discipline, mastery of technique, and preparation for the industry's demands.

On the other hand, the experience of becoming an actor encompasses a more personal and holistic journey. It involves not only the acquisition of skills and techniques but also the exploration of one's identity, emotions, and creativity. The process of becoming an actor often involves self-discovery, personal growth, and the development of a unique artistic voice. This experiential aspect can happen within formal training environments but also extends beyond them, incorporating life experiences, personal reflections, multidisciplinary, and interactions with the world.

This research delves into the intersecting area among these broad strands of training, viewed as a potential zone of conflict and as fertile ground for the development of numerous skills essential for becoming a professional actor and for fostering ethical awareness. Thus, actor training is viewed as a system of transferable skills (Camilleri 2020), which consequently are adopted with a dual concern: to enhance the actor's agency and to expand the human consciousness. This bifunctional approach raises questions about the criteria for excellence in acting and the political value of such trained awareness beyond the stage or set.

This dissertation narrows its scope to primarily consider actor training in relation to theatre, particularly in its post-dramatic forms, as well as site-specific and applied theatre more broadly. Robert Gordon identifies six main approaches to contemporary Western acting in his book (Gordon 2006: 6). These approaches include a realistic approach to characterisation, emphasizing psychological truth; the actor as a scenographic instrument, viewing performance as artifice; improvisation and games, treating theatre-making as play; performance as political praxis, seeing acting as a rehearsal for change; exploration of self and the other, considering acting as a personal encounter; and performance as a cultural exchange.

To this list, Zarrilli adds a seventh category in his book, *Psychophysical Acting: An Intercultural Approach after Stanislavski*: Performance as a Psychophysiological Process, focusing on the embodiment and shaping of energy (Zarrilli 2012: 44). This view proposes an enactive meta-theoretical framework for acting, integrating phenomenology, cognitive science, and anthropological ecology, diverging from traditional representational theories by emphasizing the actor's internal perspective and experience.

This dissertation primarily focuses on the seventh and on how it could expand and connect to the fourth category, acting as a rehearsal for change, as it focuses on the actor's embodied sense of self at the interception with the post-human and new materialities. Furthermore, this seventh acting category is rooted in the performer's interest in shaping energy. The actor's agency and action stem from her ability to, acting through a metaphorical internal operation, shape and exchange this energy. For this reason, it is argued in this dissertation that this acting category is predisposed to share some links with new materialism, flat ontology, and a view of the world as a field of energy. And finally, psychophysical practices operate on dualities through braiding and intertwining. And through modes of braiding and intertwining, this research seeks to generate sets of practices capable of integrating the world that, as Camilleri states, has been erroneously separated from the action (Camilleri 2020: 99) back into training.

Diving deeper into the nature of training, we recognize that training, in any discipline, is both a formative and transformative process. It shapes individuals' skills and understandings, moulding their approaches to their craft. For actors, training not only imparts techniques, influencing their perceptions of character, and storytelling, but also affects their human condition. The consequences of undergoing training are multifaceted. On one level, it leads to skill acquisition and professional readiness. On another, it can profoundly impact an actor's identity, confidence, and worldview, influencing how they approach their positioning in social networks and assemblages at large, challenging or reinforcing their inner beliefs and contrasting their sensibility.

Training, inherently a global ideology in today's context, emerges in this dissertation as a fundamental response to the challenges of embodying humanness and navigating the world. It transcends being a mere activity practised by some in an organized and self-aware manner. Instead, it is here proposed as a universal endeavour, intrinsic to all, shaped by and shaping our perceptions of what it means to be human and non-human. The paradox lies in the fact that while training is a product of our human condition, it also serves to cultivate and perpetuate specific critical values regarding our humanity. The unique complexities of existing as a body in the world today have elevated training's significance, marking it as a pivotal response to these contemporary issues (Matthews 2014: 8).

2.2.2 Psychophysical training

Psychophysical training in the context of acting refers to a wide methodology of practice that emphasizes the interconnectedness of the mind and body to enhance an actor's performance. Unlike traditional acting techniques that might focus primarily on either the psychological understanding and interpretation of the character (such as the early Stanislavski's acting method) or on external aspects like voice and movement without integrating the psychological depth, psychophysical training seeks to integrate both physical and mental aspects of acting. This approach is rooted in the belief that physical actions can influence psychological states and vice versa, thus creating a more nuanced and holistic performance.

The main purpose of psychophysical training, as presented by Zarrilli (2005: 57) is to achieve a heightened state of awareness and control over one's psychophysiology, enabling actors to fully inhabit their performances with an embodied presence. Zarrilli emphasizes the importance of daily training to cultivate this psychophysiological state, which is essential for the actor's art. He underscores the significance of the lower abdominal/pelvic region, or the "root of the navel," as the centre from which breath and energy emanate, a concept deeply ingrained in kalarippayattu practice. This training is yet not merely about physical exercises but involves a psycho-spiritual process that leads to the ultimate flowering of one's life-in-art and seeks to integrate the actor's physicality with their psychological and emotional processes, creating a dynamic and expressive performance that is both grounded and energetically alive.

This mode of training offers additional advantages: it enhances the actor's awareness and understanding of the cognitive dynamics present in any given performance framework. By anchoring the personal experience within embodied perception, this approach provides actors with a guide through the psychological void characteristic of post-dramatic creations. The deepened awareness of the actors leads to an increased adaptability to new structures and patterns. A more profound grasp of the interrelation between perception and consciousness enables actors to attain a more refined sense of self, thereby facilitating their evolution beyond mere character portrayal.

In doing so, this training method not only furnishes actors with strategies and clarity for operating within a post-dramatic context but also limits the potential for applying these

principles and insights to broader or more speculative contexts. A critique that may be directed at the psychophysical training method is its strong focus on established frameworks. Phillip Zarrilli's idea of 'psychophysicality' stands out as a key example of how training methods have focused on human-centred discursivity, a concept that started in the early 20th century. And there is where the push for an update to this idea, the previously introduced post-psychophysical framework, which recognizes the important role that the physical environment plays in shaping how training is done (Camilleri 2020: xvii), comes from.

Reflecting on a conventionally conceived psychophysicality in the 21st century, Camilleri defined it well as

“an entrenched psychophysicality that leaves humanism intact. In a posthuman world, this form of psychophysicality is backwards-looking in seeking the ‘eminently human’ understood as a static, nonchanging entity. In endeavouring to (re)sensitize the human, an entrenched psychophysicality is forever in reverse gear, aspiring towards an old-fashioned construct of the human. This is not dissimilar to the consideration of psychophysicality as a kind of ‘corrective’ practice aimed at making up for any deficiencies accumulated during the modern age, from the Enlightenment to industrialization, and on to technological and digital globalization.” (Camilleri 2015: 120)

As previously introduced, psychophysical training is grounded in pre-performative processes of ‘formation’. These processes include diverse practices such as Feldenkrais and Alexander techniques, Suzuki training, Asian martial arts, Meyerhold training, and yoga, amongst others (Zarrilli 2019: 24). This modernist attempt to build bridges between practices, puts constraints on further creative exploration beyond the realm of traditional acting, confining the actor's attention predominantly to the process of translating the gathering of *qi/prana* through specific forms and sequences, into presence, states of being, dramatic tension and reactivity. One might argue that such a focused endeavour on bridging the body-mind divide and the investment in the pre-performative might unintentionally cast a fixed narration, a hierarchical order, a rigid prioritisation elevating psychophysical acting considerations to a paramount status and relegating other possibly interesting dualities to a secondary position.

Additionally, in terms of practice, the learning of traditional practices from diverse cultures may introduce a level of rigidity and perplexity into the performer's mindset, as they earnestly

strive to assimilate while creatively adapting these derivative sequences zest to their acting repertoire. Zarrilli argues against this rigidity pointing out the tremendous amount of individual variation among actors performing specific roles for example in *Kutyattam* (Zarrilli 2019: 35).

Yet with many of these practices, such as yoga and martial arts, becoming increasingly prevalent within our society, one might argue that actors now have the liberty to engage with them in more authentic settings outside their formal training environments. Theatre training in the 21st century could either build upon these social networks or evolve towards an unknown. In any case, new circumstances are raising pertinent questions regarding the essential components of actor training.

This dissertation posits that integrating traditional practices into an actor's educational framework is no longer a prerequisite for accessing psychophysical dimensions of performance. Instead, it is imperative to cultivate insights into evolving further selected aspects of these well-known practices. Equally important is fostering an environment where actors can connect with their intrinsic energy and engage in meaningful dialogue with their bodies in complex heterogenous networks, thereby cultivating a post-human mindset and sensibility that is both enriched by an appreciation for diversity and invigorated by creativity. Coming back to Zarrilli's words and the aims of this research, if psychophysical training allows the performer's life to flower in art, then post-psychophysical training, should allow the performer's life to flower in art+care.

In actor training, breath control exercises are fundamental, providing a psychophysical pathway to attune the body and mind. The breath is the starting point for training because it fosters an optimal state of body-mind awareness, where the body is fully present and ready for performance. This is exemplified in the Kathakali actor-dancer, who uses breath to animate facial expressions and enliven the entire body to assume dynamic postures appropriate to emotional states.

Conceptually, breath is linked to the original Greek term *psyche*, which refers to the vital principle or life force, and is closely related to the Sanskrit *prana* and the Chinese *qi* or *ki*. This understanding of breath goes beyond the modernist interpretation of psychology and delves into the animating, life-giving nature of breath.

The actor's awareness of breath is crucial for psychophysical disciplines, as it allows for the cultivation of an inner sensitivity to the body's internal circulation of energy. This awareness is described as a self-grasping sensation of the body, an awareness of the whole body. Through such disciplines, the actor learns to direct passions and control the breath, leading to a deeper psychophysiological awareness.

During performance, the preparatory work involving breath becomes intuitively present, informing the structuring of the actor's score. The performance score, created during the preparatory period, may use modes of analysis and consciousness that, in performance, become peripheral to the actor's primary focus. The actor's task is to develop an affective musculature by training the breath, allowing for the voluntary control of emotional states.

The breath is also associated with the ability to provoke the spontaneous reappearance of life and increase the internal density and volume of feeling. This is achieved by placing the breath in specific locations in the body to cause psychophysiological vibrations. The actor carves out the character through the controlled manipulation of breath, which serves as a springboard for the emanation of feeling.

In summary, breath is a multifaceted concept in the realm of psychophysical acting, serving as a tool for control, a pathway to awareness, and a means of connecting the inner and outer aspects of performance. It is both a practical technique and a conceptual framework that underpins the actor's craft.

But it is also what keeps the discourse on training so focused on human agency. The decentralisation of human breath is a key issue to the set of practices proposed in this dissertation as it prioritizes the process of embodiment to any other relational materialities shaping the human condition. The appendixes are an attempt at establishing through practice what else, other than the experience of an actor listening to his breath, could serve as a gateway and conceptual framework to an even more expanded sense of awareness and where the limitations to such a methodological approach are.

2.2.3 Intuitive gateways out of a human-centred approach

As it is made visible through the previous subchapters, psychophysical training's final goal is to enhance an actor's control of his immediate surroundings and inner life. The insights derived from the description of psychophysical training's strongest traits in acting offer a foundational understanding of how this approach facilitates a deeper connection with the self, and fellow actors, but not overtly the material world. This connection is achieved through the holistic integration of physical and psychological aspects of performance, underscoring the mutual influence of the body and mind. What is now relevant to ask is if this process can be reconfigured for broader connections and for what purpose.

This dissertation supports the idea that this reconfiguration needs to be messy at first, speculative and even based on arbitrary choices. The first step is to move the discourse and practice away from the body as an exclusive site of experience. Intuitively speaking, one may say this move implies a dual process of augmentation: on one hand, an expansion, which refers to the horizontal broadening of dynamics and applications, thereby extending its scope and reach of what we exercise with and what we talk about when we discuss training; and on the other hand, an enhancement, characterized by a vertical or diagonal deepening of capacity, thereby enriching its depth and complexity by reaching into more subtle and blurred territories of materiality.

It is here that new materialism and posthumanism come into play, with their intersectional nature and powerful ideas, to drive the research forward. For example, one could integrate the notion of flat ontology into their practice, treating the body as an entity with equal standing among others – each possessing the potential to influence the actor's cognitive and emotional states. The train of thoughts could lead to extravagant approaches to begin with, such as training psychophysical activation in the secretary's office while the school staff continues their work or arbitrarily filling the actor training space with everyday kitchen utensils and clothes brought from the performers' homes, creating opportunities for dialogue in interaction with the socio-material environment of the actors. In time, the research must bring to fruition sets of practices that provide evidence of tangible interconnectedness, enhanced by the training, within experimental networks. For this aspect of the training to evolve, networks must include, from the very start, not only the collective of actors but also a diverse array of both material and immaterial entities.

The insights derived from the description of psychophysical training's most debatable traits in acting offer an opportunity to reflect upon how this approach's shortcomings could translate into an opportunity to rethink the practice's potential. Its emphasis on Stanislavski's system and the presumption that his experiences universally apply to all actors, for example, offers a platform to think about training that is not only more observant of the differences between actors' body-minds but also their differences in beliefs, political agendas and sensoriality. Moreover, while it touches upon the spiritual dimensions of acting, leaving these discussions open-ended, it might invite further research and debate by touching on other unfathomable matters such as energy fields and affect.

Finally, both the praised and criticised traits of psychophysical training open new directions for developing either through theory or practice new perspectives reflecting a new understanding of agency more aligned with political, scientific, and philosophical contemporary discourses. What needs to be further addressed, but is not in this research, is what these developments would bring in terms of threats and gains to a practice that, implicitly, withholds the status of a universal method for acting, and has reached a level of high formalisation.

Camilleri, who coined the term "post-psychophysical", developed this approach as an evolution of traditional psychophysical methods, aiming to create a more expansive framework for actor training. His focus is on guiding performers toward a shared focus that assembles the psychophysical – body and mind – and the world. His thesis is that psychophysical training does not lose its relevance but evolves by integrating the world and its affects at the core of practice. He achieves this by offering a rich theoretical blueprint to expand the performer's field of reflection during training and by suggesting how certain technologies, such as smartwatches (Camilleri 2020: 76) and video recording (2020: 189), can be incorporated into the practice.

Despite being different in their final aims, both for Camilleri and for this research, the crux of the dilemma lies in the pivot from the body-mind nexus of traditional psychophysical practices to the body-mind-world axis that characterizes the post-psychophysical paradigm. This shift raises questions. How can it be obtained in practice? What can obstruct this shift? Regardless of the outcome, this shift appears to necessitate a recalibration of practice.

A recalibration that calls for maintaining a focus in training while embracing new understandings fosters a radical transformation in the actor's sensibility, even if it results in incremental sharing rather than a complete overhaul (Grusin 2015). While Camilleri primarily focuses on expanding the performer's field of reflection and providing evidence of the stages and modes of connection within the body-world relationship, he offers little input on how to approach this process of integration directly through practice or how to incorporate his reflections into practical training. He offers a few examples, such as learning from a smartwatch or video recording of a performance, but largely leaves the task of pivoting the actor's focus to the validity of his arguments.

In contrast, this dissertation proposes a practice-based approach to integration, placing emphasis on playful experimentation and observation. The direction of this approach is guided by a simple mechanism of alternation – between attempting to integrate the world into training and training in the world. Unlike Camilleri, and building on his exhaustive work, this research assumes that comprehension alone is not enough for radical transformation; teachers and actors can benefit more from practice-based examples to initiate their own transformational journey.

In traditional psychophysical practices, the interplay between body and mind is paramount. The point of entrance is mostly the breath and training is meant specifically to reinforce an actor's control of his energy in every possible scenario (Zarrilli 2005). However, as we have already seen, the post-psychophysical domain expands this interplay to encompass the body's relationship with the external world. This broadened perspective raises the practical question if the human body's breath should remain such an exclusive and if it remains an effective entry point in an expanded paradigm. Or could breath be translated into wider decentralising “holistic processes of structure and function, in constant interchange of matter and energy” (Hanna 1976: 30–32)? Can maybe somatic practices offer alternative routes through affect?

For the purposes of this dissertation, the theoretical resolution proposed through practice involves, once again, a speculative transition toward concepts that are novel to the field of acting. This transition is necessary to propel the research forward and shift the ideological framework that reinforces the idea of acting as an exclusively human undertaking. Assemblage theory, for example, offers a platform to address the first question.

Assemblage theory, as it is explained by Manuel DeLanda, rejects hierarchical structures in favor of a network of equally significant elements. Within this framework, the performer, the

environment, and the material world are not arranged in a fixed hierarchy but are seen as parts of a dynamic and constantly evolving whole (DeLanda 2016: 1). This concept supports the performer's understanding of positioning without hierarchical supremacy while still maintaining relevance in the creation of action. It can be implemented through improvisational structures involving chance, fragmented tasks, bodies, and objects, which train the performer's ability to sense their connection to the world through assemblages.

However, for these concepts to be integrated into acting, one must set aside old ideas and familiar impressions that may conflict with the coherence of the new propositions. To apply assemblage theory to acting, it is necessary to move beyond the notion of acting as an organic process, with its inherent interdependencies. Camilleri explains the reasoning behind this well (Camilleri 2020: 6). Yet, the transition is potentially hindered by performers' strong attachment to organic acting. Acting feels rewarding, and being at the centre of attention offers a powerful sensation of control. It is important to recognize that integrating the world into training may require performers to renounce these intense sensations and the feeling of power, which remain significant obstacles to any post-psychophysical agenda that values implementation.

Furthermore, thinking training through assemblages can help discover new entry points in one's practice. DeLanda asks himself in the introduction to his book *Assemblages*: "What is an assemblage? [...] not successions, lines of descent, but contagions, epidemics, the wind". (DeLanda, 2016: 1) This definition provides this dissertation with a potentially substitutive entry point to human breath as an essential gateway to psychophysical practices, and the vision of all things coming dynamically into being, acting just like a wind, the breath of the world. To start with, one could set training in multiple interconnected rooms, applying all to different principles of physicality and intercepting with a modulation of the exercise defined by time and chance.

From these short examples is possible to draw a method of exploration, based on the trainer's ability to stay in a grey zone of learning and be inventive, by getting inspired by beautiful and fresh ideas, from other fields and opposing the force of habit. Looking into new materialism, for instance, can intercept Assemblage theory in this exercise and bring in fundamental questions such as: "How is the material world moved by the material world it inhabits?" (Birringer; Fenger 2019: 14) which expands our imagination on movement's matter and shows the possible interplay between these ideas. A vital breath comes not exclusively from within the body, as the *psyche* but from everywhere, as the aleatoric moving force of nature, provoking

unpredictable interactions, human bodies moving with things, movement going through our bodies.

Or hybridization as a post-humanist concept can suggest a transformative process towards new ways of relating to agency and self that blend the border between what is considered human and what is not (Camilleri; Kapsali 2020). Through this lens, everything breaths together somewhere on a continuum, oscillating between the multiplicity of coming together and the singularity of becoming, revealing snapshots of intervals, options for different agential cuts and with it, different phenomena.

These highly imaginative theoretical shifts bring with them the peril of losing clarity on what exactly is being trained in practice. Assemblages can lead us to limitless networks and no centres to go back to. New materialism challenges the very notion of human agency. Hybrids can drag us into an undistinguishable soup of everything. As we move away from a defined centre – the body-mind duality – and embrace a more vibrant and fluid assemblage of interactions, there's a risk that the specificity of training could become diffuse.

By engaging with these theoretical tensions through practice, this work seeks not just to answer questions but to actively navigate the obstacles and complexities these new frameworks present. It is through the act of doing – of embodying these concepts within the practice itself and by exposing the actor's body and mind to a world vibrant in its materialities – that new strategies and practices can emerge.

3. Creative Works Analysis

3.1 Creative Work I: *Solitude*

Director: Giacomo Veronesi. Performers: Sammy Van de Heuvel, Camilla Parini, Andre Willmünd. Dramaturg: Irina Müller. Location: Luzern Theater. Period: November 14 to December 27, 2019.

I heard this story of solitude at a dinner party with friends, in 2017. The account I have here transcript and edited several times, is from a close friend of “P”, the protagonist. It unfolds in three distinct acts.

It all started ten years ago. In a small town near Padua. It was the end of the school year and students pondered their futures. Among them, a tight-knit group of nine friends faced their crossroads: most aspired to attend universities in Milan or Rome, some considered staying in town to work and study, and one dreamed of venturing abroad. This narration starts with P, the exception, who chose to pursue a life in Brazil as a gym trainer. One might say that P’s boldness, known for an outgoing nature, marked the beginning of the group's divergence into the world.

As years passed, the friends reconvened each Christmas at their favourite bar, maintaining a tradition. Their reunions were a tapestry of personal accounts of triumphs and struggles. P often missed these gatherings, instead sharing vivid images from Brazil, portraying an enviable existence. Everything changed in Christmas 2015 when P joined the celebration. After a night of revelry anecdotes, friends attempted to take a very drunk P home, only to be confronted by his mother's shocking admission: P had never left for Brazil and had been living in the basement for a decade. For ten years he had been sitting on a mattress, staring at the walls of the basement, without showing initiative or complaint. He would just be there, part of a constellation of archived objects and germs.

The story didn't end there. After Christmas, P attempted to restart the illusion with a photograph of Milan's sky. However, in response, his friends visited him in the cellar. A violent

confrontation ensued, leaving P bruised. The friends left the cellar, filled with shame and anger. P remained there, continuing his life in solitude.

3.1.1 Starting point



Photo 1. A study on the character of P. as defaced Hybrid improvised by Camilla Parini. (Parini 2019)

Solitude is a performance I created for Luzern Theatre in 2020. The initial idea was to explore how a posthuman plot line could affect an actor. More in specific, the study revolved around the real story of a young Italian man who lived hidden in his parents' cellar for more than ten years, without giving any comprehensible explanation. What makes the narrative post-human is the radical inaction of the main character.

The prolonged stasis results in P's transformation into a hybrid creature, part human and part cellar. As one mentally navigates through the storyline, it becomes easy to visualize the moment when the friends enter P's hideout: a damp room with flickering light, immersed in an unnatural stillness. Somewhere in a corner near a broken chair seats a body. It emanates a vague

presence, entwined with the many other objects sparse in the basement. As one approaches, it becomes possible to distinguish only a few of P's facial traits.

As I started imagining my P., I felt the power the character unusual positioning had. P. challenged my basic anthropocentric settings. Against my most basic systems of beliefs, the character P. did not think about the future, he did not seem to need human connections and showed no intention to make sense of his world. He appeared to me as a subject deprived of the notion of human agency and as a subject quietly removing himself from the center.

