

Future Laboratory: Artistic Research in Theatre

A Casebook

**FUTURE LABORATORY:
ARTISTIC RESEARCH IN THEATRE**

A Casebook



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FOREWORD

ETC Casebooks – Sharing Insights from Cutting- Edge European Theatre Projects

BY

HEIDI WILEY

It is a pleasure to introduce Future Laboratory: Artistic Research in Theatre – A Casebook, a collection of essays that captures the spirit, challenges and transformative outcomes of the European project entitled ‘Future Laboratory – A Performing Arts Network Connecting Artists and Audiences to Find the European Narratives of Tomorrow’.

The Future Laboratory project is a shining example of the benefits of European collaboration. The initiative brought together 12 partner organisations from 10 European countries across a two-year period to explore new ways of fostering artistic research, nurturing emerging talent and identifying the pressing narratives of our time. Crucially, the artists were given space for open process-based artistic research that was unconnected to the demand for specific results.

The 15 artists selected for the project worked closely with participating theatres and cultural venues to facilitate meaningful artistic dialogue with sometimes hard-to-reach communities. Through these residencies and sharing knowledge and contacts, the artists developed bold ideas about the sorts of narratives that speak directly to the challenges and realities of their local contexts. What stands out in the essays of this casebook is the diversity of approaches: while each person focused on a range of societal issues, including climate change, social justice and identity, the individual research practices are refreshingly distinct. The importance of investing in artistic research and creating safe spaces where emerging voices can shape the future of theatre also emerges as a clear conclusion.

For ETC, this project resonates strongly with our new programme of activities, **BREAK THE MOULD (2024–2028)**,

which is co-funded by the European Union. Alongside work on digitality, the climate crisis and European theatre, this programme prioritises diversity and the development of the next generation of artists. We are therefore thrilled to share what has been learned from the Future Laboratory alongside results from other ETC applied research and European projects with the broader creative community through our 'A Casebook' series. The series contributes to the growth of the body of knowledge about pioneering creative practices on participatory, digital and youth theatre.

I would like to extend my heartfelt thanks to Tom Leick-Burns, Artistic Director of Les Théâtres de la Ville de Luxembourg – and also Secretary of the ETC Board of Directors – for leading this extraordinary project and for inviting ETC to collaborate. It is my hope that the essays and reflections on the Future Laboratory contained in this casebook inspire theatres, policymakers and artists to embrace experimentation and open up a dialogue with local communities as they seek narratives of the future.

Heidi Wiley is Executive Director of the European Theatre Convention (ETC).



Final event, Luxembourg, November 2024

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FOREWORD

Future Laboratory – Seven Years of International Collaboration and Learning

BY

TOM LEICK-BURNS

I am very grateful that we can share our experience and insights from the Future Laboratory with you thanks to the ETC and its 'A Casebook' series. Leaving the well-trodden path behind and trying something new can be a daunting experience, but when it is done with others who share the same vision, it can be full of invaluable lessons, unexpected rewards, and create a better understanding of one's organisation as well as the impact of collaboration itself.

This Casebook is designed to equip you with knowledge that we did not have when we started a conversation with a small group of longstanding partners about new types of international collaboration back in December 2017. Even after many more meetings (and a pandemic) during which we formulated the concept of an international research residency programme for emerging artists, we still did not know what the experience would be like. It was only from autumn 2022 onwards, when the project was launched and the residencies began, that we realised that the Future Laboratory was a unique European experiment in creative collaboration.

Over the past two-and-a-half years, our consortium of cultural institutions and emerging artists from all over Europe have worked across borders and navigated complex social and artistic landscapes to craft stories that resonate with the diverse communities we want to serve. Together, we have strived to cultivate a new language in creative disciplines, addressing themes of inclusion and shared European identity. By collaborating closely with local communities and addressing issues like social exclusion, we aimed to explore artistic concepts that not only enhance accessibility and representation on our stages but that also resonate deeply with our audiences.

We believed from the start that supporting artistic research and providing time and space for it was crucial for artists to develop their projects. What we had not anticipated was how crucial it was to have a comprehensive care framework in place when connecting artists with underrepresented communities, and that co-creation, transparency and open communication are central pillars in a project like this.

I would like to thank all the artists, cultural institutions and their teams, local associations, mentors, and project coaches as well as the many facilitators who supported the project at every stage for their commitment, patience and cooperation that made this first edition of the Future Laboratory a truly rewarding experience.

I hope this Casebook will serve as both a practical resource and an inspiring guide for theatres and performing arts professionals. In our aim to nurture the dialogue and deepen the connections with the diverse communities in our territories, it is crucial that we keep developing our institutions into open places where coming together, debate, inclusion and collective creativity are celebrated and where new voices and narratives can emerge.

Tom Leick-Burns is Artistic Director & General Manager of the Théâtres de la Ville de Luxembourg and Secretary of the ETC Board of Directors.



Tom Leick-Burns and Marc Marti,
Luxembourg, November 2024
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INTRODUCTION

Capturing the Many Voices of the Future Laboratory: A Practical Guide

BY

STEFANIE HUSEL & JEFF THOSS

This Casebook accompanies and documents the Future Laboratory over almost two years of its history. As a reflection of one of the project's core goals – to promote emerging artists by giving them ample time and means to do research for their future work and discuss it in various contexts – it is almost exclusively artists who appear as authors in this Casebook. All the people who were interested in presenting their project, its development, or their general experience in the Future Laboratory were given the opportunity to contribute.