My P. had discarded language and lived as a physical entity, in a zone of potential alternative forms of cryptic communication and minimal interaction. What remained at my disposal as a practitioner to work with, after this first dramaturgical phase, was the body itself as a site for external attention and its own faculty for attention as an irreducible principle of connection within any habitat. This is when, due to these reasonings, my understanding of a dramaturg/author role started shifting.

Only much later, with the performance *72 Days*, did I explicitly define my role as a body dramaturg, emphasizing a distinct approach that prioritizes the body over textuality in crafting posthuman narratives. At the time, the decision not to write a text for P. was an unpopular one, based purely on intuition. It was unpopular because it left the actors feeling insecure about their roles and caused concern within the theatre about how the audience would react to two hours of stillness, silence, physical work, objects, and free improvisation.

My interest in P. was driven by the opportunity this specific positioning offered to enable a creative process focused on the subtle differences and inconsistencies between the power of a body as an actant and the power of intention in action. What is compelling about this shift in perception is that it seeks to manifest and capture impacts that are unintended, yet distinctly human. It highlights the inconsistency in making a clear distinction between the human and the non-human.

P. is conceived therefore as a specific positioning inside the texture of the narrative that demands the performer to deskill from controlling the action to enact, or channel, a non-human force in giving direction to a narrative. A force that yes, would be captured in a human design, but still would suspend or at least challenge, for the time of the performance, a basic understanding of human agency and its framing. In that suspension, where the actor becomes

merely an almost still object coexisting with other objects, there is a potential for alternative network connections.

However, at the time, we were uncertain whether these connections would be perceptible to the audience or what the cost of such an experiment might be. To maximize the audience's ability to engage with these subtle dynamics, we chose to stage the performance in a very intimate setting. A similar decision was later made by Ene-Liis Semper and Tiit Ojasoo in *72 Days*, who also opted for an intimate setting to ensure the audience could deeply connect with the performance.



Photo 2. *Solitude* maquette, thinking of an immersive and intimate space. (Veronesi 2019)

Solitude was my second attempt at staging the posthuman in Luzern. I approached this work after a previous “failed” attempt. A year earlier, for the same stage, I had written and directed the piece *What Do We Talk About When We Talk About Eating?* In that earlier work, I had a similar intent: to foreground the impact of the human body as such. However, in this case, I

followed a psychophysical approach in both writing and working with the actors, focusing on circumstances and verbal actions.

The work was inspired by the writings of Elizabeth Kolbert and Yuval Noah Harari on the future of the human species. In *The Sixth Extinction*, Kolbert warns that we are on the brink of a catastrophic event likely to wipe out much of the animal world and our civilization. In *Homo Deus*, Harari envisions a near future where a small segment of humanity, using technology, becomes immortal and, in effect, god-like.

As a dramaturg, I adopted an actor-centered approach, setting a philosophical dialogue in the kitchen of a couple expecting a baby. The action was meant to carry the words, sparked by the desire to reflect on urgent ethical matters. The actors skilfully executed the complex interplay of philosophical arguments and physical gestures, yet the work failed to shift the audience's focus away from the character interaction. Although the performance addressed the planet's sorrows thematically, the action directed the audience's attention toward the characters' conflicting relationship. By the end of the creative process, I was left with the impression that traditional acting methods could not effectively steer empathy toward the non-human.

The narration of the events leading to the creation of the performance *Solitude*, in response to *What Do We Talk About When We Talk About Eating?*, serves as a starting point to reflect on what it takes to adopt and sustain a post-humanist perspective in the making of a theatre performance. More specifically, it explores what one might need to temporarily relinquish, and with what level of commitment, in order to gather insights on post-psychophysicality through practice. In this initial phase, the research aimed to let go of the directors' gaze, the convention that actions in theatre can be pretended and dramatic text and the action that stems from it, loosening the rigid mechanisms that place the human at the center of the creative process and the audience's gaze. As the research progresses, this approach will give way to a different conceptualization, one that challenges the very process of centering itself.

3.1.2 Practical methods

The aim of this first part of my research was to create and analyse settings in which performers would not look for acting solutions but rather connection with the, quiet yet vibrant, invisible

movement of the piece. As a group we decided to structure our workflow according to certain principles and rules to stay out of acting, such as:

- a) No directorial gaze
- b) The proposed materials don't need to be refined and can be improvised on the spot
- c) Everyone can suggest strategies to inhabit the performative space
- d) No speaking
- e) No pretending, invisible objects, characters
- f) The proposed materials can escape meaning, be boring, random.
- g) All propositions are video recorded
- h) The space needs to be full of materials and objects from day one

To guide the research, we followed a preestablished strategy. At the start of rehearsals, we created a schedule that divided the time into two distinct phases. The first phase, from November to December 2019, was dedicated to research—uncompromisingly workshopping tools and materials within the mentioned rules and principles.

The second phase, in January, was when we would reconcile our findings and focus on staging the work, addressing the needs of both the actors and the theatre. My reflections on the work focus only on the first period of the work as in the second, for many different reasons, we had to step back drastically from the initial idea of a silent performance and stage the work based on text.

During the research period we established a very rigid routine that kept the work going without the need for anyone to step out and direct the work progress. The routine started with a strong co-directed physical training in the morning that incorporated elements of dance, psychophysical training and gymnastics. We then sat at a table to read every day for few hours different chapters from a selected bibliography on the topic of solitude.

We then gave ourselves the broad task of setting up improvisations or offering presentations of any material that emerged during the lunch break and felt somehow connected to what we were trying to achieve. In the evening, as the final act of the day, we would improvise a sequence of materials, drawing inspiration from both archived and fresh content, and explore it within a two-hour session.

Once a week, we would watch the recorded material and share our impressions on the direction of the work and the research, often returning to the following questions: Can the idea of a human body in prolonged solitude be experienced, in our laboratory and according to our method of work, as a shifting state of hybridization with the surroundings? Is this shifting state always initiated by human intention? How can we clarify for ourselves what the stages of hybridization are? How can we embody them? What verbs help us understand the interaction with the non-human?

3.1.3 Location and team

The research took place in a large white box in the production centre Süd Pohl, in the periphery of Luzern.

The space was filled with things, and we trained among them. This is important to notice as my previous practice was based on the idea of an “empty space” in which to focus on actors’ interactions. The messiness and abundance of random objects, which in other times I would have deemed counterproductive felt appropriate to our task. It disrupts the feeling we were designing, controlling and creating meaning.

The team was composed of four members. Me. Sammy Van de Heuvel created the setting, and the costumes and performed in the performance. Camilla Parini, as a dancer contributed to the creation of the training and performed. Andre Willmünd, as an actor and musician took part in all the explorations and performed the role of P. in the end. Irina Müller provided her assistance as an in-house dramaturg and attended several parts of the process. The artistic director Sandra Küpper was involved in the development of the concept and in the final moments of the staging. Giovanni Longhin is the person who introduced me to the story of the real P., who asked to be kept anonymous.

The research period lasted six weeks, from November 14 to December 27, 2019.

3.1.4 Transmission

This creative process was affected by the arrival of COVID-19 in Europe. *Solitude* played only six times before the theatre closed for more than a year and was afterwards cancelled. The examination committee did not see the final work in person but only a recording of one of the final run-throughs in December. The video shows a partial account of the set of practices the group put into action to explore the isolating and dehumanising condition of P.

The Laboratory

The rules

- **Every day**, there has to be a physical training, a psychical training, a voice training.
- Every day, there has to be a reading and discussion of a selected material on the topic of Solitude.
- Every day there has to be an Etude session, where each one would organise freely one or more improvisations.
- everyone can take the lead of the laboratory and make new propositions.
- every evening there would be a 1 hour improvisation based on structural rules of different kind.

Photo 3. The protocol of the set of strategies put into place during the creation of *Solitude*.

The findings from this early stage of research were first integrated into *Archiving Melpignano*, the third creative work, during the April session. As will be explained later, during the residency *Archiving Melpignano*, the performers engaged with the concept of archiving in various ways, exploring radical stillness, makeshift archives and abandoned spaces for objects at rest. Throughout the process, P. was frequently referenced as an example of an ideal state of stillness, a key attitude for engaging in dialogue with the slow-paced communities of the village.

Furthermore, in *Archiving Melpignano*, the concept of the group self-regulating through a system of written tasks re-emerged. The writing process was shared, and the set of practices evolved daily, allowing for rich diversification in the search for entry points into the practice.

In 2023, I was invited for the second time to Steirischer Herbst, where I presented a work created in the border city of Narva. The project was developed in the abandoned spaces of Baltijetz, a former Soviet factory. This specific setting allowed me to continue the research initiated with *Solitude*. The figure of an alien, peacefully resting in the uninhabitable spaces of the factory, served as the connecting thread throughout the experience.

This time, the research advanced significantly as we trained in a non-theatrical space, closely resembling the actual extreme conditions in which the real P. lived for ten years. The space offered us a rich sensory exploration, which we were then able to integrate seamlessly into the performance.



Photo 4. A moment of research in the abandoned spaces of Baltijets. (Kremm, 2023)

3.1.5 Key issues

The creative process led to the emergence of several key issues that have been later readdressed in the next creative works. The strategy of “escaping acting and text”, in appearance functional to creating an empty space for the non-human to manifest itself, was hard to pursue. As it was inhibiting my position as director. Finding P. positioning demanded specific affirmative strategies. At that time, I had no idea what those strategies could be. I improvised, trying different things.

However, our work lacked a strong conceptual foundation. As a result, whatever we attempted would eventually gravitate back to known frameworks of acting and be assessed according to familiar parameters. In the absence of a clear alternative intention, as it emerged later through different feedback sessions, we struggled to feel not in control of the action. We did not coexist well on stage and often felt indifferent toward what we were experiencing.

A conclusion can be drawn here: for actors to transition to a post-psychophysical framework, it is not advisable to discard their acting experience. Instead, the transition requires a careful deconstruction of the concepts underlying their practice, followed by the introduction of new ideas that provide intellectual stimulation while also offering a viable experiential path.

The complexities that arose from this initial attempt highlight, for example, the necessity of establishing and training principles of coexistence and care within the practice, while deconstructing conflict and opposition. This underscores the importance of theoretical transdisciplinary research, daily practice as a research method, and the need to clearly define the role of a guide – the body dramaturg – to establish a different experiential path for the actors in training.

Finally, this project led the research toward a theatre without words, while also making me acutely aware of the hostility my intent provoked within a theatre environment rooted in traditional acting. I realized that I needed to take a step back and focus entirely on the performers’ bodies, examining how the ideas underlying my training conditioned my ability to see beyond a human horizon.

I also decided to temporarily set aside the idea of composing new posthuman dramaturgies based on a story. *Solitude* manifested itself because of a story I was told, which I then

transmitted forward to the producer, the performer, and ultimately the audience, through words. I noticed, through this project, how my passion for storytelling and my skills as a storyteller acted against my research interests. I felt that the next step needed to be more cautious and that the research had to come from a place where there was no story to tell, or where the story had no allure, thereby allowing for a stronger deviation in terms of focus.

Moreover, the most valuable mistake made during this first phase of research was underestimating the importance of carefully “casting” the non-human in the production. As we entered the creative project, we knew we could not rely entirely on our bodies and that we needed to recreate the cellar environment to explore the process of hybridization with the non-human. Yet, we were in a theatre, and the production, despite being formidable, could not provide us with what we expected. They had a vast fund of theatrical props, and they were willing to build anything we requested. However, nothing surrounding us provided the powerful sensory stimulation we would have needed from the start, as we were inexperienced in this area. Theatres might not be the most conducive environments for this kind of research. As supportive and open-minded as Luzern was, it was simply not the right laboratory. This is why the next three phases of the research emphasize the importance of place and how the non-human is brought in or researched outside the confines of a rehearsal space.

Moving forward, I decided to explore a much simpler setting where I could train performers in vivid and caring coexistence in space, touch on assemblage theory and new materialism, rethink agency within more comprehensive and clear structures of performance and examine the role of stillness and duration in shaping audience perception.

In the next subchapter, I will introduce the second stage of the research, where, thanks to the artistic collaboration with Ene-Liis Semper and Tiit Ojasoo, I was able to bring the lessons learned from *Solitude* to fruition.

3.2 Creative Work II: 72 Days

Director: Tiit Ojasoo, Ene-Liis Semper. Body dramaturg and pedagogy: Giacomo Veronesi. Performers: Kristiin Räägel, Rea Lest, Keithy Kuuspu, and Liisa Saaremäel. Students performing: Alice Siil, Astra Irene Susi, Emili Rohumaa, Hanna Brigita Jaanovits, Hele-Riin

Palumaa, Kristin Prits, Kristina Preimann, and Lauren Grinberg. Location: Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre. Period: October to December 2021

It's the evening of the premiere. 72 days of rehearsals have passed. The production had gone through all kinds of twists and changes to finally land in the Blackbox at Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre (EMTA). The performers, all females, are mostly students from the second year, in Drama school. This is their first real premiere. And it's not going to be a classic drama, nor a post-dramatic deconstruction of the theatrical situation. They are going to present a complex and semi-improvised composition of physically reenacted pictures across time and space, and they are going to work it out through a mountain of an aleatory combination of clothes, objects, physical shapes and facial emotions.

I think back at the rehearsal process. We spent the first half of it, capturing the essence of presentation as opposed to representation. We engaged in the basics of psychophysical training through pleasure, to learn how to attend to one's body with care and gather energy to shape an impulse to bring gently a physical reenactment to life. The second half, we spent it doing formal, repetitive, very hard work.

They learned hundreds of shapes, with surgical precision, holding pictures in front of a mirror. To do that, they had to learn how to read those images. To find what was worth being embodied in each one of them, they had to be able to visualise the inner world of the portraited subject and the visual impact of the picture, to capture both the general existential moment and the subjective feeling. Then, they had to learn individually how to develop a perfect physical memory of the shapes to be able to reenact them instantly. Finally, they had to work out how to physically get to the image in a way that was both engaging for a viewer and activating. Once this part was done, they had to work with the three of us to explore the material on stage and write the score. Many images never made it to the final cut. Entire sections were revealed to be dead endings. It was touching to see the tenacity with which everyone worked. Everyone in the room wanted that rigorous theatre abstraction to come to life.

And then, in the final weeks, as the actresses began to grasp the form, the stage started to fill with clothes and objects. A new phase of the dramaturgical work began. The students first needed to intellectually distinguish this process from regular theatre and recognize that they were not dealing with costumes and props in the conventional sense. The vibrant mass of colourful clothes and extravagant objects came to occupy space and perform alongside the

living performers. The first item/partner they engaged with were crinolines, not as garments to be worn, but as entities to interact and become something with.

Piles of clothes were then literally thrown on the floor, not to be transformed into characters, but to be attended to. We asked the students to engage with the materiality that suddenly surrounded them. How do you connect with each item and react to it? Every existing sensorimotor schema had to be reconfigured: How do you scan a floor? Where does the pile lead your attention? How do your senses dynamically interact with a texture? How do you engage with shapes, physiology, images, imagination, and materiality in a discursive interchange that leads to a sustained moment within each of Ene-Liis Semper's visual propositions? How do you leave each of those moments behind and dynamically entangle your body and self in the next assemblage?

Back to the evening of the premiere: Tiit Ojasoo and Ene-Liis Semper are managing everything so that the performers can have a quiet moment to reconnect with their psychophysical bodies. We go through a routine and start playing around when, all of a sudden, the bodies come to life and impulses start shooting in every direction. Fortunately, Tiit Ojasoo is present and stops the warmup before it turns into a performance without an audience. As I prepare to leave the room, I feel positive. Somehow, we did it – we brought the performers to an optimal psychophysical state and created a work that reframes acting principles within a much broader context.

In the final weeks, we focused entirely on putting together the piece through a mechanism of mirrors and photographs. We allowed ourselves to engage with objects and fabrics, carving out space for their power to influence the creative process and the performance narrative. The trust we all felt in each other and the things we were surrounded with enabled a constructive negotiation between visual refinement, materiality, and bodily activation. Ultimately, *72 Days* is a balancing act between what a post-dramatic actor can let go of and what a deep re-examination of connection as a non-human defining trait is leading the arts toward.

3.2.1 Starting points



Photo 5. The actresses of *72 Days* immersed in the work with materialities. (Ojasoo 2023)

The starting point for this stage of research was to test Camilleri's thesis of a shared focus between psychophysical training practices and post-psychophysical considerations. In his book, *Performer Training Reconfigured*, Camilleri posits that adopting a more holistic approach will lead to a deeper understanding of the psychophysical process. He outlines a trajectory that imagines new training methods to expand a performer's field of consciousness (Camilleri 2020: xxii). My counterargument to Camilleri's thesis is that new materialism and post-humanism not only provide integrative insights into psychophysical phenomena but also act as creative catalysts that fundamentally challenge conventional methods of conceptualizing and organizing creative processes and training. Practitioners should thus embrace the exploration of alternative strategies to accompany existing training forms.

For this project, I had the privilege of collaborating with two highly accomplished artists who aligned perfectly with the objectives of my research. Tiit Ojasoo is one of Europe's most skilled post-dramatic directors, particularly adept at guiding actors in the creation of deconstructed scenarios that hinge on distinctive states of being and stylized physical patterns. Ene-Liis

Semper not only shares Tiit Ojasoo's expertise in post-dramatic direction but also brings an iconoclastic approach to theatre. Her work often emphasizes a visual perspective, resulting in performances that offer innovative and unconventional ways of experiencing theatre through the poetic language of images. My role within the team was to oversee the training process to structure the impulse work on stage and to accelerate the performers' development, enabling them to effectively contribute to the creative process.

To achieve these objectives, we planned five weeks of psychophysical training. While Ene-Liis Semper began selecting visual materials and items, Tiit Ojasoo and I developed a training routine supplemented by explorations into broader physicality, aimed at providing the performers with a comprehensive understanding of the field in which they were working. This training introduced a specialized terminology, which we continuously refined and expanded in tandem with the rapid skill development demonstrated by the students. Once the students reached an optimal level, capable of collaborating with the more experienced professional performers, we transitioned from the workshop and training phase into the actual creative process, with Ene-Liis Semper and her assistants fully joining our efforts and taking the lead of the creative work.

3.2.2 Practical methods

Since the students had little to no experience with psychophysical training, our initial task was to quickly establish a foundational understanding of the concept. We aimed to convey what psychophysical training entails practically, how it feels physically, and why it is vital to our creative process.

While we had a generous amount of time, it was not sufficient for traditional psychophysical training methods. Although I possessed the skills to teach Qi Gong, I was aware of how subtle the practice is, how long it takes to feel the energy flow within one's body, and how challenging its application to theatre can be. Unfortunately, we didn't have the time required for such an in-depth approach.

Today, there are more accessible methods available, developed by practitioners like Lorna Marshall (Marshall 2021) in the UK and Jüri Nael in Estonia. These alternatives may not

possess the same level of ambition and complexity as martial arts, but they offer solid and versatile entry points to activate the body within the terminology of acting and the immediate context of a rehearsal. These practices operate on the principle that if we first learn to listen to our bodies, our bodies will naturally connect to our intentions, grounding us in presence.

The exercises and experiential journeys proposed by Lorna Marshall and Jüri Nael, while differing somewhat in their approaches, when practised consistently, lead performers to a state of being that integrates body and mind through breath. This integration is achieved by cultivating the pleasure of moving freely within a safe environment. In these practices, the body itself becomes expressive as the performer learns to listen and eventually respond playfully, engaging in a dialogue regulated by continuous breath awareness. The resulting sensation is one where the body seems to move autonomously, with the performer experiencing the action almost as an observer. Such training serves as a gateway to activation, a crucial aspect for students to learn to recognize on their path to becoming professional actors. It also provides a learning space to provoke, acknowledge, and validate – without needing to attach meaning to it – the impact of fully activating the sensory body on the actor's self and states of being, as a human.

Moreover, these exercises help practitioners learn to identify and act upon what is referred to in theatre practice as “impulses”. Recognizing and responding to these impulses is essential for acting and often requires multiple stages of practice before an actor can consciously acknowledge this state while in action. Activation can generally be sought either internally, through the absorption of a character's circumstances or personal psychological motivation, or externally, via physical activation, breath, and specific muscle contractions.

In our context, much like the work on *Solitude*, we operated within a non-psychological framework where performers did not interact directly with each other. Instead, the materiality of clothing and props significantly influenced the development of actions. Therefore, we chose to avoid the traditional internal/external dichotomy and focused on the body's voice and the myriad ways it can respond.

When discussing the concept of the “body voice”, we often referred to Lorna Marshall's description of it as a voice that requires extending “listening across as wide a band as possible, sensing the tiny flickers of half-formed impulses as well as the stronger desires for clear action” (Marshall 2021: 48). In the context of my research, as we reached the final stages of our creative

process and a vast collection of items was brought into the space, the interest in this voice shifted and expanded to encompass multiple and coexisting subtle forms of stimuli that emerge from the body and beyond. These are perceived through various sensations, such as changes in body temperature, visualizations, itching, and the movement of internal fluids and blood. These multiple and juxtaposed flickering forms of communication are linked to the introduction of materiality and raw, non-linguistic interaction, within a broader, less goal-oriented context than in Marshall's work.

At the heart of this research is not the activation of the actor but rather zooming in on the seemingly homogeneous sound and recognizing its polyphonic nature – the chorus of voices of which it is composed, in which the actor's body finds itself entangled and never fully in command.

Through training and the foundational principles of our anti-psychological approach, these lines of communication can capture our attention and become more prominent. Both the training sessions and the performances were structured around the performers' ability and willingness to reconnect daily with the body speaking. This process involves a shift from a centered, self-focused position to one of listening and receptivity.

A significant question concerning these practices is how to handle the fact that we often cannot comprehend what these body voices are communicating, nor can we easily derive meaning from them. Since the primary aim of the training is to induce activation, a common strategy involves listening first and then searching within oneself for the impulse to respond. Intuitively, the body's voice often finds a response in raw physical movement. Guided by pleasure (etymologically from the Latin *clinamen*, meaning inclination), performers gradually awaken to a heightened state of awareness.

As the training progresses and students become more attuned to their body voices, the dialogue with these voices requires greater articulation. To maintain a dialogical approach and work toward a fully integrated psychophysical state, the training is gradually enriched with elements of structured communication: pauses, full stops, responses, and topics of interest. This evolution is crucial, as it adds specificity and detail to the work, eventually providing a transferable vocabulary for building performance structures.

However, one could argue that this structured approach limits the potential of remaining in the ambiguity of an uncoded communication system, where our humanity and its myriad capabilities currently have no predefined place. A frequent reminder given to the students was to remain immersed in the practice, seeking pleasure while understanding that there would be no direct personal reward from doing so. “You will listen”, we advised, “and the body will speak in infinite ways and through countless layers. You will never fully understand what the body is saying, nor will you know if what it says is directed at you or something entirely different. Yet, you will inevitably engage, attempt a response, listen again, and try a new response. At the conclusion of this dialogue, you will take a moment to absorb all the information. At the end of each training session, you will have learned nothing concrete, and that’s perfectly fine.”

As we approached the end of our rehearsal period, the COVID-19 pandemic struck again, leaving half of our team stranded at home during a critical week in the creative process. Fortunately, by that point, we had completed the training, and our three professional actresses remained unaffected by the virus. In response to these circumstances, we devised a method to develop the actual material with the three actresses and established a way to communicate this to the other performers, who, despite being ill, were still eager to participate in the rehearsal process.

By then, COVID-19 had significantly altered everyone's theatre practices. We had all become familiar with using Zoom and transforming our living rooms into rehearsal spaces. Since this project was part of my research on post-psychophysicality, which included exploring interactions between actors and technology, I was keen to incorporate and support various forms of technological interaction during this week.

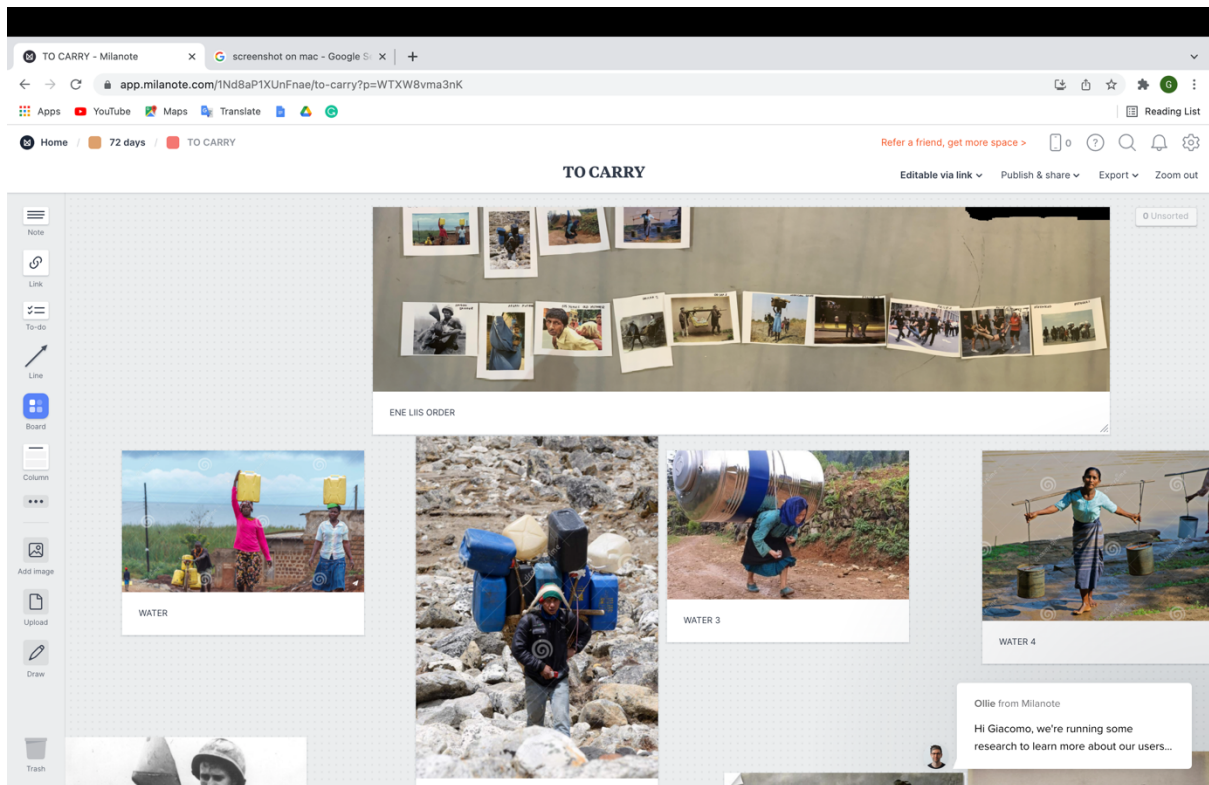


Photo 6. A page of the software the actress used to take part to the work from home. (Veronesi 2021)

The compositional aspect of our work involved using archival photographic images from around the world. The actors learned to embody the figures depicted in these photographs on stage, doing so through largely improvised compositions guided by a strict impulse structure. By utilizing multiple platforms simultaneously – such as Milanote, Obsidian, Zoom, and Google Drive – we expanded our black box theatre into a hybrid, shared space.

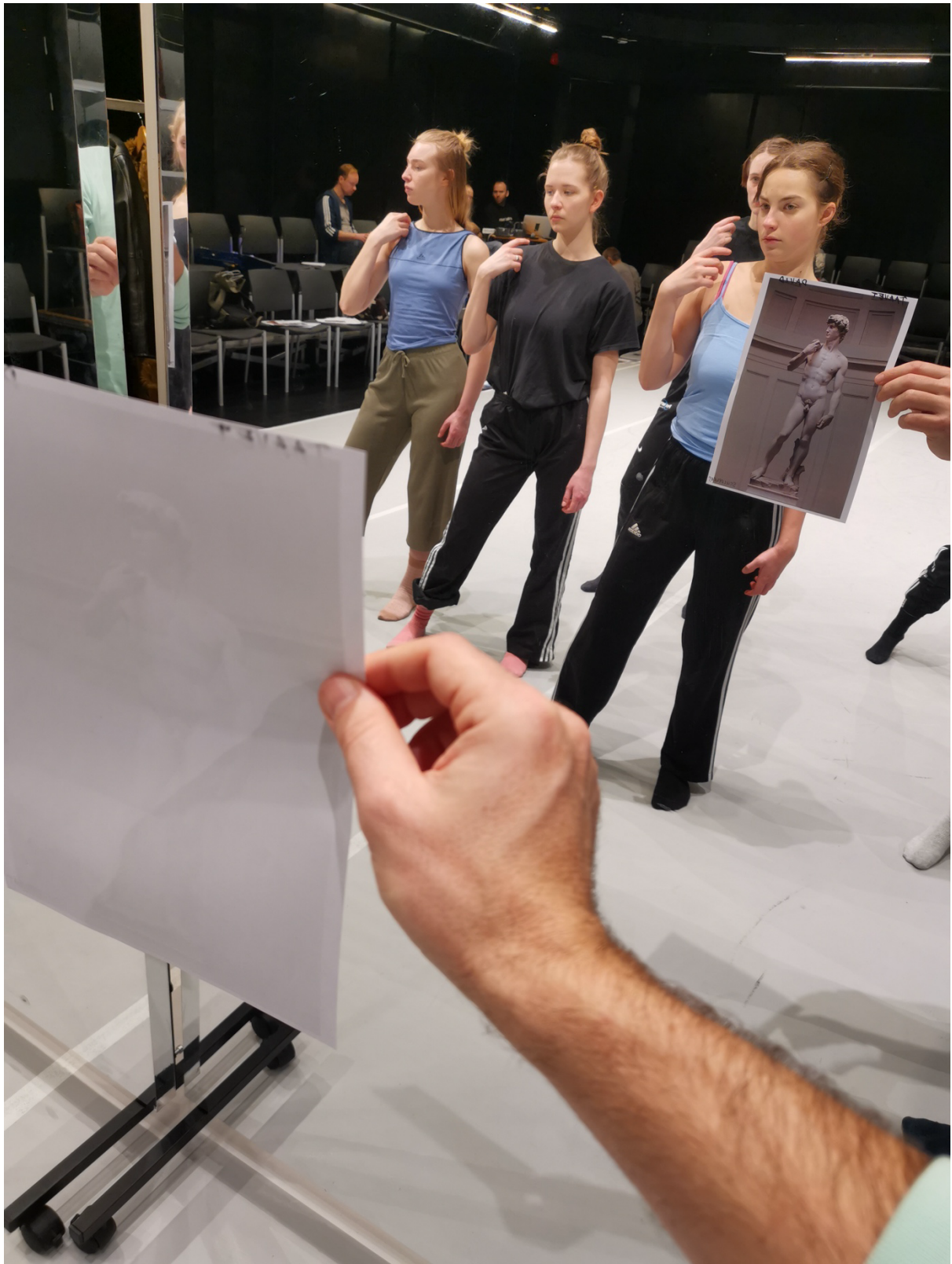


Photo 7. Actresses training shape through the inventive use of a makeshift technology (Veronesi 2021)

The three professional actresses worked in front of mirrors, interpreting the images, speculating about the emotions they might contain, labeling them with markers, holding printed copies, and moving among tape markers and stands. Meanwhile, the students participated virtually, engaging with the same images on a Milanote board, typing their observations on digital post-it notes, searching for additional resources in Google Drive, and trying to capture as much as possible from their Zoom windows. They provided feedback from their living rooms, creating a collaborative environment that bridged physical and virtual spaces.

An intriguing aspect of this research is how the concept of being "in presence" evolved for this group during the week of COVID-19 disruptions. We coexisted in a hybrid environment, which allowed us to engage in this exciting creative phase while acknowledging the constraints imposed by material circumstances, without sidelining the students' potential contributions to the rehearsal. A few years ago, I would not have considered opening a laptop in a black box theatre as a viable alternative to having an actor physically present. However, against the often rigid definitions of participation that theatre sometimes adopts, the ability to recognize and value less visible but essential contributions to the creative process is crucial for a post-psychophysical project.

This recognition extends both to the technology that allows and mediates the communication, decentering the space in which the performance is created – somewhere between the rehearsal room and the Zoom interface – and to the students at home, debilitated and therefore not fully capable of acting, yet perfectly able to contribute exceptionally well to the process through other, previously undisclosed traits of their personalities.

This raises the question: How effectively can what is learned through a technological medium be transferred to a live stage setting? In our case, it was evident that both groups—the professional actresses working with mirrors and printed photographs in the black box, and the students working from home using Zoom and Milanote – were equally capable of improvising with the given material later on. The key to this success lay in the hybridization of the two spaces. The students were not isolated while working with the material; instead, we established a dynamic dialogue. Materials and exercises were developed in the black box, first tested in front of those physically present, and then mediated through technology with those on screen. Subsequently, the feedback and adjustments made by the virtual participants were mediated back through technology into the black box setting.

Two weeks before the premiere, the performers were presented with a vast collection of clothes. These clothes were not chosen randomly; they were carefully selected by Ene-Liis Semper and thoughtfully linked to the images she had chosen. The second half of the performance revolves around bringing these piles of clothes from backstage onto the stage, dumping them on the floor, and spending over an hour organizing them on shelves at the back of the stage.

Curiously, this part of the performance was inspired by an improvisation originally rehearsed six years earlier at the Thalia Theater in Hamburg by the same directors for the production *Die Stunde, da wir nichts voneinander wussten*³ (2015). At that time, I was working as the theatre director's assistant on the production. Although the improvisation, which left everyone with a sense of wonder, did not make it to the final performance, it was based on the act of sorting through the belongings and clothes of someone who had just passed away. The instruction was to connect deeply with each object, allowing space for unexpected emotional responses.

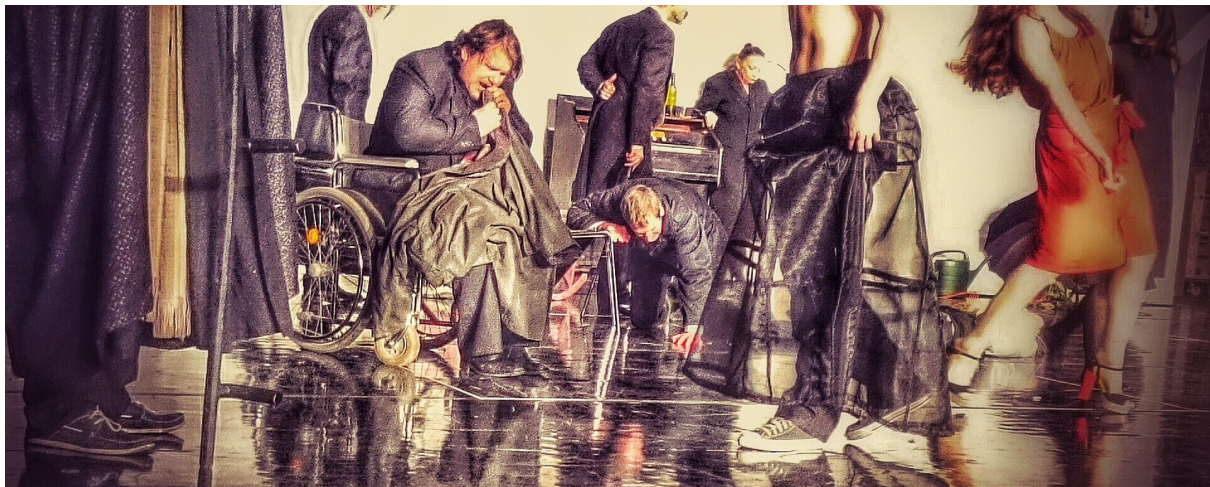


Photo 8. A moment from the original improvisation in Hamburg in 2015. (Veronesi 2015)

In *72 Days*, the theme of grief is not as explicitly explored, yet one could argue that this part of the show is a conceptual offspring of that earlier improvisation. Grief is experienced here through absence. The numerous objects scattered randomly across the floor symbolize the

³ Directed by Tiit Ojasoo and Ene-Liis Semper, text by Peter Handke, Thalia Theater 2015.

sudden loss of meaning that intimate possessions undergo in the wake of death. As life and breath depart from the body, the meaning and value also seem to vanish from the objects.

Those left behind are tasked with attributing new meanings to these items or discarding them, a process that often involves giving them away. This painful procedure is performed physically, by handling each item, rediscovering it through the senses, trying it on, checking its condition, or playing with it. Each object demands the full psychophysical engagement of the individual to establish, within a short time and a durational framework, an intimate connection. This connection hinges on the object's ability to evoke memories of the deceased, as if the objects themselves held a reflection of the departed's essence, character, or soul.



Photo 9. The process of connecting to the different objects constellations in *72 Days*. (Veronesi 2021)

In *72 Days*, the action was reframed in a more kaleidoscopic manner. Performers were asked to explore the sea of objects surrounding them, extending the skills they had developed during their body training. In this case, the objects were not tied to a single individual, family, or

culture; they came from different places around the world and various historical periods, representing diverse social groups. They were to be regarded as remnants from a global junkyard. The challenge was whether these objects would “speak” to the performers and whether the performers could listen and engage in a dialogue with the voices that emerged from this array of layered materialities.

Part of this sequence was carefully choreographed by Semper and Ojasoo, while another part relied on improvisation and the agency of the performers. My role in exploring this part of the performance was to ensure the quality of the physical actions that the performers would later practice through repetition. What is noteworthy for this research is that traditional acting approaches often treat objects merely as stimuli to elicit a psychophysical reaction in the performer, as tools to create playful or tense dramatic moments, or as symbols or signifiers for the audience. In contrast, we encouraged the performers to avoid these conventional approaches and instead view each object as an active participant – a peer on stage contributing to the dynamics of the slow and ritualistic improvisation.

To achieve this, we had to secure the actors’ positioning and adjust their perception. Among the various instructions given to achieve this outcome, we asked the performers to interact with each object with extreme care and to act economically in terms of the quality of each gesture, making space for the object to “speak” to them. Their responses were intended not to dominate but to invite the object to communicate again. The work in this scene never solidified into a fixed routine but rather became a series of carefully juxtaposed journeys. Each journey had its designated moments and images, yet it retained a space for rediscovering the object’s voice and agency during each performance. It is arguable that the variations that emerged through repetition, in this particular durational sequence, depended less on the actors’ creativity and more on the object’s inherent capacity to influence and move the performers’ bodies into dialogue.

3.2.3 Location and team

The performance was developed in Tallinn and initially envisioned as a collaboration with Tallinn City Theatre. However, due to unforeseen circumstances, the theatre was unable to host the project. Consequently, the production was relocated to the Blackbox Estonian Academy of

Music and Theatre, where the majority of rehearsals took place. This new venue, a space well-known to all participants and dedicated to study and research, reinforced the identity of *72 Days* as a creative work within the framework of a PhD project. Given the dimensions of the new space and the constant presence of multiple performers on stage, a traditional proscenium-style seating arrangement was impractical. Instead, we opted for a more intimate setting, accommodating 70 audience members seated in two rows of chairs placed directly in front of the performers. This arrangement allowed sufficient space for performers to move freely and interact with the objects and pieces of cloth on stage.

The performance was subsequently restaged in two additional locations as part of festival engagements: Rakvere (Estonia) and Hamburg (Germany). Each venue brought its unique audience and required specific adjustments. In Rakvere, the performance was adapted for a larger stage, with the audience seated on a specially constructed podium at the edge of the stage, creating a close connection between the performers and the viewers. In Hamburg, the production was restaged in a traditional spacious black box theatre, featuring a podium that accommodated 200 seats.

The team behind *72 Days* consisted of directors Ene-Liis Semper and Tiit Ojasoo. It is significant to note that this project was part of both my and Ojasoo's doctoral work which took over the role of director and producer. I served as the Body Dramaturg, a role that underscored my responsibility not only for introducing students to the specific methods of physical theatre but also for devising strategies to help them comprehend, internalize, and creatively engage with the material. This involvement extended to guiding them in improvisation and preparing them to perform confidently in front of an audience.

The professional performers included Kristiin Räägel (Tallinn City Theatre), Rea Lest (substitute for Kristiin Räägel after she went into maternity leave), Keithy Kuuspu, and Liisa Saaremäel. The student performers from the 31st cohort of the EMTA Drama school were Alice Siil, Astra Irene Susi, Emili Rohumaa, Hanna Brigita Jaanovits, Hele-Riin Palumaa, Kristin Prits, Kristina Preimann, and Lauren Grinberg. Siim Reispass was responsible for the lighting design, while the music was composed by Jakob Juhkam. The production was managed by Ene-Liis Semper and Tiit Ojasoo in collaboration with the Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre.

3.2.4 Transmission

The performance was presented in Tallinn, Rakvere, Tartu and Hamburg, with 24 showings in total. More than 2,000 people experienced the performance in an intimate setting. It was staged over an extended period, allowing for continuous development and refinement. This iterative process involved several adjustments that enhanced the work progressively. Both the examination committee and my supervisor, Luule Epner, had the opportunity to attend the performance multiple times, observing its evolution at different stages.

The training principles and creative procedures have found their way into various subsequent works that explore the concept of enacting stills of bodies captured in heightened moments of life, each taking the idea in different directions. The creative procedure of working with the images was revisited by Ene-Liis Semper, who can be credited as the originator of the idea, in many of her recent works: *Macbeth* (2023) for Estonian Drama Theatre in Tallinn, *Master and Margarita* (2023) for Dailes Theatre in Riga, where she co-directed with Ojasoo. *Untitled* (2023) for City Theatre in Helsinki, and *Now We Can Talk About It* (2024) for Expedition theatre group in Tallinn, where I assisted the productions as body dramaturg.

During the production of *Untitled*, I had the opportunity to reorganize the training principles initially explored in *72 Days* into a more coherent set of practices. This phase of research was crucial in shaping the training approach that will be detailed in the Appendix 1. Additionally, as this work followed *Safe Space for Male Bodies* (2022; my fourth creative work), I was able to incorporate insights gained from exploring assemblage theory into the structural development of the project.

The experience of *72 Days* left me with a desire to complement the work on visual images with a corresponding focus on psychophysical gestures. Working with the concept of assemblages offered me a strategy for implementation. The intention materialized in the sequence on grief performed in *Untitled*, which mirrors the logic of the final sequence in *72 Days*. However, this iteration shifts the connecting principle from clothes and objects to human bodies as objects.

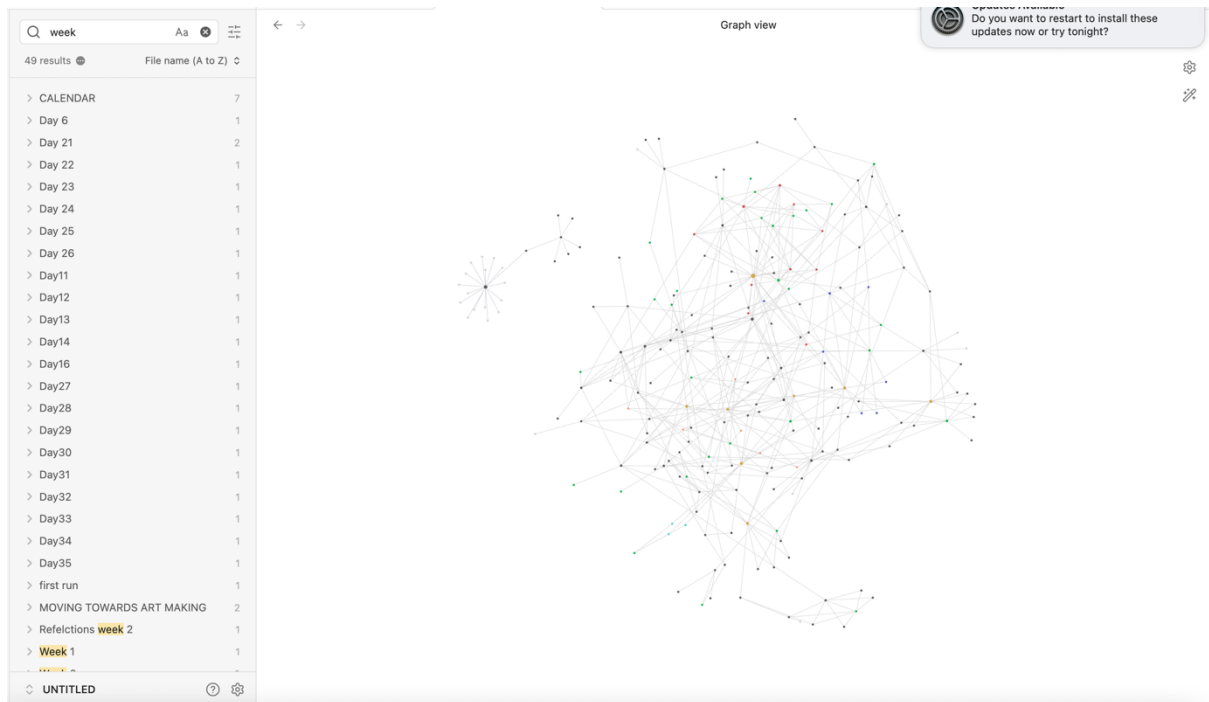


Photo 10. The view of the autoethnographic diary on Obsidian. (Veronesi 2021)

To develop the autoethnographic research, I kept a daily diary using Obsidian. Obsidian's unique writing system facilitates the creation of connections between ideas through its distinctive layout. This diary-keeping method was continued and further developed throughout the subsequent phases of the research, providing a valuable and detailed contribution for analyzing the data. Additionally, we collected photographic documentation of the various rehearsal stages. This material is stored in a folder and can be accessed by downloading Obsidian on a computer.

3.2.5 Key issues and developments

With *Solitude*, I encountered significant challenges in attempting to stage a method of working that transcended conventional acting. Based on interviews with one of the participants (Parini 2024), these difficulties can be attributed to two main factors: the ideological context and the absence of viable alternatives to the principles underlying traditional acting.

On one hand, conducting research within a theatre that primarily produces spoken-word performances for an audience accustomed to dramatic theatre proved to be an unsuitable strategy. At a certain point, the context itself began to work against the research. On the other hand, asking skilled actors not to act, without providing any alternative beyond a series of generic training exercises, turned out to be an offensive and counterproductive approach. The findings of this research suggest that the ideological framework underlying acting should not be discarded but rather re-examined, expanded, and selectively renewed. Working with already trained actors adds complexity to this endeavor.

Three important developments occurred during *72 Days*. First, by a completely fortunate yet providential coincidence, the production took place within an academic institution rather than a traditional production house. This setting supported the research by allowing us to create a performance that was fully aligned with our academic objectives. The significance of this compatibility between space and intent goes beyond the simple alignment of content and context. Through this work, it became evident that the ideological space in which this type of research is conducted forms a crucial part of the research itself. Training a body-world sensibility leads the consciousness beyond the neutral or "empty" rehearsal space, connecting the source of inspiration with the socio-material forces surrounding it. These ideas were later revisited and developed further in both *Archiving Melpignano* and *Safe Space for Male Bodies*.

Second, a collaborator from the visual arts, Ene-Liis Semper, joined the project. Her approach brings a different sensibility compared to that of a traditional set or costume designer. In her work, and in the way she discusses the objects and spatial elements she introduces, it becomes immediately clear that she rejects the notion of a hierarchical structure with actors at the center. Working with Semper means learning to listen and engage with the power of images, materials, and aesthetic details. This collaboration underscored the importance of how objects are presented to achieve an impact. It also led me to consider modes of production and how certain archives of materials and objects are more conducive to this research than others. These concepts were further explored in *Archiving Melpignano*.

Third, another happy coincidence was the involvement of a group of second-year students who, initially expected to play a supporting role, emerged as the primary focus of the work. When we met them at the first of the 72 scheduled rehearsals, they had no prior stage experience and were still in the process of shaping their identities as actors. This was a formative period when the foundational principles of acting were just beginning to take root in their consciousness.

Our role, mine and Ojasoo's, was not only to conduct research and create a performance but also to contribute to the development of these young performers' acting identities. In retrospect, I realize that I was working under extraordinary research conditions. The students needed training not just for the performance itself, but also in the broader sense of developing their acting skills and identity. My research is driven by a desire to create a pedagogical path that aligns with the values of the new generation of actors. The alignment between my intentions, their learning conditions, and their cultural context was serendipitous.

This experience underscored that post-psychophysical training cannot be universally applied at any time or with any type of actor; it requires specific conditions. For example, a year later, I found myself in seemingly similar circumstances in Finland with the *Untitled* production. However, this time the students were not sophomores but seniors, and the production took place in an off-campus theatre. These circumstances brought with them a different set of expectations and pressures. The students viewed the play as a launching pad for their professional careers and naturally sought opportunities to showcase their acting skills. However, in a performance as starkly titled as *Untitled*, that space for traditional showcasing did not exist.

Moreover, the theatre in which they performed primarily offered comedies and entertainment shows. While this space neither directly hindered nor supported the work, it did not connect the source of inspiration with the socio-material context and expand the work beyond the boundaries of traditional acting.

- A Call for an Extended Definition of the word Intimacy in *72 Days*

In theatrical contexts, the term “intimate” is often used dismissively, suggesting that something is too small, ambiguous, or excessively human for the stage. Many actors have, at some point, encountered the critique: “Too intimate!” There is a common concern among directors that intimacy, unless skilfully presented, may become invisible or insignificant to a wider audience.

While “intimate” is often used dismissively in theatrical contexts, the term has recently gained new significance with the emergence of intimacy coordinators. These professionals are responsible for ensuring that portrayals of intimacy are carefully managed and ethically navigated, reflecting a heightened sensitivity to issues of consent and the psychological safety of performers.

In this modern framework, “intimate” carries a profoundly politicized connotation, highlighting an acute awareness of gender dynamics, racial representation, and social inequalities. These concerns, deeply rooted in the human experience, challenge the notion that intimacy can be navigated without considering how power structures affect a performer’s ability to clearly and effectively express or withhold consent when asked to cross a boundary of intimacy.

Thus, rather than rendering intimacy insignificant or invisible, this renewed focus on the politics of intimacy calls for a re-evaluation of its place in theatre. It emphasizes that intimacy is not only suitable for the stage but is also a vital means of engaging with contemporary social discourse, challenging established norms, and fostering a culture of awareness. However, as we integrated these ideas into our working methods, we felt they did not fully capture the range of meanings associated with the term as it was intended in our rehearsals.

Throughout *72 Days*, “intimacy” emerged repeatedly as a term to describe the quality of interactions that performers were required to responsibly establish—both through their bodywork and their connection with objects and clothing.



Photo 11. The beginning sequence of the performance *72 Days*. (Ojasoo 2021)

Each time the audience enters the space, the action in *72 Days* is already visibly underway. For some time, the performers, dressed in intimate clothing, have been moving as a collective body across the dance floor. Arms, heads, shoulders, legs, hands, and feet extend in all directions, guided by a collective intelligence that determines responses and direction with minimal speed.

Throughout the entire performance, the actors rely on a profound sense of mutual trust, revealing vulnerable parts of their bodies and adopting provocative, and at times scandalous, poses that evoke images of nudity, sexual transgression, and political protest. Each moment in this work is imbued with signs of intimacy, necessitating a safe performative space where such intimacy can be openly expressed and explored.

This environment of trust is essential, as it allows the performers to navigate the boundaries between personal exposure and collective experience. It fosters a space where the audience, too, is invited into a shared vulnerability, creating a dialogue that challenges social norms and confronts viewers with the rawness of human connection and expression.

However, to examine the performance solely through the lens of human intimacy limits the broader aim of this research, which is to explore how non-human elements influence the development of performance. Traditionally, intimacy is understood as a deeply human experience, characterized by elements such as desire, trust, objectification, and power. While objects can sometimes mimic aspects of human intimacy – consider, for example, the attachments people form with fetishized objects like cars, shoes, or pets – these connections are typically one-sided and anthropomorphized, projecting human emotions and desires onto inanimate entities.

This research, however, aims to expand this perspective by directing the actors' attention to the often overlooked, subtle dynamics of what Jane Bennett describes as "vibrant matter" (Bennett 2010) – the inherent vitality and agency of non-human entities. This approach inevitably intersects with the concept of intimacy, but it also challenges us to rethink and potentially redefine intimacy in a way that includes the non-human.

Rather than seeing these non-human forms of intimacy as mere imitations of human experiences, the research invites us to consider alternative pathways for expressing intimacy. These new forms could foster a richer and more inclusive understanding of relational dynamics on stage, where both human and non-human elements – actors and actants alike – engage in a

complex interplay. By embracing non-human forms of intimacy, we open up new possibilities for theatrical expression, moving beyond traditional narratives of human connection to explore a fuller spectrum of relationships that recognize the agency and impact of all participating entities.



Photo 12. The actresses becoming one with the shelf, the costumes and objects of *72 Days*. (Ojasoo 2021)

In the final moments of *72 Days*, the performers merge with the shelf, entering its remaining openings and becoming indistinguishable from the objects and pieces of costume presented. In this way, they effectively disappear, becoming one with the structure.

The spaces in which the actresses fit are dark and irregular, requiring slow and careful body adjustments. This action requires training, both to prevent the actresses from injuring themselves while climbing on the furniture and squeezing into the empty spaces between objects and clothing, and to prevent them from accidentally kicking an object and dissipating the suspended atmosphere of the final moments of the performance.

While the objects cannot actually suffer from a kick, and the sequence serves a theatrical image rather than an intimate exchange between the objects and the actresses, the training required to interact with the space and its complex constraints evokes behaviors and movement patterns strongly resembling those enacted by the body when seeking the sensation of intimacy. To explain the resemblance, one can recall the very human experience of going for a felt, sustained, and tender hug. When we truly embrace another body, a process of slow and careful alignment takes place as the bodies seek a feeling of deep communion. This intimate process allows the body to move on its own until the desired sensation is achieved, and we feel united with the other person. It happens without rational guidance and ends with a: “Yes! That’s it!”

In this sequence, of course, the objects do not move, nor can they project desire onto a human body. However, the actors can reflect on how the value they assign to the experience enables them to access the physical resources and skills necessary to complete the sequence. As they slip into the free and dark openings of the shelf, the actresses can decide to train themselves to assert absolute control over their bodies, controlling their limbs and weight shifts until they find themselves in position. This kind of training will lead to a fixed, optimized sequence of movement. Alternatively, they can move without adhering to a strict logic of positioning but instead do so tenderly and gradually, acquiring the perfect form dictated by the surrounding objects by following their body’s ability to find a perfect hug.

The consequences of choosing the second path of training are that the actor can now end the performance with an act that engages her sensibility towards the world, blurring the line that divides her from it. The actresses fuse themselves into the world to participate in an assemblage comprising quiet objects, breath, the tenebrous vibrations of color and matter, smells, and soft creaks.

Observing the performance, one might wonder: is this still the work of an actor? The performers enter the stage, occupy a position, enact an image until the vitality of that image fades, then break from the experience and exit. This forms the core language of the performance. There are no characters, no dialogue, no logical progression of actions—only a repetitive act: the presentation of a singular, heightened state of existence. The performers are trained to achieve this state almost instantly, following a choreographed psychophysical sequence, which exposes to the audience the constructed nature of the sensation being evoked. The process resembles possession, with the performers allowing the “spirit” of the studied image to momentarily inhabit their bodies. Yet, this inhabitation is not guaranteed; it may or may not occur.

It is evident that this practice diverges sharply from traditional acting methods. Similar to *Solitude*, it denies the actor the chance to fully engage in conventional forms of performance, though it does so from a place of reverence for what acting can offer at its best. The actor is left with a repetitive indirect objective: animating images – an act that influences the performance but does not directly define it.

To navigate this specific territory, the performer must be deeply rooted in the craft of acting. This task requires not only an understanding of the technical demands but also a genuine belief in the essence of acting itself. Only an actor, with a profound love for the art form, would undertake the challenge of repeatedly embodying and animating these images, each time striving to capture their fleeting vitality.

Despite its deviations from traditional acting methods, the process of bringing these moments to life – of repeatedly surrendering oneself to the spirit of the image – remains an inherently theatrical endeavour. It calls for the dedication and courage of an actor who understands that true artistry often lies in embracing the unknown and committing fully to the present moment, no matter how unconventional the form.

Ene-Liis Semper, in an interview conducted for this research, reflected on how, in traditional theatre, we often sit for an hour just to witness the slow buildup leading to one or two significant moments. In contrast, her work in *72 Days* sought to eliminate this buildup, focusing solely on the pivotal moments we tend to remember once the performance has ended. Utilizing her photographic archives, she juxtaposes these quintessential moments of life, allowing them as “things” to communicate with each other when stripped of their buildup, creating a new form of dialogue through their isolation. (Semper 2024)

One could still argue that the work is centered on fundamentally human experiences and that there is nothing inherently post-human about the emotions presented. The material predominantly focuses on faces, the most quintessentially human feature. The performers' effort in repeatedly executing precise, tense images and maintaining a low-key energy flow through rigid spatial strategies invites the viewer to engage with the work on multiple levels. Through duration and abstract compositional logic, the performance extends perception beyond the confines of empathetic human-to-human interaction. Most prominently, the actors' disciplined work opens a space for the audience to sense something beyond immediate emotional display, connecting to broader relational and material dynamics. This expansion of

experience is achieved by specifically training connections as external, which can be understood as a sign of a post-psycho-physical approach to acting.

3.3 Creative Work III: *Archiving Melpignano*

Concept and pedagogy: Giacomo Veronesi. Performers: Alice Corni, Alice Torriani, Alicia Aumuller, Birte Schnöink, Flaminia Veronesi, Isabella Macchi, Johanna Luise Witt, Iveta Pole, Keithy Kuuspu, Liisa Saaremäel, Sharon Tal, Fabio Ghidoni, Fabio Zullino, Cedric Eeckhout, Eulalie Roux, Emilie Flamant, Sandro Pivotti, Carlo Zoratti, Hanna Binder, Olivier Van Den Hende, Mona Camille, Lisa Ursula Tschanz, Chiara Verzola, Fabio Ghidoni, Flavia Ripa, Anita Kremm, Martina Georgina Buhagiar. Location: Melpignano (LE), Puglia, Italy. First session: September 1–September 28, 2021. Second session: April 3–April 30, 2022.

Melpignano is a small town in the heart of Salento, the southernmost part of Puglia, Italy. The region is renowned for its olive groves, the rich layering of ancient cultures, and the Taranta – a powerful ritual in which female performers enter a trance while dancing to the beat of a drumming band. Despite being the birthplace of two of Italy’s most influential theatre figures, Carmelo Bene and Paolo Grassi, the region does not boast a thriving theatre scene. In Salento, cultural events are predominantly seasonal and tied to tourism. For most of the year, the villages fall into the slow rhythm typical of Southern Italy, making them ideal for those seeking a place to retire. The near-total stillness of their empty squares during autumn, winter, and spring is deceptive. Beneath the surface, these immobile towns resonate with community life at low frequencies—life that reaches deep into complex patterns of immigration, Christianity, and environmental consciousness. The vibrant life of the South requires time, inner peace, and a willingness to immerse oneself in order to be perceived. I could not imagine a more fitting site to study the influence of non-human actants on the movement of life.

When I was first invited to Melpignano to discuss the possibility of organizing a series of theatre workshops, I became acutely aware of the scarcity of cultural activities available to the local residents. Producing a traditional show would not have sufficed. The producer’s vision was for me to integrate the local community into my work and involve them directly. Yet, for us, it felt natural to take a different route and seek our own integration into the community as

a strategy for achieving a meaningful creative outcome. We were invited to spend time in this beautiful town, to engage with its inhabitants, knock on doors, inhabit public spaces, and eventually respond to what we had received by interacting with the diverse realities we encountered.

We played cards, made fresh pasta, wore wedding dresses, cultivated the land, swam in the sea, danced, and more. The town revealed itself to be a space where new connections were not restricted or controlled but encouraged and deeply valued. Melpignano absorbed us through its porous boundaries, allowing us to fully engage with its materiality. Our responses were intuitive and mimetic, sometimes leading to moments of collective joy or provocative behavior that we later labelled as performance practice.

As a local aptly put it: “Theatre here does not exist. You can do whatever you like wherever you like here and call it theatre, and people will accept it as such. This is both a great opportunity and a responsibility, as you will be leaving traces on a clean slate.”

The key insight gained from this inspirational journey is that post-psychophysical training can be practised within connections with non-actors, where public space serves as a source of inspiration, and responses are generated in alignment with what an existing community spontaneously offer. Individual sets of practices may emerge from acts of listening combined with intuition and care. Formalization may then follow through the practices of documenting, archiving, and writing down complex tasks that can subsequently be replicated.

Above all, cultivating an attitude toward crafting post-psychophysical strategies does not require traditional rehearsal spaces. Instead, it necessitates attentiveness to how an actor feels about being in the world while acting through their skills and intuition. On one hand, the actor must find a way to create a strong and multifaceted feeling of home, allowing them to maintain a presence outside the black box. On the other hand, the actor must learn to notice and take into account the intersectional and rhizomatic nature of certain public spaces, shaping their performative space in connection to preexisting realities.



Photo 13. A performer “making home” through practice in an abandoned house in Melpignano. (Veronesi 2022)

3.3.1 Starting point

At this stage of the research, I aimed to create a space for experimentation where, as researchers, we could prioritize the experience of connecting with the world without worrying about how this attempt might align with conceptions of body and psyche. The research at this point was encouraging us to lean into the world and explore beyond the usual boundaries of theatrical practice, considering what such an expansion could truly encompass.

This phase of research required an environment that allowed the researchers to embrace failure, lose themselves in the process, and focus on exploration. The questions we grappled with included: What do we mean when we say we want actors to connect with the world? What are the core skills an actor needs to develop to connect their practice to the forces of the world they

typically avoid by entering a black box? What are the possible strategies? How does an actor attitude changes while undergoing this process of integration?

This inquiry led to the organization of two residencies: the first in September 2021, and the second in April 2022. During the first residency, we adopted a more cautious approach, keeping one foot in the rehearsal space and the other in the outside world. This initial work, *A Room of One's Own*, serves as a comparative benchmark in my analysis. The second residency, *Archiving Melpignano*, held in April, was similarly structured but grounded in the explicit objective of maintaining a presence outside a theatre space, fully engaging in a practice that was connected to and responsive to the life of the village of Melpignano.

A Room of One's Own starting point

For the first residency project, a group of 15 artists – mainly international actresses with backgrounds in theatre and performance-making – was assembled. After a series of preliminary meetings between the producer and myself, we conceived the idea of reimagining the first act of Chekhov's *The Seagull*, using Konstantin's staging, as depicted in the play, as a springboard for a performative act connected to the region of Puglia. Although the production company assured us that we would find a suitable rehearsal space, upon our arrival, we discovered that the town had no viable venues for theatrical rehearsals, let alone for staging a performance.

Initially, this seemed like a significant setback. The group I had chosen to work with understood that a rehearsal space was essential for us to function together. Perhaps due to our ingrained assumptions, we believed that actors could not do their work without an empty, silent space. However, upon reflection, this absence became an impetus to engage deeply with the local community and explore individual strategies for connecting with the world outside rehearsal spaces. Setting aside our original plan to rehearse *The Seagull* together, we remembered that the town had offered us the use of the Marchesale Palace, located in its heart.



Photo 14. Alicia Aumuller practicing knitting in her own room in the Palazzo Marchesale. (Veronesi 2022)

While the palace lacked a theatre hall, it offered numerous small rooms, with a hard sandstone floor and poor acoustics, seemingly unsuitable for theatrical purposes. Yet, the availability of these spaces, combined with our determination to make the residency successful, led us to shift the project's focus toward a more performative and individually driven exploration. Abandoning *The Seagull*, we chose to use the residency time and resources to explore how the outside world can inspire and generate an actor's creative practice.

As a unifying theme, we chose a few sentences written by Virginia Woolf in *A Room of One's Own*. Each performer was assigned a room in the building and given the freedom to experiment creative strategies between the private space inside and the public life of the village outside. Once our new objective was agreed upon by the group, each performer was tasked with finding their own orientation in the process and committing to achieving at least one performative outcome involving the town community.



Photo 15. Birte Schnöink performing the wedding dress task in front of a men’s club. (Veronesi 2022)

A Room of One’s Own method

As this research aims to discover practical ways to connect the actor's body with the world outside the rehearsal space, it seeks to identify what changes in attitude this shift might require and what transformations it might bring to actor training. Therefore, this phase of the research needed to explore the boundaries between these realms. To position ourselves at the border between traditional actor training and the world beyond, we decided that everyone would begin with the same task: an invitation to leave the rehearsal space and seek activation in connection with nature, the culture and the people of the region. We started our residency from a post-psychophysical task, which we called the “Coin Task”.

Sit in a car with a coin in your hand (maximum 3 people) and present to your peers two daring options. Toss the coin and carry out the outcome. Present a new set of options every

10-15 minutes. The coin must be tossed regularly by everyone throughout the entire day, following a specific order. Return at 21:00 to share the documented experience.

The idea for this task was inspired by *Apparizioni* (2020), a book by the Italian philosopher Andrea Gentile, who theorizes art as a gateway between representation and what remains eternally unknown. Gentile invites readers to embody his theories by playing a game in which they toss a coin every ten minutes throughout the day (Gentile 2020: 15). Over time, he argues, by surrendering to chance rather than will, the subject meshes with the other, a shift occurs in perception and new liminal images begin to emerge.

Our purpose in participating in Gentile's game was to explore activation as a manifestation of a body-world. Once the task began, performers were required to adhere strictly to the ritualized structure of the game and were not allowed to socialize or engage in mundane activities for its extended duration. The demand to remain in constant action required performers to monitor their behavior, continuously engage with high stakes, and maintain an openness that allowed external manifestations to leave a deep impression on the performer's psyche.

At the same time, to fulfil the choices dictated by the coin toss, the actors had to continuously interact with the world around them, engage in an open dialogue with whatever arose, while maintaining their humanity, empathy, and sense of self. Over time, the coin, through its repetitive use and the dramaturgy of chance, took on magical attributes, becoming a formidable tool for assembling ourselves within the subtle and fleeting networks of rural life in which we were immersed.

The task had an immediate positive effect on everyone. It felt like undergoing intense training, leaving participants exhausted yet filled with adrenaline and wonder. Many stated: "It was Magic!". However, unlike typical rehearsals, the actresses also built themselves within a network of social connections with the villages, the landscape, and the objects they encountered. Some had the visions Gentile aimed for and felt ready to start working on them in a room of their own, while others required additional support or time to continue working on tasks.

A Room of One's Own key issues

The coin task allowed us to maintain a connection to our identity as actors while encouraging exploration beyond the psychophysical horizon. As the overall process advanced, we supported each other in integrating various forms of social engagement, from human (local community, institutions, workforces) to non-human (local materials and technology). The overall result of the residency was considered satisfactory by both the local producer and the performers, and feedback from the community of Melpignano was enthusiastic.

The individual creative process itself was described by the performers as both highly frustrating and stimulating. As Birte Schnöink reported in her interview (Schnöink 2023), the frustration stemmed from the struggle to find a meaningful way to inhabit the room. “It was not bad in itself, but being in the town was much more interesting!” she noted. Alice Torriani added, “At times, being confined in separate rooms felt too difficult and like a lost opportunity, as the group and the town were so exciting.” (Torriani 2023)

On one hand, these comments can be linked to some of the challenges this research encountered at its beginning, particularly with *Solitude*. Sometimes, as in the context of *Solitude*, the actresses felt clueless about what they were doing. However, there are also key differences. In *Solitude*, acting was pushed aside, whereas in this project, acting was welcomed as it provided the perfect set of skills for the task.

The feedback indicates that the actors were enthusiastic when working outside the black box but struggled specifically with translating their experiences into the confined space of a small room. Returning to these small rooms, they may have felt the expectation of reverting to a traditional theatre rehearsal process.

It is important to note that this phase of the research focused on encouraging actors to enjoy applying their acting skills outside the rehearsal space while connecting to the world. At this stage, the research did not emphasize what to do with the world experienced outside the rehearsal space or how to translate it into a theatre-based creative endeavour. It is also important to mention that these other questions have only been partially answered in this research, as the answer to these questions are mostly specific and individual.

Nevertheless, this research offers a way, as an example. In fact, a few actresses, during the residency, managed to inhabit the rooms successfully, transforming them into personal archives of images, texts, videos, and objects. The rooms gathered the impressions of the world outside,

felt vibrant and offered an opportunity to start responding from inside within a post-psychophysical framework. It became evident that archiving was the lead to follow.



Photo 16. One of Melpignano's rooms moved to Zurich for a new phase of research. (Veronesi 2023)

A Room of One's Own Transmission

Following the September session, which started successfully despite a series of unexpected last-minute changes, Melpignano emerged as an even more intriguing location for artistic residencies due to what we had discovered. The town offered multiple points of access to the local community. With the performers warmly welcomed by the local authorities, we had permission to perform in public spaces without needing additional authorization.

The feedback of the actors helped me understanding how to structure the second phase. To help the actors finding ways to process the world into their practice, the project required a dedicated team with expertise in different kinds of documentation and technology. Before revisiting the residency planning, I formed a team comprising myself, a sound designer, two video makers, and an artist experienced in community work. Together, we compiled a list of essential equipment for documentation.

Early conversations revealed the need to establish a general archiving system and to integrate technology into the creative process. It became clear that simply handing performers a video camera was insufficient for producing meaningful and generative documentation. Instead, documentation had to become a fundamental part of the creative process. Moreover, our performers needed to learn how to edit their footage and draw inspiration from the act of creating documentation to push their creative process forward. Consequently, we incorporated the following elements into the residency schedule: professional editing tutorials and daily screenings of the work produced.



Photo 17. A typical editing session during the *Archiving Melpignano* residency. (Veronesi 2022)

To fully integrate archiving into the project and engage all participants at this level, we adopted a practical approach: in April 2022, we made archiving the central theme of our collective artistic research. Questions such as “What does archiving mean for a local community?”, “How can archiving become a part of a performer creative process?”, and “How can recording, editing, and reviewing my work make aware of my body connection to the world?” naturally sparked interest in the participants, leading them to embrace archiving as part of their process.

Creating a coordinating team with both artistic and technical skills also altered the hierarchical structure. Unlike in September 2021, I was no longer the sole point of contact for every issue. With this new organizational structure, the final decision rested with the person most knowledgeable in the specific area under discussion. This multidisciplinary approach made the project more dynamic and engaging, significantly reducing the influence of the rehearsal practices perspective, in the analysis of the material.

The core group was responsible for structuring the process, assisting guest artists, and encouraging documentation and archiving. They also focused on establishing and maintaining

communication with various communities, organizing the final event at the Palazzo, and keeping institutional stakeholders informed and engaged. Additionally, they were tasked with backing up and organizing the entire body of documentation into an accessible archive and actively participating in as many tasks as possible.

The preparation work was conducted entirely using Miro and Obsidian. Miro, an accessible software platform, was invaluable for fostering online collaboration, while Obsidian helped structure the conceptual work. Each topic was discussed exclusively among those with the relevant expertise. For instance, our sound designer and video maker managed the budget for purchasing microphones and hard drives, while I developed the bibliography and, together with our community expert, established the parameters for the tasking system. All discussions and decisions were documented on the Miro boards for everyone to access.

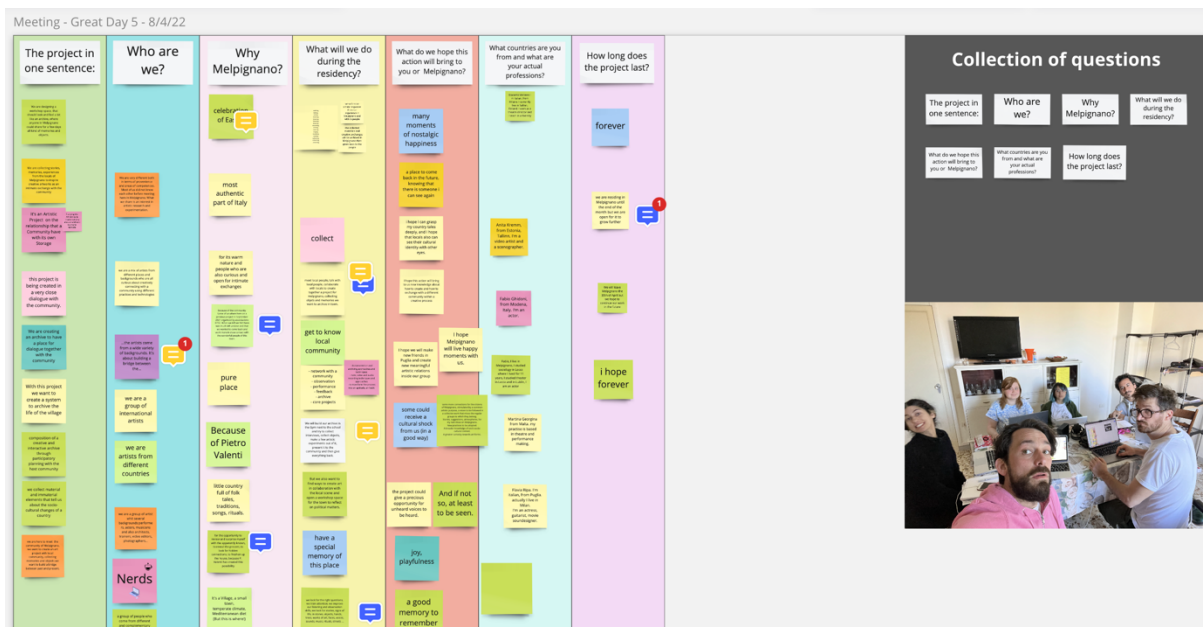


Photo 18. A session of the core team on Miro while preparing the 2nd residency in Melpignano. (Veronesi 2022)

The boards were titled: Community, Ritual, Archiving, and Participation. Each category, on the one hand, reflected an important aspect of how the ecosystem in which we were immersed functioned. On the other hand, they also reflected the way we wanted to work with each other and the ethical parameters of our research. For example, we saw ritual not only as one of the mechanisms through which the town kept the community together, but also as an essential aspect of our own approach. When we began our research, the Easter rituals were taking place,

featuring impressive light installations, altars, and processions. Yet, on a day-to-day level, the community displayed an equally impressive number of rituals that gathered smaller subcommunities in the town's hot spots: the main square and the bar. We felt these were indeed rituals, not simple habits, as they possessed specific traits: they were rigid, redundant, and often repetitive.

In order to integrate into the community, we felt we needed to approach these daily leisure activities with the care and appreciation for complexity that one usually reserves for rituals. At the same time, we invited an incredible group of experienced artists with whom we sought to foster collaboration. Our goal was to create a working environment where everyone could pursue their own ideas while also offering assistance whenever needed. To bind the group together, we introduced a series of rituals, such as ecstatic dance on the rooftop or venturing into nature blindfolded.

Resident artists received access links to view the boards and were given mini-tasks to encourage interaction with the platform and exploration of the proposed materials a few weeks before arriving in Melpignano. For those of us on the core team, this approach provided great clarity of purpose even before meeting in person. It also offered less obvious advantages; for example, Miro allowed us to collaborate despite our differing schedules. During the residency, even when physically present together, we often used the virtual platform to brainstorm or reorganize the upcoming week's work. However, we were unable to engage the other participants in project details before their arrival as we had hoped, primarily because the completed boards presented a finished product rather than an invitation to collaborate. Nevertheless, after the project concluded, many performers found it useful to revisit the Miro boards, reflecting on the experience in light of their shared work.

This new phase of research was based on the idea of continually challenging ourselves with new, complex tasks. The inspiration to work with such tasks came from two sources. First, the successful outcome of the coin task during the initial residency. Engaging with this task had empowered the actors and made them aware of the creative possibilities of working outside a rehearsal space. However, during the first residency, we also positively experienced the reverse. At a certain point in the research, as the performers began to interact with local communities through performative actions in public spaces, we implemented feedback sessions. Most of these actions emerged intuitively. During these feedback sessions, it became natural to try to translate these actions into written tasks so they could be shared with everyone.

The experience of writing down the tasks, as a next step after every intuitive attempt, was a turning point: it was generative and made subjective propositions accessible for training, sharing, and collective reflection.

Building on this experience, the core group and I delved deeper into the concept of tasks, particularly complex tasks, as they could be intended in education. To share the general concept with the group we often went back to the metaphor of an elementary school homework setting. In such pedagogical settings, complex tasks are specific kinds of tasks that cannot be completed without the student engaging in a learning process and at the same time helping each other (Hess 2023: 35). The quality of the student's performance in completing a complex task is directly related to the skills acquired during its execution. I found this aspect crucial to our collective process, as we needed to encourage theatre makers to learn how to edit their own documentation. The process had to prioritize learning over the final outcome.

Complex tasks also push children to establish a first connection with the external world. They are designed to engage with reality and gather practical knowledge necessary for functioning in specific environments. Consequently, these tasks often require students to move beyond the safe boundaries of the classroom and interact with the outside world of the adults.

Reflecting on the September residency, I realized that much of the best work emerged from our interactions with the local community. However, the quality of care invested in these interactions was often left to the actors' individual agendas and empathy. More than once, the absence of follow-up or a clear contextualization of our actions had caused tensions. What needed further adjustment, in April, for us to maintain an open relationship with the community, was our attitude. We felt that the drive inherent in complex tasks could guide the group away from the escapism typical of theatre-making and foster at the same time a sense of care and responsibility for the human connections initiated outside our artistic circle.

3.3.2 Practical methods

The experiment with the Coin Task in September had been successful: a single task had led to very different outcomes for each participant. This time, however, we sought to use the opportunity to study a generative strategy. Together with the core team, we began considering

the possibility of embedding a system of complex tasks into everyone's practice—tasks that would combine experimentation, personal research, learning, and community engagement. Working collectively and following a system of tasks provided structure to the days, greatly increasing the productivity of the artists in residence.

We wanted the task-writing process to be open-source. During the first week, the core group guided the work, assigning everyone a written artistic task each morning. These tasks were printed on attractive paper cards and had to be completed, documented, and presented by night. This well-structured start gave everyone a clear sense of our goals. After the first week, we invited all residency participants to join the task-writing table. Every morning at 7 o'clock, we would gather to write and discuss the day's tasks, which had to be printed by 9 o'clock. The aim was to generate a couple of new tasks daily and allow anyone with an impulse to work individually to translate that impulse into a written and executable task within the same day, to be shared with the group.

The tasks generally followed two trajectories: either towards engaging with the local community or towards self-reflection. In retrospect, this approach significantly influenced the quality of the work produced, both because of the emphasis on daily documentation and the 24-hour limit to complete each task. While the quality of individual work may have varied, the time was spent productively, with a focus on doing, learning, and experimenting.

The April group differed from the September group in that it included participants from disciplines outside of theatre. Aware of the biases in the previous group, I believed that creating a multidisciplinary team would automatically bring balance. We soon realized that for the tasks to be executable by everyone, they needed to be written in a way that could accommodate a wide range of interpretations. The tasks had to encourage collaboration and learning while allowing for diverse modes of execution. This initial challenge renewed our interest in language and surprised us with the outcomes of tasks initially conceived for theatre. Once the tasks were distributed, everyone knew, unlike in September, more or less what to do or whom to ask for help.

To establish a clear connection with psychophysical training, one can conclude that, despite what occurred in April not resembling a practice traditionally directed toward the body as one might expect training to appear, it met the psychophysical objective: to cultivate awareness

while acting. In Puglia, we discovered care, as a form of trainable heightened attentiveness, to be a potential bridge between the body and the world.

3.3.3 Location, timeline and participants

The two residencies involved a group of 18 professional performers from various artistic disciplines, including video art, theatre, performance, cinema, dance, architecture, and sound design. The group comprised participants from Puglia, other Italian regions, and countries such as Malta, Estonia, the UK, France, Belgium, Seychelles, Switzerland, Austria, the USA, and Germany.

Participants in the September 2021 session:

Alice Corni, Alice Torriani, Alicia Aumuller, Birte Schnöink, Flaminia Veronesi, Isabella Macchi, Johanna Luise Witt, Iveta Pole, Keithy Kuuspu, Liisa Saaremäel, Sharon Tal, Fabio Ghidoni, and Giacomo Veronesi.

Participants in the April 2022 session:

Fabio Zullino, Cedric Eeckhout, Eulalie Roux, Emilie Flamant, Sandro Pivotti, Carlo Zoratti, Birte Schnöink, Hanna Binder, Olivier Van Den Hende, Mona Camille, Liisa Saaremäel, Lisa Ursula Tschanz, Chiara Verzola, Fabio Ghidoni, Flavia Ripa, Anita Kremm, Martina Georgina Buhagiar, and Giacomo Veronesi.

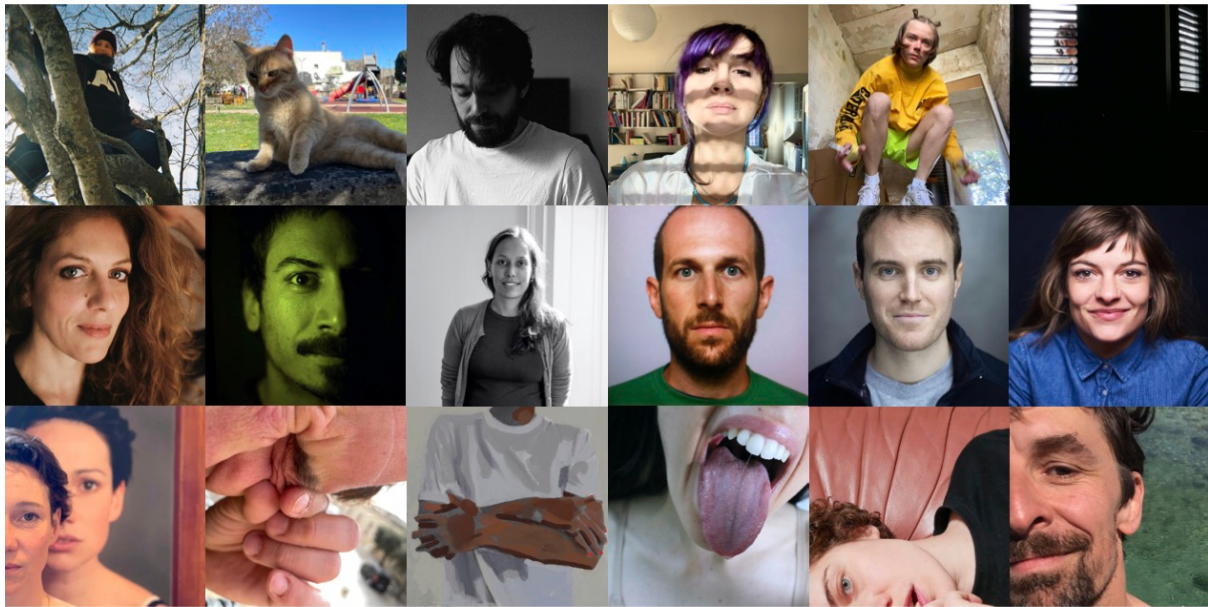


Photo 19. The performers from the second residency. (Kremm 2022)

Location:

Melpignano (LE), Puglia, Italy. The artists were hosted in local apartments and worked in the Palazzo Marchesale, the gym of the former elementary school, as well as in the streets and squares of the town.

Timeline:

First session: September 1–September 28, 2021. In the session, all participants arrived and departed simultaneously.

Second session: April 3–April 30, 2022. In the second session, the work was structured differently to improve organization and to explore variations in the creative process. In April, a core group (comprising Fabio Ghidoni, Flavia Ripa, Anita Kremm, Martina Georgina Buhagiar, and myself) arrived in Melpignano on April 3 and stayed until the end. The second group (consisting of 13 guest artists) joined a week later and left on April 28.

3.3.4 Transmission

The outcome of the research process was presented to the public on April 26, 2022, at the Marchesale Palace in Melpignano. The event took the form of a participatory and itinerant conference, spread across five rooms on the palace's noble floor.

The workshop produced a series of outputs, including links to video documentation of the overall project (a 10-minute documentary), individual works (Showcase), access for viewers to the group's technological platforms (Miro), and written documents (Task List).

The workshop had an impact on both the town of Melpignano and the lives of the participants. Locals gathered around our performative actions, mingled, and mixed in new groups. In the following year, several artists who participated in the residency were invited back for another residency in Melpignano. Additionally, many artists developed an interest in integrating technology into their own practices, which led to the creation of a shared database of materials.

In education, I introduced the practice of working with written complex tasks in the context of a master's course in Contemporary Physical Performance Making (CPPM) at the Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre. Throughout the two years of study, the cohort presented several public events under the title "Exprompt Nights". The aim of these evenings was to attempt something never tried before on stage, with minimal preparation. Instead of rehearsal time, the students were given task-based tools to explore and expand their knowledge beyond their prior experiences and organize their findings into an impromptu performative act, similar to what was tested in Melpignano. An example of one of these tasks would be as follows:

Take a moment to formulate a question that you don't yet have an answer to, but that feels significant to you as a person and resonates with your artistic practice. Write this question down on paper. Keep refining it until you feel satisfied. Once finalized, give the written question to the *ExPrompt* coordinator and leave the premises.

Spend the next three hours wandering around Tallinn and:

- a) Engage with at least one stranger; see if they can help you reflect on your question.
- b) Find an abandoned object and bring it back with you.
- c) Create a physical performance score inspired by your question and the interactions or spaces the city allows or evokes.

Return by 19:00 and prepare to present a 10-minute performance as a response to your question, incorporating the findings and objects from your exploration.

3.3.5 Key issues

During both sessions, some challenges were encountered with the local community. Simply put, the actors engaged in real-life situations and took over a space without always considering the consequences. On one hand, this is what an actor is trained to do. On the other hand, it is the opposite of what this research aims to achieve. The objective here is to promote a change in sensibility that more deeply considers the impact of "non-actors" on the action, rather than the other way around.

This evidence suggested some potential limitations within the education provided by theatre schools and the broader theatre profession. Even very experienced performers with a primarily theatrical background sometimes seemed to lack the sensitivity to invest time and energy in understanding the environments they felt drawn to before acting upon them. They rarely considered it relevant to assess the impact of their theatrical actions in real-world settings, as if the conventions of theatre might somehow mitigate the consequences of their actions.

The contrasts with the local community highlighted a need for clearer parameters when involving non-professional actors in public actions and underscored the importance of learning how to navigate the differences between performing in a proscenium setting and a shared public space. Additionally, when removed from the psychophysical system of references and the conventions of a rehearsal room, many of the theatre actors will temporarily lose their ability to produce creative work. This difficulty in approaching a broader framework highlights both the value of psychophysical training in grounding a practice within a clear set of actions and its potential to overshadow alternative creative strategies.

These findings connect with the insights gained from *Solitude* and *72 Days*. As the process of understanding a post-psychophysical framework developed, *Solitude* pointed this research back toward the need to maintain a positive and warm perspective on the nature of acting. *72 Days* demonstrated the necessity of extending the reach of theatre vocabulary beyond what directly concerns the actor, while *Archiving Melpignano* highlighted the potential side effects

of training exclusively in a theatrical setting on the actor's ability to adapt to new circumstances and empathically acknowledge the complexity of multilayered spaces and take responsibility for the impact of their actions.

Moreover, in September, while some performers expressed discomfort with the isolation and the lack of constant oversight by a director or adherence to workshop rules, they also avoided the camera, resisted analyzing their work through documentation, and generally felt unmotivated to integrate recent technology into their creative processes.

Returning to Melpignano for the April workshop brought several key developments. Participants were tutored by professionals so to rediscover a more positive relationship with technology. The task system trained creative stamina, often leading to successful outcomes. Many participants mentioned in interviews that they realized in Melpignano that, despite the absence of a common space where to work with each other's physically, by integrating technology and tasks into their practice, they could achieve things they had not thought possible before. In April, thanks to the collective writing table, the relationship with the local community deepened, and communication became clearer.

We might not have gained a greater understanding of participation or significant insights into human–non-human relations. Yet the research suggests that before reaching that point, theatre education must first advance in fostering an attitude that, while recognizing the advantages of working in close quarters, does not entirely isolate performers from the socio-material circumstances that shape and enable the functioning of a concentrated space.

The archived material from the residency shows that this type of residency does not produce finished works but rather work hypotheses, raw exposure to the material world, and potential studies. The primary function of the task-archive mechanism is to move the research one step forward by bringing the material world back into the rehearsal space in a way that allows for further response. It is likely that the most interesting outcomes of these residencies will emerge in the coming years, in forms that might not require acting. Thus, despite its multidisciplinary approach, this creative process remains grounded in a solid post-psychophysical foundation for developing new strategies.

3.4 Creative Work IV: A Safe Space for Male Bodies

Concept and pedagogy: Giacomo Veronesi. Performers: Philipp Finsterer, Christoph Griesser, Selman Kličić, Gordan Kukić, Kenneth Constance Loe, Johannes Mayrhofer, Peter Roll, Marwin Strutz. Set: Sammy Van den Heuvel. Media: Anita Kremm. Period: August to September 2022. Location: BRUSEUM Gallery in the Johannes Viertel Museum in Graz.

On the morning of February 25, 2022, I was scheduled to give a lecture on contemporary theatre to a group of second-year students from a bachelor course at the Estonian Academy of Arts in Tallinn. A few days earlier, we had concluded our previous session with an assignment: to capture a testimony, in any form of expression, of freedom as a feeling. To give the task a post-psychophysical dimension, I encouraged the students not to confine themselves to a rehearsal room or studio, but to carry out the task while walking around the city or following the natural flow of their day, as if the task and school were secondary to their daily lives.

However, when we woke up on February 25, our lives had taken a new and unsettling turn. Russia had launched its invasion the day before, coinciding with Estonia's Independence Day celebrations. I remember how difficult it was, in those initial moments, to comprehend what was happening. It was challenging to discuss the situation without evoking painful memories or causing alarm. Many people's immediate reaction was to prepare a backpack, just in case. When I arrived at class on the morning of the 25th, I felt an ignoble desire to shut out the world and focus solely on the people around me and the familiar, reassuring problems of a typical day in education. Perhaps nothing reveals the human reflex to look away more starkly than the horror of war. I felt deeply inadequate as I began the class, pretending that nothing had happened, trying to maintain the simple joy and expected urgency of presenting the results of a creative assignment.

The first presentations were intimate and personal reflections, touching on family dynamics, questions of identity, or observations of random public events with a particular aesthetic quality. Then it was C.'s turn. The student stood up and presented two works similar in nature and content to the others. After a moment's hesitation, C. asked to share a third work, one she was unsure about but felt compelled to present. It was a strange photo—a close-up of a face, with the background showing a shop sign and a clock. The photo was blurry and out of focus, lacking clear compositional elements and a discernible subject.

When I asked what had prompted her to share this photo and how it made her feel free, C. explained that the photo captured part of her boyfriend's face at the train station. She had taken it just minutes before entering the classroom. She had accompanied him to the platform where the train would take him to the barracks. He had been in military service for a few months, but given the recent developments, he would no longer be able to return to Tallinn as regularly as before. They both cried at that moment. The idea to take the photo came to her almost unconsciously, she said. She pointed the camera at him, feeling her stomach twist with confusion and displacement, which is why the photo did not turn out well. When C.'s testimony ended, the room fell into a long, heavy silence. The atmosphere grew tense and cold. Up until that point, it had been easy to find words to comment on the students' work. But after C. finished her presentation, it felt impossible to continue with any further commentary. The raw emotion and the reality of the situation had shifted the room's dynamic, leaving us all grappling with the weight of the moment and the stark contrast between our creative exercise and the harsh realities unfolding around us.

That morning, the reality of bodies and how they are inextricably linked to the world took center stage. In that classroom, there were five women's bodies and my own, tied to an Italian passport, immune to the circumstances of forced conscription. The space we occupied was transformed. I no longer felt protected from the world's loud distractions, in a space dedicated to the pursuit of learning and free artistic expression. The space I had tried to make real—post-psychophysical, permeable to the material conditions of the students, and open to contact with the world—became increasingly unsettling. We had encountered the limits of the educational context in which we were working. With our eyes downcast, we remained together until the hour was up, and then we parted ways.

Later, I often returned to this episode, trying to understand if and how I could have handled the situation differently. I have found myself in similar circumstances where traumatic events and their memories have disrupted the flow of a class. Over time, I have learned that it is generally safer to give everyone a platform to express their feelings about a particular topic before proceeding. Institutions are slowly recognizing that learning cannot be a priority unless it continuously questions how knowledge is created. However, this type of engagement can be challenging for educators; it can create anxiety and sometimes make teaching feel impossible. Providing a platform for discussion can lead to heated debate or deep, uncomfortable silence.

Yet, it often results in the opposite—an emotional release followed by a wave of confidence and a renewed desire to engage with the practice.

Since I began studying this topic, much has changed in education. Only a few years ago, my work might have been considered progressive. Nowadays, however, the shift in sensibility that needs to occur in theatre education and art schools is largely being driven by students, and it has taken on a more radical stance. I have also personally experienced how attempts to “protect” a daily schedule or insulate the creative process in the name of artistic autonomy are increasingly counterproductive and can have unintended consequences for both teachers and institutions.

Students around the world are clearly advocating for changes to outdated institutional practices. They expect their educators to implement proactive anti-racist protocols and to be genuinely committed to the decolonization of the institutions they belong to, despite the challenges this may entail.



Photo 20. The soldiers taking care of each other before the beginning of the performance. (Wildberger 2022)

In July 2022, I was commissioned by the Steirischer Herbst performing arts festival to conceptualize a site-specific performance for the Johannes Viertel Museum in Graz. After some deliberation, I developed a concept that aligned with both the site's specificity and my interest in post-psychophysical training, which led to the creation of *A Safe Space for Male Bodies*. The work was somehow inspired by the events of that class. I realized that the art world I was operating in, by pushing back against patriarchy, had rendered the male body invisible. Nobody was looking at the male body around me, not even to witness and expose its displacement to the front. The performance was introduced at the festival with the following description:

As distant as the Russian invasion of Ukraine may seem, the possibility of Europe becoming a theater of war has recently become more real than we ever feared—and with it, the prospect of being called up. With his new work, theater director and performing artist Giacomo Veronesi focuses on those who would be mobilized in wartime, namely young males fit for military service.

In his performance for the spaces of Neue Galerie Graz's BRUSEUM, Veronesi collaborates with a group of men who have been trained in the Austrian military service, the Bundesheer, drawing upon his background in experimental theater and acting techniques. Creating a "safe space" in precarious times, he invites the audience to take a closer look at the shifting perception of the male, potentially militarized body in the context of an approaching war.

The performance challenges the images of heroism and masculinity associated with the military and explores the incomprehensible contradictions of young male bodies that might be trained, armed, and finally destroyed in the name of peace.

Together with the Steirischer Herbst festival team, we decided to launch the project with an open call for male non-professional performers who had undergone life-defining experiences in the Austrian Army. The motivation for specifically bringing young male soldiers into a white box came from two fundamental interconnected ideas: the white box is a timeless space, intended for both protection and exposure, and the male body was undergoing a violent, forced conscription before our eyes.

And so, we began a process that led us to present an audience with a group of non-professional performers who carried a strong physical memory of their military training. In the performance, they moved their bodies, remembering and shaking off the remnants of their previous training in an active process of playful re-examination and deconstruction. In the process they brought

to light the beautiful and often unexplored aspects of a period of homosocial camaraderie, engaging in intimate exposure within the protective walls and ideological framework of a white box.



Photo 21. The soldiers and audience members hugging in the entrance of the gallery. (Wildberger 2022)

In obvious ways, this work aimed to draw the audience's attention to how the perceived distance from a war conflict can vary and be controlled. The performance, quite symbolically, begins with the soldiers breaking the fourth wall to offer the audience members a series of prolonged hugs. It also seeks to question the role of art institutions in times of conflict, which, both in the past and present, have often maintained a neutral profile, as their role as preservers of art has distanced them from contemporary events. It does this by emptying the museum of its original protected and exposed content – the art – and replacing it with the soldiers' bodies, their everyday tools, training sequences, and intimate habits. Additionally, it extends the ideological framework of the white box into an assemblage of heterogeneous rooms, functions, mediums, rules of engagement, and participation, questioning the hierarchical nature of the underlying power structure and its self-preserving mechanisms.

Instead of being instructed on what behavior to assume or guided in the exploration, the audience is invited to make individual and group choices, shift strategies of engagement, and generate new, unintended forms of interaction, thereby becoming part of the assemblage. What holds the assemblage together is the force of will to evoke fragments, the curiosity to interact, the willingness to constantly adapt to diverse environments, and the desire to tap into contradictory aspects of the self – being intimate, playful, and never attempting to dominate the narrative. The evening is collectively and erratically carried by intuitions, negotiations, and, at times, whims. As a multiplicity of dynamic feelings spreads throughout the room, one is reminded of a wind carrying things along, the breath of things themselves, and an underlying kaleidoscopic mantra: “We better...”



Photo 22. Two soldiers idling in the white box while the audience observes. (Wildberger 2022)

Furthermore, it responds to theatre and this research by reflecting on what strategies can be conjured in the creative process and training to genuinely connect us to the world and create

space for the world in our creative endeavors. It tests this possibility by focusing on assemblages as a way of perceiving reality, gathering inspiration, challenging the supposed limitations of the medium, operating through chance and fragmentation, and allowing the work to constantly evolve, carried by the forces that assembled it in the first place.

3.4.1 Starting points

In *A Safe Space for Male Bodies*, the creative process was conceived and organized starting from the evidence gathered from the previous stages of research: exploring care as a primary and generative means of connection with oneself, other performers, and the world; allowing uncoded forms of intimacy to lead the creative process; bringing into the work an existing training, with both an affectionate look and the intention to carefully deconstruct and expand its framework; acknowledging the ideological framework of the inhabited space and questioning its isolating power; and finally, offering a chance for a change in sensibility in how performers look at their profession and its political indirect impact on their humanity.

But it also addresses questions left unanswered with *Archiving Melpignano*. What is crucial to this phase of research is to establish under what circumstances the world beyond a regular psychophysical theatre practice, aimed at making the action experienceable for the performers, can enter the frame of the creative process, through what means, and to what effect.

This approach reintroduces the concept of assemblage, a practice not unfamiliar to the art world (Kelly 2008: 24), having been explored by visual artists like Robert Rauschenberg, John Chamberlain, and Niki de Saint Phalle in the 1950s and 1960s. Rauschenberg, for example, would often wander the streets of downtown Manhattan, collecting intriguing objects and using “whatever the day would provide” as inspiration for his creations. These three, along with other artists worldwide, aimed to create art that was deeply connected to everyday life in its themes, materials, and methods.

These artists, fascinated by the ordinary, combined found objects with traditional art materials to create "assemblages" (see Photo 23). By looking beyond conventional mediums like oil paint and bronze, and beyond traditional formats like easel paintings and sculptures, they established new conditions for art-making, where every element of daily life was considered a potential

component. Similarly, this stage of research looks beyond conventional acting training and creative processes, elevating the everyday aspects of a group of soldiers' lives—their personal objects, uniforms, boots, habits, jokes, training routines, and guilty pleasures—as valid material for assembling the experience. By incorporating these every day elements, this research aims to outline a direction for a more conscious and inclusive way of making theatre, one that takes advantage of training, creative processes, and performances to expand participants' awareness of how the environments and ecosystems in which they operate truly function.



Photo 23. John Chamberlain, Essex 1960. Automobile parts and other metal. An example for Assemblages in Art. (Veronesi 2024)

In visual art, the appearance of an assemblage is often characterized by three-dimensional elements extending out of the frame, composed of everyday objects brought together in unexpected ways. In the case of performance, instead of materials extending out of a physical frame, we must consider the dimensions of time and space and explore what and how something might extend beyond the boundaries of a storyline or a dramatic action. The challenge here is to determine how a performance assemblage might manifest, what creative strategies it could employ, and how it relates to psychophysicality. To put it briefly: it involves embracing change, fostering participation, incorporating fragmentation, allowing everyday materials to emerge in time and space in a dynamic, evolving, and fragmented space.

3.4.2 Practical methods

The tool used in this process to collect and assemble the everyday aspects of the male soldiers' lives into the creative project is a text frame. A text frame is used in creative processes to provoke an unreflected state of creativity in an actor. During a text frame exercise, the performer is repeatedly prompted to begin the same sentence (e.g., "I love...") over and over, each time completing it with a new, unreflected ending and allowing the outcome to affect them. At times, the text frame may require a corresponding embodiment. For example, with the group text frame "We will...", if one performer shouts "Jump!" then, according to the exercise's logic, everyone should start jumping. If another performer then restarts the text frame with "Walk in slow motion," the new verbal action should immediately change the group's physical dynamic.

Text frames are important in education as they teach actors how to explore their subjective instinctual creativity, recognize the performative power of language, and navigate stakes within a composition of fragmented psychophysical actions that never reach full execution. This tool can lead to improvisation or the creation of a cohesive text. In a traditional acting context, considering the expectations of a theatre audience, the frame would be progressively led toward a pleasing rhythm, variation in topics, and irony. For this research, the tool has been used somewhat differently, becoming the backbone of the entire process, both from a performer/maker perspective and as a tool of participation for the audience members.

Soldiers possess their own language, terms, and tempo, both in formal and informal communication. Approaching the process with curiosity and trust, the “WE BETTER...” text frame tool was introduced without steering the training toward a theatrical outcome. Instead, it was used to uncover the communication skills and atmospheres embedded in their physical memory from their time in the training camp. The entire rehearsal process was conducted under the same mantra, “WE BETTER.” After the first day, when the tool was explained, everyone slowly began to take the initiative, offering an action through the prompt to be executed immediately without reflection. Using this research method, we playfully explored the everyday life in the barracks. Gradually, they learned to practice a few hours of “WE BETTER” daily until they became so connected that they began acting on the prompt directly through actions, without needing to introduce the change through language.

Strings of material did not always connect, and at times the work lost its specificity. Nevertheless, the soldiers and the creative team agreed never to fix the score. The performance's value lay in what the soldiers were motivated to do. They spontaneously expressed, assembled, and shuffled fragments of their body memories as soldiers, including every aspect of their experience, and found their voice in narrating multiple perspectives. The absolute fluidity of the process, from beginning to end, reflects this research's focus on assemblages and its dynamic nature, similar to a spiraling wind.

A Safe Space for Male Bodies offers the audience a similar experience connecting disparate elements externally, without forcing interdependence or an artificial aesthetic of unity. In fact, the separateness of the components in this work is deliberately emphasized rather than concealed. Several examples of this separateness are evident in the flickering aesthetic of the performance, in the varying behaviors displayed by the performers when confronted with the same task, and in the audience's diverse patterns of engagement as they select their own experiences.

A few examples of this separateness include:

The transition from the entrance to the wider network of the museum rooms, where the performance shifts from immersive to highly interactive, granting the audience the responsibility and freedom to choose how and where to spend their time, before the rules change again, only in the end.



Photo 24. A soldier assembling, out of his and the other performers bodies on canvas. (Wildberger 2022)

In the video room, viewers are presented with paper images depicting various body parts from different naked male bodies. These images are provided as materials for the audience, inviting them to create their own “body assemblages” by gluing these cutouts onto canvases. This interactive process encourages participants to playfully reimagine and reconstruct the male form, expanding the field of perception regarding what a male body can represent. By combining different body parts in unique configurations, the audience is prompted to question traditional representations and stereotypes of male bodies, thus fostering a broader understanding of male physicality and identity. This creative exercise becomes a collaborative exploration, challenging preconceived notions and inviting new interpretations of masculinity in a safe and open environment.

Even though all parts of the work are connected, there is no sense of organic unity. As the audience moves through the rooms, the media and formats change, as do the rules of engagement. The experience operates on different timelines, making it impossible for any

single audience member to witness everything that happens. The center of the work is dislocated, situated somewhere between many conflicting interests, leaving both the audience and this research with the question: What connects the elements of the work? Importantly, the core of the training and performance does not lie in the interaction between the performers, and this is perceivable from the audience's perspective.

Moreover, very little of the work is fixed, and the performers constantly exchange roles, never repeating themselves in a specific role. They continually separate themselves from their previous actions and begin something entirely different. With each repetition of the material, they delve deeper into their physical memory, uncovering new material forces. This kaleidoscopic movement is the aesthetic outcome of a post-psychophysical approach to training. Achieving such fluidity in movement is fundamental to this approach. While a psychophysical method generally promotes organicity, unity of language, and repetition, this approach leverages the reality of the performer and technological medium to continually shift the work onto different layers, creating opportunities for new connections. This strategy results in a performance framework with minimal fixed agreements, granting performers considerable mobility and the ability to adjust their performance autonomously in response to their evolving personal context.

3.4.3 Location, collaborators and time frame

Philipp Finsterer, Christoph Griesser, Selman Kličić, Gordan Kukić, Kenneth Constance Loe, Johannes Mayrhofer, Peter Roll, and Marwin Strutz participated in the performance as themselves. They generously shared their knowledge and personal experiences as soldiers during both rehearsals and performances.

The concept was developed by me, with the support of Sammy Van den Heuvel and Anita Kremm. Van den Heuvel and Kremm later took responsibility for the space and media design, while I focused on the body dramaturgy of the performance.

The performance was commissioned and produced by Steirischer Herbst '22, with the kind support of the Instituto Italiano di Cultura di Vienna. The festival provided us with the BRUSEUM Gallery in the Johannes Viertel Museum in Graz, a space that played a crucial role

in shaping the performance. Van den Heuvel reinforced the concept of a “safe space” by adding barricades made of plywood to the rooms. The space was deliberately left mostly empty, with only a few personal belongings of the soldiers present to emphasize the focus on their bodies. The contrast between the large, white rooms and the few soldiers’ bodies created a dramatic effect, highlighting their vulnerability and extreme isolation, as well as the necessity of connecting with the audience to find balance.

To express the ironic concept of the white box as a “safe space” for objectified bodies, and to respectfully coexist with the socio-material constraints imposed by the space on our rehearsal schedule, we adapted our rhythm to the gallery hours.

3.4.4 Transmission

The performance was presented six times and then recorded into a video, which now belongs to the festival’s archive. After the final performance, an artist talk was held, with many audience members in attendance. During this discussion, the soldiers had the opportunity to describe the process from their perspective. The festival, impressed by the work, immediately commissioned us to create a piece for the following year. Building on the experience, we were able to apply the skills and insights gained from this initial project to our subsequent work.

3.4.5 Key issues

It can be argued that *A Safe Space for Male Bodies* was not conceived as a singular, cohesive creation, but rather as an assemblage of resources, skills, technologies, and personal experiences informed by the diverse contexts surrounding the team and the institutions involved.

Had I employed a psychophysical approach to training, I am confident that the work would have achieved greater formal clarity and that I could have trained the performers' bodies more effectively. However, I am equally convinced that spending time with the soldiers repeating exercises and structures that use their bodies while excluding significant aspects of their identities would not have adequately informed the creative process or this research. Nor would

it have allowed me to explore the relationship between the body, war, and masculinity in any meaningful depth.

Instead, a post-psychophysical approach to training enabled me to frame the rehearsal space as a site where different political interests are continuously negotiated, where technology plays an integral role in the process of training and creation, and where differences are preserved rather than homogenized.

In my view, we are entering an era in which theatre academies, for example, can no longer sustain acting training that isolates students from their personal political contexts. The 20th century produced psychophysical training within a cultural environment that valued the independence of theatre from other disciplines and prioritized the search for an essence. However, the further I advance in my research into post-psychophysical approaches, the more I recognize the need to distance myself from the past. This is a precarious endeavor, as psychophysical training remains the foundation of much of the theatre still cherished and produced across Europe, and it demands a long journey to master. Yet, it is rooted in values and beliefs that no longer align with current scientific understandings, the contemporary performance landscape, technological advancements, ways we perceive reality, or my own political convictions.

Nonetheless, moving beyond the psychophysical currently feels like navigating a dark forest at night, where it is easy to lose one's way. My work reflects this difficulty. After this phase of research, I will need to take time to reflect, analyze, and reassess my work, as my questions currently outweigh my certainties.

4. Results and Discussion

The research explored how post-psychophysical discourse can be translated into set of practices within creative and educational environments, particularly in theatre. The focus was on developing through theoretical research ideas drawn from the field of 21st-century studies into practice as research as an approach to integrate the body, the world, and the mind as active participants in training and performance processes.

Drawing on theories like Posthumanism, New Materialism, the research advocates for a shift away from traditional psychophysical training, seeking a more holistic integration of the material world and a critical perspective on anthropocentric views.

The theoretical part of this research reached the conclusion that understanding the field of integration between material forces, body and mind is not enough to produce the change it fosters. Practice might suggest obstacles invisible in theory. Moreover, the territory of exploration the post-psychophysical is infinite and the training need to be attuned to what the trainer pursues to flower in the performers' lives. In the case of this research, this flowering translated into a practice of care and attentiveness, touching both political and experiential definitions of acting.

Finally, the theoretical research offered a method to explore through practice the obstacles and complexities inherent in reconfiguring the focus on the body-world. This method operates through association and playfulness, fostered by a messy learning environment, decentring moves and practising shared agency and care.

4.1 Case studies outcomes

With *Solitude*, the purpose was to explore how an actor could merge into a network of objects to create an impression of dynamism that differs from what is typically recognized as dramatic action, in all its variations. The strategy involved rejecting conventional acting as a means of producing action while working within a theatrical rehearsal space. This approach was inspired by the story of P., a person who spent more than a decade in a state of inaction, living in his

parents' basement. The story itself raises questions about isolation and what constitutes human solitude and the feeling of loneliness, how this state can connect us to a non-human network, and how it can deteriorate into a form of transfiguration.

What emerged from these early stages of practical exploration was that, for the purposes of this research, traditional acting as a medium should not be entirely set aside when working with actors, or at least, this is not advisable. *Solitude* highlighted the necessity of deeply understanding the ideas that underpin acting as a system of beliefs. The many concepts upon which acting is built need to be critically addressed and reconsidered: some require re-evaluation and expansion, while others may be discarded, but only if they are replaced with new ones.

Moreover, to work within a post-psychophysical framework, one might want first to arrange favourable circumstances. Favourable circumstances might include working with a mixed group of actors and non-actors, bachelor students, or within the context of a process-based residency. It could also involve including professionals from the art field who have developed a sensitivity toward working with materialities.

With 72 Days, the research shifted to a more abstract domain, suspending the pursuit of enacting post-human narratives. The strategy centred on selecting two core skills from acting – impulse work and mimicry – and merging them with the objectives of a radical visual artist, who was interested in emphasizing the power of still images and their capacity to engage the audience in meaning-making in the absence of dramatic action. This phase revealed a positive reception among new generations of actors toward a reconfigured acting framework that aligns more closely with their personal values.

It also highlighted the benefits of deepening psychophysical training while experimenting beyond familiar dynamics. Regardless of how abstract the staging may be, continuous psychophysical training will create space for the key sensations that an actor expects to experience on stage, such as their own presence, bodily impulses, and a sense of aliveness conveyed by the space.

Additionally, *72 Days* underscored the significance of place and time; in this context, both were ideal, as the setting was an academy and the practitioners were actors in the making. The research further emphasized the need to expand the vocabulary and definitions used in acting,

incorporating non-human elements into our reflections on action. An example of this was the case study on the concept of intimacy, which traditionally confines the experience to the human realm, creating a line of separation that this practice aims to challenge.

With *A Room of Her Own* and *Archiving Melpignano*, the overall intent was to shift the perceived isolation that an actor often experiences during rehearsal toward cultivating an appetite for its opposite – the indestructible connection with all surrounding realities. To facilitate this shift, the actors invited to the residency were given no choice but to practice in the public spaces of a remote village in southern Italy. The research employed various generative strategies to continuously juxtapose the actor in action with a landscape of multiple socio-material and ecological interconnected networks.

The strategy did not aim to impose established principles of applied theatre or performance to help performers adapt to public spaces. Instead, it sought to create an explosive encounter between traditional rehearsal-based acting practices and a public space free from the constraints of a proscenium stage. While the resulting incompatibilities between these two worlds were anticipated, their emergence provided the actors with a valuable opportunity to reflect on their training and make individual choices on how to develop and adapt. Some actors embraced the idea that dramatic art should be disruptive, choosing to become increasingly bold and loud in their engagement with the village. Others began to consider the impact of their actions more deeply, opting to observe their environments more thoroughly before intervening. This led them to absorb and aesthetically rearrange the materials found on-site rather than bringing external elements into the space, fostering more nuanced strategies and a more holistic understanding of their positioning in public spaces, pointing to an aesthetic of coexistence.

Ultimately, these experiences revealed that some of the perceived incompatibilities might only be temporary and could be worked through to enhance our understanding of a more interconnected form of acting. Bringing acting practice into the streets can serve as a preparatory step to transform how we perceive acting and its broader implications. It challenges the notion of humanity as separate or isolated from its surroundings, encouraging a deeper reflection on our relationships with both the human and non-human worlds. This approach fosters a sense of connectedness that extends beyond conventional performance spaces, pushing the boundaries of what acting can achieve in a complex, interconnected reality.

If restricting access to a traditional rehearsal environment can reveal the limitations of training within the physical and ideological boundaries of an empty space, adopting complex task-based strategies, can increase the actors' sense of awareness as performers within the diverse socio-material contexts in which they usually operate unnoticed. The research demonstrated that a complex task system, similar to methods used in education to help children connect with the world beyond the classroom, can help actors create actions that resonate more deeply with the broader world, with its many networks, assemblages, and communities. It also highlighted the benefits for actors in mastering the documentation of their endeavours to bring insights from these experiences back into the rehearsal space and fuel new creative processes.

With *A Safe Space for Male Bodies*, the aim was to work within a setting that mirrored both *72 Days* and *Archiving Melpignano*, bringing the research to a close by completing a circle. In *72 Days*, the research was conducted with a group of young actresses, whereas this time, it involved a group of male soldiers. In *Archiving Melpignano*, the research took place in a context of extreme openness to facilitate connections with the surrounding communities. In contrast, *A Safe Space for Male Bodies* was conducted in a barricaded white box that favored circumstances of isolation.

This work attempted to reorganize the action around the idea of assemblages. What emerged is that assemblage theory allows greater freedom in projecting and staging work, as it relies on a more open definition of action. Thinking in assemblages enables a creator to blur the boundaries between the theatrical event and the ecosystem of which it is a constituent part, bringing to the surface objects, actors, and behaviors that would otherwise remain invisible in a setting meant for protection and exposition.

Furthermore, it introduces a substitute concept to *breath* as the gateway to presence. The new keyword proposed by this research is *wind*. In this specific case, the wind is generated by training text frames as psychophysical prompts in a regime of continuous improvisation, aimed at connecting to the ecosystem in which the performance takes place. This wind might not feel as precise as the sensation of being present through breath, but rather as a sense of connection that comes and goes, engaging us variably with what is within reach or not, and with a dispersed sense of agency.

Moreover, this work brings full circle the question of sustainability. If this performance succeeded in creating a temporary space for continuous exploration and audience engagement

in the realm of post-psychophysicality, it also leaves us with the final question: how can we rethink theatre training to prepare performers to operate increasingly in this direction, demanding modes of production that can incorporate diversity and provoke questions attuned to our contemporary sensibilities and urgent political matters.

4.2 Developments

This research has led to numerous developments. Since creating the four creative works embedded in this study, the same principles have been reapplied in various theatre productions and workshops. Some examples include: *Untitled* (2023) by Ene-Liis Semper, an alternative take on *72 Days* in which I took part as body dramaturg; *Border Euphoria* (2023), a second exploration of war and bodies, focusing on the borderlands of Europe and their communities; *Now We Can Talk About It* (2023) by Ene-Liis Semper, in which I took part again as body dramaturg in a second attempt at merging post-psychophysical training and post-human narratives—similar to *Solitude* but with more balanced outcomes; a series of new residencies in Melpignano that culminated in *Dear Jane Doe* (2023), produced in Zurich, originating from one of the rooms developed by Alicia Aumuller in *A Room of One's Own*, in which I took part as dramaturg; and a personal painting exhibition at the Palazzo Marchesale, inspired by my own *en plein air* practice as an actor without access to a rehearsal space.

Among these, the most insightful development for the future of this research has been the work conducted through workshops and regular teaching in academies. In these contexts, the process of reframing finds immediate resonance with the students and develops significantly.

For example, I recall a specific workshop conducted with students I had previously worked with on *72 Days*, now in their fourth year of academic studies. The workshop, titled *The Seagull: A Post-Psychophysical Study of Action* (2023), aimed to bring my research full circle.

As briefly explained in the introduction, my initial desire was to deepen my study of ludic action through the practices I had acquired over years of working with the Russian director Anatoly Vasiliev. This workshop sought to integrate this research with the post-psychophysical practices I have been developing in recent years. What followed was a fascinating workshop, not unlike a typical study of action, but distinguished by the care the students took in their

practice to understand interconnectedness. This focus enabled us to open the training and practice to the family members of the actors in the final stages of the research.

Remarkably, the research on action was maintained to the highest possible standards, yet the group of performers succeeded in recognizing and integrating various human constellations around them, empowering these groups of friends and relatives by devising specific practices that allowed different forms of contribution into the process. This was made possible by a shift in the actors' sensitivity regarding the nature of the action, its causes, and the networks from which it originates. Without deviating from their primary focus on acting, the performers managed to dissipate the illusion of isolation that practicing in a rehearsal space can often reinforce. Instead, they brought their bodies and minds into a state of active listening and felt care towards the community surrounding and complementing their daily reality.

The theoretical work in this field has advanced significantly. For example, Camilleri has published numerous new articles since the release of *Performer Training Reconfigured: Post-psychophysical Perspectives for the Twenty-first Century*. The research direction has shifted from broad conceptual ideas to a more detailed system of reference, helping to find orientation in the specifics of training methods.

One example of this is Camilleri's work on *hybrid* (Camilleri 2020b) as a key term for understanding post-psychophysical training. This research provides a useful framework that maps out all possible stages and states of hybridization that a post-psychophysical approach can organize and make visible within a creative process or training context.

These developments are particularly interesting because they highlight the complementary nature of this research. This study addresses the sense of isolation that training in an empty space and acting on a proscenium often reinforce, framing it as a significant ethical dilemma tied to issues of mental health and sustainability of both communities and ecosystems, and offers, complementary to more theoretical approaches, practical tools to change people sensibility through embodied experience.

4.3 Lessons from exploring Post-psychophysical perspectives to devise the training

What awaited at the conclusion of this research was the hope of developing a training method that allows performers to experience post-psychophysicality as a territory of personal growth and discovery, through daily practice. The four works produced have each, in their own way, led to a series of repetitive successes and failures that can be considered here as stepping stones in devising a temporary training practice for post-psychophysical theatre.

There should not be a single approach to reconnecting the body and mind to the world. *Archiving Melpignano* has demonstrated how many resources and strategies actors can develop when provided with a generative tool to intuitively find their way to integrate the world into their practice. What remains as a guiding principle is the cultivation of care, starting with the more obvious material aspects and progressively extending one's reach.

It is crucial to maintain a loving connection with the actor's primary tools. It is advisable to acknowledge the beauty of working with the action, while also preserving an actor's core skills, and to devise a training that trades the anthropocentric setting without leading the performer to a nihilistic feeling. An actor, like every human being, needs to feel purpose and be valued. Care, which is central to these practices, cannot flourish without an actor's sense of self-worth.

Lightness is also key to a post-psychophysical framework, and it requires strategies that reflect the nature of reality as assemblages rather than organisms. Assemblages are constantly forming before our eyes and reaching their powerful syntheses in mysterious ways. For this way in which reality operates to manifest itself, there must be a careful revision of all theatrical production methods. It will take time. Meanwhile training should encourage an appreciation of how syntheses cannot be fully predicted but only recognized, and how everything contributes equally to it. To reach this state of awareness, a performer must cultivate a sense of lightness regarding the impact of their actions. This feeling enables the performer to perceive the interconnectedness that underlies every ecosystem and to sense the flow of all things.

Ultimately, this research calls for a radical reconsideration of the terms used in theatre education. This re-evaluation is already occurring in various pedagogical institutions, where

questions of access to knowledge and the recognition of diverse forms of knowledge beyond the predominant Western, colonial framework are being addressed. A critical issue, in relation to this research, is whether the concept of training remains relevant in light of the changes sweeping through the world of education today. We must ask whether it is desirable for everyone to learn the same skills and how these skills can be relevant to different cultures with varied understandings of theatricality. This line of reasoning can be extended further by questioning whether focusing on specific skills might narrow the scope of learning outcomes that a school should aim to achieve.

Instead, this research suggests that education could provide structured spaces for learning rather than formalized training. While this may initially seem like a simple rephrasing, it is meant to emphasize the plurality of learning outcomes that students can pursue through repetitive daily psychophysical exploration. It advocates for a rethinking in the design of offered experiences and the use of terminology. A learning space, unlike training, might offer a wider range of entry points and diverse strategies that students can develop through their own agency in a minimally structured environment. Furthermore, it calls for a reconsideration of access based on motivation rather than suitability, positioning motivation as the driving force behind true learning.

4.4 Research limitations and future paths of research

This research is fundamentally practice-based. It does not delve deeply into the complex theoretical frameworks it touches upon, primarily due to the vastness and complexity of these subjects. This is also a deliberate choice, as the work is primarily aimed at practitioners. It seeks to remain closely aligned with practice and embodied experience, aiming to inspire other practitioners to connect with their own feelings about these issues and to find their own strategies for moving beyond the current impasse in theatre training.

In terms of the scope of the research, it is important to note the vast number of actors and multidisciplinary performers involved, their diverse backgrounds and nationalities, and the significant differences in context among the four creative projects. These factors should be seen as strengths in testing the relevance and consistency of the research question across different times and spaces. However, this same diversity can sometimes make it difficult to determine

the primary audience for this research, the specific realities it addresses, and the true validity of the research outcomes in terms of data consistency. This complexity arises because the research had to negotiate, at times, conflicting artistic and production needs.

It is also crucial to acknowledge that, despite frequently using the term *world*, the research took place exclusively in Europe and involved only European performers. While this context highlighted significant differences in education and sensibility, it also demonstrated a lack of broader diversity, falling short of the optimal conditions that might have yielded more nuanced and compelling data by bringing the Western world into dialogue with perspectives and practices beyond its ideological and geographical borders.

Additionally, this research does not provide a comprehensive mapping of the ideas underlying acting or explore how these ideas might be re-evaluated through disciplines such as sociology, neurology, political science, or philosophy. It focuses on a few select examples—those that have been tested in practice. The emphasis remains on the actor's mindset as a construct shaped by their education and training, proposing strategies that enable actors to break free from their ideological constraints through their own efforts. In contrast, other research, which is more advanced in this area, directly examines the quality of interactions between performers and specific materialities, offering deeper insights into how these exchanges occur.

This research presents a range of opportunities and potential developments. To apply its findings effectively, these ideas should be incorporated into theatre academy programs through workshops designed to develop a clear pedagogy that better integrates theory and practice.

As this study progresses, it has the potential to contributing in influencing not only the understanding of theatre training but also the broader production of theatre itself. The research advocates for a mode of working characterized by greater openness, lightness, shared agency and care in every aspect of theatre practice. It is hoped that this research will support the critical changes that theatre, as a part of Western culture, is already undergoing. Additionally, it may contribute to challenging the very concept of training, questioning the necessity of establishing certain skills as fundamental to theatre-making while also generating different forms of inclusion.

5. Conclusion

There is a sense in the air that this research aims to bring to the foreground. The study focuses on its specific manifestation within the context of theatre, examining how an actor develops a need to isolate themselves to create, how this solitude is a politically troubling illusion that over time affects their sensitivity, and how to dispel this illusion and change the actor's perception of the world outside the rehearsal room.

If we take a step back from the given context, this feeling might very well be described as a perception that the Western world is experiencing an illusion that human beings can exist in isolation and need to develop into self-standing individuals to succeed in life. This perception appears to be influenced by a confluence of factors, including certain technologies, political developments, and the rise of an inconsistent and ruthless form of individualism.

Currently, many societies appear particularly exploitative, treating the individual as an isolated and self-sufficient working force, while implementing strategies that encourage self-criticism and promote constant distraction. Such distractions may prevent us from addressing urgent societal and environmental issues, engaging in meaningful dialogue, or fostering connections with those around us. As a result, traditional communities often deteriorate without being replaced by alternative, genuinely responsive forms of community.

In this context, the empty space where actors isolate themselves to train their presence can be seen as symbolic of a broader societal contradiction. Given the finite and fragile nature of our planet, there is a growing recognition of the need to cultivate a culture of care, connection, and attentiveness to everything that surrounds us. This involves developing an awareness and responsibility not only toward others and the shared spaces we inhabit but also toward broader ecological systems, from local environments to distant ecosystems.

This research suggests that theatre, as a psychophysical process, may need to engage more directly with contemporary spiritual and social challenges. This would involve rethinking and reorganizing its practices to contribute positively to social change, in ways that align with the evolving needs and challenges of humanity.

Theatre and performance may not have the power to change the world, but they always provide an opportunity for us to pause, feel, and reflect on the contemporary moment. It is not only the choice of themes/topics—whether socially committed or not—that matters. Equally important is how we engage with the world to which the theme relates: the space we give to certain voices, the care we bring to the research, the connections we foster, and the way we invite others to contribute to the creation, without deceiving ourselves into thinking that it is ever possible to create in isolation.

Rethinking psychophysical training, then, means rethinking human experience beyond empathy—necessary but sometimes overly simplistic—within the political framework of care. Caring means not only noticing what surrounds the actor's body in the moment of action but also making an effort to notice the world of the other and how that world operates, without necessarily reshaping it to suit our preferences.

The outcome of this training in action is a positive outlook on the world, where nothing operates according to the dramatic polarizations typical of theatre. Instead, the world is built through alliances that are not ideological, but rather arise from the need to move forward in diversity, yet together. Ultimately, the result is a world perceived through the continuous motion of all things—nomadic by nature, porous, and open to all possible connections, especially those we tend to avoid by constructing linguistic and material boundaries, or those we might not have considered possible.

This research has led me, and those who participated with me, to a series of simple but foundational considerations about training and how we can transform it to better suit our sensibilities:

1. **Humans need constant care throughout their lives, and consequently, they are made to give care.** Care can be applied to anything. When it is desentimentalized, it does not foster victimhood or feelings of pity. Instead, it becomes political, rooted in attentive listening, radical equality, and the potential to ignite the desire for self-expression in the silent and oppressed. This dignified vulnerability should be a fundamental part of any psychophysical training aimed at helping the actor experience their humanity.
2. **Training should sometimes take place out in the world.** Openness to spaces where unexpected connections are always possible can greatly enrich a practice and bring

transformational change to the performer. Opening to the world means allowing something external to your known practice to lead you on a journey with an unknown outcome.

3. **Working in the territory of the post-psychophysical requires patience.** Many experiments may not make sense initially and may provoke strong questioning of the value of straying so far from conventional training. Much of this work does not lead to greater comprehension, a pleasant feeling of flow, or fun. These practices generally require the performer to suspend their personal growth in favor of forming improbable alliances within ecologies and communities, pushing them beyond the realm of theatre into a liminal space. Practicing in this territory, however, helps the performer recognize a different world beyond dramatic structures—less polarized, less heroic, yet composed of moments of collective heroism, collective creation, and collective change.
4. **Psychophysicality remains a strong foundation for bringing the performer into connection with themselves and for fostering awareness of their own experience of the world.** Yet it is insufficient on its own, as it leaves the performer only halfway to a deeper understanding of how experiences shape not only our world but also the coexistence of interconnected worlds. Psychophysicality does not engage with the borders between one's world and another's, leaving unexplored the porous nature of our experience and the dynamic activity of negotiation and care that occurs on the periphery of our perception.

One of the central aims of this research was to weave the material world more holistically into actor training. This ambition found resonance in both the theoretical and practical strands of the work. Drawing on insights from New Materialism, I was able to conceptualize materiality as an active and vibrant participant in the training process. This notion became tangible in exercises like those involving stones in *Archiving Melpignano*, where the stones were no longer mere objects but co-actors, shaping and influencing the creative flow. Similarly, in *72 Days*, the interplay between performers and objects brought to life the idea of a wider definition of intimacy, highlighting the agency of materiality in co-creating meaning.

However, this integration was not without its challenges. While the creative works demonstrated the potential of this approach, questions remain about its broader applicability. How can such materially focused methods be adapted to diverse contexts,

particularly in traditional training institutions with limited resources or rigid structures? Is it really possible to simply set aside drama and craft a new aesthetic out of a practice of care? While the research successfully highlighted the possibilities of material integration, the scalability of these practices warrants further exploration. Yet, the prompts and framework developed here offer a foundation to build upon, opening new doors for integrating materiality into actor training.

The second aim, to critique and move beyond anthropocentric perspectives in training, was deeply embedded in the theoretical and practical dimensions of this work. The concept of shared agency was pivotal here, as it reframed the actor not as the sole driver of creative expression but as a participant in a broader network of relational forces. This was particularly evident in *A Safe Space for Male Bodies*, where the performers' interactions with military paraphernalia became a site of negotiation between personal agency and the socio-material realities of war and vulnerability. Similarly, the exercises in radical attentiveness encouraged performers to decenter themselves and engage with objects, spaces, and environments as active collaborators.

While these efforts effectively challenged anthropocentrism, I found myself grappling with the tension between theoretical ideals and their practical implementation. For instance, how do performers navigate the balance between their subjective, embodied experience and the decentering of their agency? This tension surfaced repeatedly, particularly in exercises where the actor's own perspective risked being overshadowed by the emphasis on non-human agency. While this research offers a framework to explore this balance, the nuances of such negotiations remain an area for deeper inquiry.

The integration of the world-body-mind framework has been one of the most rewarding aspects of this research. The creative works demonstrated the possibilities of this braiding in different ways:

- **Social Environment:** In *Archiving Melpignano*, performers were immersed in the rhythms of a community, allowing their actions to emerge intuitively from their interactions with the site and its people. This highlighted how training can become socially embedded, responsive to external stimuli, and deeply connected to its context.
- **Technology:** The work in *72 Days* showcased the role of technology not as a background tool but as a co-actor. The performers' relationship with digital interfaces

during COVID reflected the expanded possibilities of a posthuman sensibility in performance.

- **Objects and Materialities:** Across all the creative works, from the stillness in *Solitude* to the object-driven interactions between bodies in a white box in *A Safe Space for Male bodies*, materiality played a central role. These experiments exemplified how actors can cultivate a sensitivity to objects and environments, engaging with them as equals in the performative space.

These examples underline how the post-psychophysical framework can open gateways to new ways of thinking and practicing, where the material world and the human actor are in constant dialogue. However, the challenge lies in refining and structuring these practices to ensure they remain accessible and adaptable.

The interplay between theory and practice has been a defining characteristic of this work. Theoretical insights from thinkers such as Camilleri, Barad, and Braidotti offered a lens to critique and reimagine traditional actor training. At the same time, the creative works became a testing ground for these ideas, translating them into tangible methodologies. Exercises like the Coin Task, warm-ups for radical attentiveness, and improvisational tasks involving materiality demonstrated how abstract concepts could be embodied and explored in practice.

This dynamic exchange also revealed the limitations and possibilities of the framework. For instance, while the theoretical concepts of assemblage and flat ontology provided rich avenues for exploration, their application in training raised questions about the extent to which actors can fully embrace shared agency without losing their individual sense of presence and control. Reflecting on how the work has consistently challenged me to navigate this tension, I now propose that training must actively counterbalance these two opposing forces. Rather than treating the development of individual agency and relational awareness as fixed, simultaneous goals, I suggest framing them as distinct yet interdependent sensibilities that are brought into ongoing dialogue. Training becomes, therefore, a dynamic process—one that oscillates between helping the actor claim their own agency and situating that agency within a larger web of connections. This approach, I believe, better equips actors to navigate the complexity of performing in a world where human and non-human agencies are inseparable. These challenges have ultimately become opportunities for reflection, pushing the boundaries of both theory and practice.

Ultimately, this research has fulfilled its aims in significant ways. It has shown that the integration of the material world into training and the critique of anthropocentrism are not just theoretical aspirations but practical realities that can shape and transform the actor's craft. However, this journey has also highlighted areas that require further attention. The scalability of these practices, the balance between human and non-human agency, and the institutional challenges of adopting such frameworks remain open questions.

What has emerged, however, is a framework that is both robust and flexible—a starting point for rethinking actor training in schools in ways that are inclusive, ethical, and responsive to the complexities of the 21st century without refusing previous traditions.

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List of Creative Works

- *Solitude*, Luzern Theater, 2019.
- *72 Days*, EMTA Blackbox, 2021.
- *Archiving Melpignano*, 2021–2022
- *A Safe Space for Male Bodies*, Steirischer Herbst, 2022.

Töö lühikokkuvõte

Loovuurimuslikus doktoritöös „Care and Shared Agency in Actor Training: a New Transformative Departure (sets of practices)“ („Hool ning jagatud agentsus näitlejatreeningus: uus transformatiivne lähtepunkt (praktikate kogum)”) uuritakse näitlejate uuenduslikke treeningstrateegiaid, mis on raamistatud post-psühhofüüsilise näitlemise kontekstis. Uurimuse esmane eesmärk on vaidlustada ajaloolisi paradigmasid, mis on reguleerinud näitlejate koolitust, eriti neid, mis keskenduvad inimese tegutsemisele kui ainukesele etendustegevusele. Kaasaegsete uusmaterialismi ja posthumanismi teooriate abil rõhutan vajadust integreerida näitlejakoolituse praktikasse sotsiaal-materiaalset suhtlisdünaamikat. Praktikapõhise uurimistöö, kirjandusülevaate ja autoetnograafilise refleksiooni kombinatsiooni abil visandan praktikate kogumi, mis mitte ainult ei suurenda näitleja enese- ja tegutsemistunnet, vaid edendab ka kriitilisi seoseid keskkonnaga ning viib lõppkokkuvõttes terviklikuma treeningkogemuse saavutamiseni.

Sissejuhatuses mõtisklen näitlejakoolituse traditsiooniliste paradigmade üle, mis rõhutavad inimese tegutsemist kui esmatahtsat etendustegevust. Need paradigmad on sügavalt juurdunud ajaloolistes meetodites, mis on kujundanud näitleja rolli teatrikogemuse keskse osana. Kuid tänapäeva ühiskond, mida iseloomustavad tehnoloogilised edusammud, ökoloogilised probleemid ja sotsiaalpoliitilised muutused, tingib vajaduse ümber hinnata seda, kuidas me näitlejaid tänapäeva teatri jaoks ette valmistame. Sõnastan, kui oluline on ümber mõtestada näitlejate koolitus, et võtta omaks omavahel seotud vaateid eksistentsile. Minu ettepanek on keskenduda mitte näitlemisele kui tervikule, vaid pigem psühhofüüsilisele lähenemisviisile näitlemisele, mis juba tegeleb lõhega (konkreetselt lõhega keha ja meelega), jättes samal ajal seose maailmaga uurimata. Rõhutan siinkohal hoolivuse ja jagatud agentsuse mõisteid, väites, et treeningkeskkond tuleb ümber kujundada, et edendada tundlikkust nii inim- kui ka mitteinimlike osalejate suhtes etendusvõrgustikus. Kerkib küsimus, kuidas luua koolituskeskkonda, mis on nii võimestav kui ka posthumanistliku seisundi suhtes tundlik.

Sissejuhatus paneb aluse kogu doktoritööle, näidates vajadust transformatiivse lähenemise järele näitlejakoolitusele, mis on kooskõlas selliste kaasaegsete probleemidega nagu kliimamuutused, tehnoloogiline areng ja posthumanistlik seisund, kus piirid inimlike ja mitteinimlike olendite vahel on üha enam hägustunud.

Teoreetiline raamistik ja uurimisküsimused. Selles osas süvenen uurimistöö aluseks olevatesse teoreetilistesse raamistikesse, keskendudes 21. sajandi uuringutes olulistele lähenemisviisidele, eelkõige uusmaterialismile ja posthumanismile. Ma kritiseerin traditsioonilisi näitlejakoolituse metoodikaid, kuna need ei arvesta etendaja ja tema keskkonna keerukaid vastastikuseid sõltuvusi. Nimetatud teooriad näitavad, kuidas edendada integreeritumat etendamispraktikat, mis tunnustab kõigi osaliste agentsust.

Peamine uurimisküsimus käsitleb seda, kuidas saab postpsühhofüüsilist diskursust rakendada näitlejate loomingulistes ja koolituspraktikates. Allküsimused keskenduvad nende protsesside eetilistele mõjudele erinevates kultuurikontekstides ning vajadusele säilitada individuaalne agentsus, edendades samal ajal kollektiivset teadlikkust. Näiteks uurin, kuidas näitlejad saavad lihtsate harjutuste (nagu pallidega žongleerimine ringis) ümberkujundamise abil kasvatada ühise tegutsemise taju, mis tunnustab mitteinimliku materiaalsuse elujõulisust ning rikastab seeläbi nende treening- ja etenduskogemusi.

Metodoloogia. Minu metodoloogiline lähenemine on mitmekülgne, ühendades kvalitatiivse uuringu ja praktilise eksperimenteerimise. Kasutan ka poolstruktureeritud intervjuusid kaasaegsete praktikutega, mis võimaldab nende arusaamade ja kogemuste põhjal mõista näitlejate koolitust. Lisaks kasutan omaenda kogemuste autoetnograafilist refleksiooni.

Mõjukate teoreetikute, nagu Karen Barad, Jane Bennett ja Frank Camilleri, tööd loovad tugeva raamistiku näitlejakoolituse materiaalsuse ja agentsuse uurimiseks. Kasutades praktikapõhist uurimistööd, uurin, kuidas näitlejad saavad arendada oma suhteid nii materiaalse maailma kui ka oma kehaga; see viib nüansirikkama arusaamiseni etendusest, mis ületab tavapäraseid piire. See lähenemisviis rõhutab kehalise kogemuse tähtsust ja vajadust arendada treeningkeskkonda, mis julgustab uurimist, eksperimenteerimist ja mängulisust.

Loovtööde analüüs. Doktoritöö keskmes on nelja loomingulise töö üksikasjalik analüüs, millest igaüks on näide minu teoreetilise raamistiku rakendamisest praktikas.

1. *Solitude (Üksindus)*. See lavastus oli inspireeritud tõestisündinud loost mehest, kes elas üle kümne aasta isolatsioonis, ning uuris üksinduse sügavat mõju inimtegevusele. Tegelase muutumine hübriidolendiks – osaliselt inimene, osaliselt objekt – on võimas metafoor eksistentsi keerukuse kohta posthumanistlikus maailmas. Selle narratiivi kaudu uurisin, kuidas radikaalne tegevusetus ja paigalseis võivad laiendada traditsioonilisi ettekujutusi

näitlejakoolitusest, kutsudes näitlejaid uurima inimliku tegutsemise ja maailmaga seotuse piire. See teos esitas küsimuse, mida tähendab kohalolek maailmas, mis sageli väärtustab tegevust vaikuse asemel, ning pani mõtlema, kuidas isoleeritus võib nii katkestada kui ka luua uusi suhtlusvorme.

2. *72 päeva*. Selles eksperimentaalses lavastuses esitati väljakutse tavapärastele arusaamadele näitlejatööst, kaasates etendusse esemeid ja riideid kui aktiivseid osalejaid. Tõin esile pingeid traditsiooniliste näitlejapraktikate ja postpsühholoogiliste meetodite vahel, rõhutades, kuidas intiimsus ja materiaalne agentsus võivad muuta näitleja rolli, viies selle teispoole inimlikku väljenduslikkust. Näitlejad osalesid avastamisprotsessis, õppides kuulama neid ümbritsevaid materjale ja reageerima nende kohalolekule. See teos rõhutas koostöö ja ühise kogemuse tähtsust, mis tekib tähenduse loomisel inimlike ja mitteinimlike elementide koosmõju kaudu etendusruumis.

3. *Archiving Melpignano*. See residentuur, mis toimus Itaalia väikelinnas, soodustas etendusi, mis sünnivad spontaanselt suhtlusest kohaliku kogukonnaga. Intuiitivsete ülesannete (nagu mündiülesanne) kaudu osalesid etendajad rikkalikus sotsiaalses suhtluses. See projekt rõhutas väljakutseid, mis on seotud traditsioonilise koolituse ja mitteteatri keskkonnas toimuva ühendamisega. Samuti rõhutas see tehnoloogia ja dokumenteerimise kaasamise vajalikkust loomingulisse protsessi, näidates, kuidas arhiveerimispraktikad võivad etendust toetada ja tõhustada. Töö kutsus etendajaid mõtlema oma suhetele kogukonna ja materiaalse maailmaga, edendades vastutustunnet ja sidet, mis ulatub kaugemale kui etendus ise.

4. *A Safe Space for Male Bodies (Turvaline ruum meeskehadele)*. See festivali „Steirischer Herbst“ tellitud kohaspetsiifiline lavastus uuris militariseeritud mehelikkust mitteprofessionaalsete etendajate, peamiselt sõdurite pilgu läbi. Käsitledes haavatavuse, kangelaslikkuse ja sõja sotsiaal-poliitilise reaalsuse teemasid, toetas see töö poliitiliselt teadlikku post-psühhofüüsilist lähenemist. See teos oli kriitiline kommentaar ootustele, mida militariseeritud kontekstides meeste kehadele seatakse, uurides, kuidas need ootused kujundavad identiteeti ja agentsust.

Tulemused ja arutelu. Minu uurimistulemused näitavad, et teoreetilised arusaamad üksi ei saa viia ellu sisulisi muutusi; praktiline rakendamine toob esile ettenägematuid probleeme ja võimalusi. Juhtumiuuringud illustreerivad, kuidas postpsühhofüüsilised meetodid võivad improvisatsiooni ja mängulise uurimise kaudu integreerida tegutsejaid, objekte ja keskkondi.

Väidan, et teatriõpetuses tuleb sooritada põhimõtteline nihe n-ö struktureeritud õppimisruumide loomise suunas, mis seavad jäikade koolitusmeetodite asemel esikohale hoolivuse, tähelepanelikkuse ja omavahelise seotuse.

Arutelu rõhutab, kui oluline on edendada koolituskeskkonda, mis toetab nii individuaalset agentsust kui ka kollektiivset teadlikkust, võimaldades näitlejatel tundlikult reageerida ümbritseva keskkonna keerukusele. See muutus ei ole kasulik mitte ainult näitlejatele, vaid parandab ka publiku kogemust, ajendades neid süvenema materjali ja esitatud teemadesse.

Kokkuvõte. Näitlejakoolituse transformatiivne visioon. Uurimistöö tulemused viitavad sellele, et psühhofüüsilise treeningu lähenemisviise, mis seavad esikohale inimese tegevuse ja individuaalse eneseväljenduse, tuleb arendada, et hõlmata laiemat arusaama seotusest – sellist, mis tunnustab mitteinimlike olendite, keskkonna ja tehnoloogia rolli.

1. Holistilise raamistiku omaksvõtt

Minu järeltuste keskmes on vajadus võtta omaks holistiline raamistik, mis soodustab sügavamat seost näitleja, tema keha ja ümbritseva materiaalse maailma vahel. Postpsühhofüüsilise lähenemise omaksvõtmine võimaldab sügavamalt uurida etendust mõjutavat suhete dünaamikat. See vaatenurk seab kahtluse alla inimese ja maailma vahelise dihhotoomia, kutsudes meid üles tunnustama loomingulise võrgustiku kõigile elementidele omast elujõudu ja agentsust. Uurimus rõhutab, et kui näitlejad suhtlevad objektide ja keskkondade kui aktiivsete osalejatega, mitte pelgalt taustaga, avavad nad end paljudele loomingulistele võimalustele, mis ületavad traditsioonilisi piire.

2. Hoolivuse ja tähelepanelikkuse roll

Hoolivuse rõhutamine nii enda kui ka materiaalse maailma suhtes ilmneb tõhusa näitlejakoolituse keskse põhimõttena. Antud uurimus näitab, et hoolivuse kultiveerimine võimaldab näitlejatel navigeerida oma emotsionaalsete ja füüsiliste kogemuste keerukuses, edendades samal ajal ühist tegutsemistunnet oma kaasnäitlejatega ja keskkonnaga, millega nad kaudselt suhtlevad. Hoolimisest saab poliitiline akt, mille aluseks on tähelepanelik kuulamine ja radikaalne empaatia, mis julgustab näitlejaid süvitsi suhtuma ümbritsevasse keskkonda ja kehastatud narratiividesse.

3. Vajadus uute pedagoogiliste lähenemisviiside järele

Käesoleva uurimuse tulemused nõuavad teatriõppes kasutatavate pedagoogiliste lähenemisviiside olulist muutmist. Traditsioonilised koolitusmeetodid isoleerivad õpilasi sageli nende sotsiaal-materiaalsest kontekstist, tugevdades individualismi tunnet, mis võib takistada nende võimet osaleda tõhusalt koostööl põhinevates praktikates. Kehtestades struktureeritud õppimisruumi, mis seab esikohale ühise tegutsemise ja omavahelise seotuse, saavad haridustöötajad luua keskkonda, mis julgustab õpilasi uurima oma identiteeti etendajatenä, jäädes samal ajal tundlikuks ümbritseva maailma keerukuse suhtes. See muutus on väga oluline, et valmistada näitlejaid ette, et nad suudaksid orienteeruda tänapäeva teatri mitmekülgsetes tegelikkuses, kus piirid lava ja maailma vahel on üha enam hägustunud.

4. Agentsuse ja intiimsuse määratluse laiendamine

Loovtööde kaudu olen tuvastanud vajaduse laiendada näitlejate koolituse raames meie määratlusi agentsusest ja intiimsusest. Traditsioonilistes raamistikutes võrdsustatakse tegutsemine sageli individuaalse eneseväljenduse ja kontrolliga; käesolev uurimus pooldab aga nüansirikkamat arusaama, mis tunnistab kõigi etendusprotsessis osalevate üksuste vastastikust sõltuvust. Tunnistades mitteinimlike osalejate, sealhulgas objektide, keskkondade ja tehnoloogiliste liidete agentsust, saame edendada dialoogi selle üle, mida tähendab etenduses kohalolek. Samamoodi tuleb ümber hinnata intiimsuse mõiste, et hõlmata etendajate ja nende materiaalse keskkonna vahelisi suhteid, rõhutades emotsionaalseid ja psühholoogilisi seoseid, mis ulatuvad kaugemale inimsuhetest.

Kokkuvõttes pooldatakse käesolevas doktoritöös näitlejakoolituse transformatiivset nägemust – sellist, mis hõlmab komplekssust, vastastikust seotust ja hoolivust kui aluspõhimõtteid. Liikudes traditsioonilistest raamidest kaugemale ja võttes arvesse materiaalse maailma elujõulisust, saame kasvatada uue põlvkonna näitlejaid, kes ei ole mitte ainult oskuslikud näitlejad, vaid ka empaatilised ja pühendunud kodanikud, kes on valmis toime tulema kiiresti muutuva maailma väljakutsetega. See teekond ei ole pelgalt näitlejakoolituse ümberkujundamine, vaid selle ümbermääratlemine, mida tähendab etendamine maailmas, kus kõik olendid – nii inimlikud kui ka mitteinimlikud – on lahutamatult seotud.

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Appendix 1. A Set of Practices

In the following, I would like to present, as an example, the post-psychophysical training I developed for a group of actors a year after the conclusion of this research. The training was conducted over the course of one month and produced several notable results: it enabled the performers to bond and create an intimate atmosphere that allowed them to generate material based on principles related to the sensoriality and materiality of bodies and objects. It fostered a space of continuous learning, where personal input could be offered without ever feeling constrained by standardization. Performers naturally began to nourish their own experiential space, taking care of their bodies and remaining deeply attuned to their own needs, while modulating and varying their strategies for engaging with assembling and disassembling in improvisation. It also stimulated a personal search for confidence in their ability to express themselves beyond traditional acting techniques. Perhaps most importantly, it trained performers to be attentive and caring toward their community, replacing values of competition and conflict with cooperation and silent support in the development of material.

The assemblage training took place in Narva, in preparation for the performance *Border Euphoria* (2023). Prior to the training, the process involved several acts of care. The working group, composed equally of performers and Narva residents, was formed through a series of workshops. At the conclusion of these workshops, we asked ourselves: Which bodies felt a connection during the various exercises? What might be the source of this positive feeling? Based on the performers' responses, we retraced what we felt was the network of care and assembled the group. We then repeatedly visited one of the abandoned factories in Baltijetz, spending days exploring the spaces and archiving the materials left to decay in the offices. Finally, we selected a space, carefully cleaned it, and transformed it into our training ground and archive.



Photo 26. The rehearsal room in Baltijeez, on day 1. (Kremm 2023)



Photo 27. The act of care: cleaning the room and bringing in the archive. (Kremm 2023)



Photo 28. A moment inside the training routine, day 8. (Kremm 2023)

Once rehearsals began, we set a timeframe and a maximum duration for the training. We initially gathered in the space where I led the training for the first few days—just long enough for everyone to grasp the unfolding plan—after which I handed over responsibility to the group, allowing the collective to develop the training in the days that followed.

What is needed:

The training requires a space where actors can freely move their bodies; while it can be a black box, it doesn't have to be. The floor needs to be clean, as the training begins on the floor. It is advisable to have an amplifier available to stream music tracks during the training if needed. The duration of the workshop is set to one hour, and a timer may be required to signal the end.

Actors should wear comfortable clothing. In the first sessions, they are not required to bring anything else. However, as time progresses, they may be encouraged to bring items into the space that they feel would complement their training.

Most of the information regarding the training can be shared through a conversation on the first day. This discussion may take some time, but performers must absorb enough details to begin working independently as soon as possible. Certain principles should be established to ensure the work evolves in a shared direction. Therefore, it is essential to present the information about the training in the form of an open dialogue, allowing everyone to contribute and arrive at a

collective understanding. Guidance, in the form of side coaching, is needed initially to help the participants find their way within the structure of the training.

Instructions and Themes for Training

The overarching aim of this practice is to create a shared space where everyone trains in absolute freedom, yet within a clear structure. This structure is defined by physical behaviour and is articulated through three key actions that are continuously repeated between explorations: stepping out of the current action, identifying a new location in the space to begin a new exploration, and walking toward that point to allow one's attention to freely wander and hook onto a new starting point.

The practice must be conducted without direct interaction among practitioners. The materials emerging from different improvisational threads connect organically, as the process recognizes that for a true assemblage to manifest, the sum of its parts should express a potential that would be inaccessible to the individual components or isolated intentions. Performers may intersect with one another's material when connections arise naturally. No performer should dominate the space, although temporary dominance may occur organically. There are no strict rules about what belongs or does not belong in this improvisational space. All strategies of creation are welcomed and encouraged.

The material developed during the training should emerge from an emphasis on the flow of information between two polarities, without any intention to curate or control the outcome. These polarities, always filtered through an act of care, may include, for example:

- The performer and her body
- The performer and the floor
- The performer and an object within the space
- The performer and an external element beyond the space
- The performer and emotion
- The performer and memory
- The performer and a memorized material

The choice of these polarities is made through a process of attentive listening. To cultivate this state of awareness, the performer must meet the surrounding materialities at eye level, finding

a position that reflects equality among the various voices and vibrations present in the space. Anything that captures the performer's attention can and should be used as a starting point for an exploration imbued with dignity.

To maintain the work within the realm of artistic practice, performers are given specific parameters, or "latitudes," to ensure that the material remains safe for the performer and evokes an aesthetic reaction:

- The material created should retain a fragmented nature, embodying qualities of ambivalence and indeterminacy.
- The development of material can be explored through variations in speed and accessibility.
- The flow of information generated through the material defines the relationships within the space, transiently shaping the power dynamics.

Once the principles of the training are established, the community of performers can enter the space, allowing for different paces to emerge without imposing rigid discipline from the outset. Instead, what is necessary for the development of the training will gradually surface day by day.

The emphasis in this training is on starting from a place of vulnerability and attentiveness. The focus shifts dramatically from viewing the performer as an independent, self-sufficient entity to understanding the human as an interconnected being, reliant on various agents—both human and non-human—who care for and nurture them. This approach fosters attentiveness toward the needs, voices, and spaces of others. The practice thus takes on a political essence, promoting an idea of restored connection with the often overlooked or silent agents of the world. It offers a positive vision, transcends sentimentalism, and avoids notions of victimhood by recognizing integrity and dignity in everything, as anything in the world has the power to draw attention.

Appendix 2. Radical Attentiveness

In an effort to inspire actors to engage in a practice of care, I developed a series of exercises aimed at deepening their awareness of the body and its relationship with the environment. Here below a few examples.

THE LIGHTNING:

Performers begin by crawling on the floor, allowing their attention to move freely in every direction. Like lizards navigating their surroundings, they respond to external stimuli. At certain moments, they focus their attention on a point where it naturally settles, then release it, continuing their exploration.

Despite its simplicity, this exercise is designed to highlight how an actor can continuously find stimuli in their environment. Even the smallest insights and sensory cues can serve as prompts for action.

To further develop this exercise, performers can begin by finding a comfortable position on the floor, allowing themselves to reach a state of calm and peace. With closed eyes, they are encouraged to let go of any attachment to thoughts, bodily sensations, or their surroundings, projecting their consciousness beyond the material world. At this stage, the performer is prompted to connect with an immaterial energy field and invited to move freely in response to whatever sensations this connection generates.

The key difference between these two approaches is that the first emphasizes the material aspect of reality, while the second explores the wavy, intangible dimension of experience.

THE CARE Structure:

Performers begin by generating a list of hugs, gestures of affection, nods, and distant greetings, which they then rehearse, experimenting with the variability of these gestures. Four performers take their places in the space, listening attentively. One by one, three performers enter and begin improvising within this vocabulary, both receiving and generating gestures of care through bodily interactions.

At the end of the exercise, the performer reflects with the tutor on their improvisation, considering aspects such as aesthetics, relational dynamics, consent, and dramaturgy. They then apply the feedback to a second round of improvisation, refining their approach.

The exercise is repeated a third time, with a deeper focus on generating new material through a broader reflection on aesthetics, relational dynamics, consent, and the dramaturgy of care. At this stage, the concept of *environment*—not merely as a backdrop but as an active participant in the creative process—is introduced.

Performers are invited to reflect on what conditions allow them to be present in the space and invest individual effort in performing a lively act. What other human or non-human efforts contribute to the network of circumstances enabling their performance?

Finally, performers are asked to research and identify these interconnected efforts and integrate them into a new performative act, expanding their awareness of how relational and environmental factors shape artistic expression.

Falling in Love with One's Knee:

Deepening Presence Through Attention and Energy. In this exercise, actors position themselves in space and allow their attention to settle on a specific part of their body—such as a hand, knee, or ear. For the next hour, they dedicate themselves entirely to rediscovering this body part, allowing it to become active without relying on external stimuli. The practice encourages maintaining space for subtle, nearly invisible actions, cultivating patience as they wait for an internal desire or impulse to emerge.

Time and atmosphere are crucial to this process. It is recommended to create a meditative space in which the performer can lose their sense of time, fully immersing in the experience. It is natural for performers to become momentarily caught in their emotions or thoughts. However, in the reflective conversation that follows, the tutor's role is not to analyze these personal reactions but to guide the performer toward a deeper relational process—one that enhances their presence with the chosen body part.

In the next step, the performer selects an inanimate object and repeats the exercise, extending their awareness beyond their own body.

Finally, the performer takes the exploration outside the space, seeking specific objects, materials, or natural phenomena that generate a perceivable field of energy. The key question becomes: *How can the performer acknowledge and integrate this independent source of energy into a performative act?*

This final phase challenges the performer to expand their sensitivity to external forces, bridging the connection between inner impulses and the external world, ultimately enriching their presence in performance.