Readers can find short essays by seven artists in the following pages. They provide insights into the heterogeneity of the artists' approaches and topics as well as the different journeys they embarked on. Since multi-year projects are bound to evolve, sometimes drastically, we have indicated the approximate time in which each piece was written. Short biographies of all artists, including those who did not contribute to the casebook, can be found on pages 134–137.

A second, parallel track of this book consists of compilations of statements we collected from those who had other roles in the Future Laboratory: such as representatives of the participating institutions who were on the executive board or acted as project coaches for artists, and artists or researchers who served as local mentors for Future Laboratory artists during their research residencies. We interviewed them – mostly via video call, sometimes via email – to discuss the various stages and elements of the Future Laboratory project: the creation and original goals of the project, the open call, the residencies and masterclasses, etc. We also asked them about obstacles encountered along the way and the solutions that were implemented.

The interviewees' statements are grouped thematically into chapters that sketch out a rough chronology of the project. The material we collected on residencies and masterclasses proved so extensive that we split these up over several chapters. Interviews were conducted between May 2023 and September 2024 and, like the artist essays, they represent a snapshot of the Future Laboratory in progress. The interviewees' bios, as well as short descriptions of the participating institutions, can be found on pages 138–144.

In two cases, we did things a bit differently. The essay by Odete, one of the artists, is based on an interview with her. Conversely, the statement by Elisabeth Schilling, the project coach for Sára Märc, is presented as a miniature essay alongside the text of the artist she coached. We explain the reasons for this in the respective chapters.

We hope that readers will enjoy reading through the multifaceted reflections on this unique project. On pages 126–132 we conclude with an epilogue that summarises the most central experiences of the Future Laboratory and provides an overview of lessons learned and best practice recommendations.

Stefanie Husel is a lecturer at the Department of Theatre Studies at Johannes Gutenberg-Universität Mainz, Germany.

Jeff Thoss is a writer and translator based in Graz, Austria.



Elena Rabkina's residency at Teatro Municipal do Porto, May 2024

© João Octávio Peixoto

ESSAY

Green Spaces Reimagined

BY

TEJA ROT

Winter 2024

The creative transformation of urban spaces requires experimenting with different models of revitalisation, activating specific parts of neighbourhoods and employing diverse technologies while coming up with real and effective community-based solutions. A place should, first and foremost, enable its inhabitants to have a more engaged experience of the city. We cannot lose sight of the need to capture and understand the cultural and environmental aspects of cities, and this is true for buildings as well as landscapes. A city's meaning, stories and cultural resonance are all elements that provide value and social worth, and there is a growing recognition of the need to curate all this information.

My research in the Future Laboratory strongly relates to reclaiming urban green spaces, and transforming them into vital parts of habitat, identifying the gaps towards regenerative development and nurturing community engagement with these spaces to shape sustainable futures. I would like to empower people in the territory to become active facilitators of a well-needed change within their urban surroundings. In this sense, 'gamicipation' (i.e. participation made better through play and games) and gaming have proven to be effective means for engaging all communities, including vulnerable groups, to achieve certain goals, regardless of the place where the project is implemented.

An essential part of my research is designing experiments or urban game scenarios in three locations: Liège, Milan and Madrid. I design projects rooted in physicality and our embodied experience of diverse spatial configurations. In recent years, I have become increasingly aware that it is more essential than ever for us to re-establish our connection with our urban surroundings, the environment

we inhabit. I believe that games can facilitate this process in many meaningful ways.

Urban games¹ can be used to address the protocols and stewardship of the commons. Their purpose is to get a variety of community representatives, creative professionals and other stakeholders in the territory to participate in community visioning sessions. This involves them in the investigating process and in shaping a participatory and humane urban sensorium. I believe that urban games are a good alternative participatory practice: a tool to create human bonds and encourage individuals to take up active roles in the city.

Throughout my research, I aim to facilitate supportive environments for co-created community action in safe(r) spaces. I am co-creating alternative shared spaces that have the potential to level up human connections, ones that allow people to be more present with one another and become agents of change in their environment.

By approaching the topic of urban green areas from a regenerative design perspective my research focuses on seeing a place as a living organism: never static, always (d)evolving and in flux. It is dynamic and moving. I am learning to ask what a place is calling for from me. In this way, I can enter in a dynamic conversation with a place, learning to listen, paying attention to its patterns and ever-changing nuances, and find appropriate ways to serve it.

¹ One example is the game Sprites of Meadowlands, which addresses the exploration of hidden spaces. I developed it for several locations in Europe. It starts with a walk and addresses all the details that can characterise the morphology of a garden/park in a specific location. Playing with what is hidden and what is shown, the project questions one's perception of reality and social practices in the city.



Project Genesis and Goals

The statements compiled in this section show the ideas behind the creation of the Future Laboratory; the interviewees reflect on how the project was originally planned and how it developed up to its approval.

We had been thinking for a while about different ways to develop the classic co-production model, which typically involves a financial contribution from the Théâtres de la Ville de Luxembourg towards a production that is then presented in Luxembourg. The aim was to develop a more collaborative approach to co-production. While we were committed to continue supporting theatre productions, we wanted to place an emphasis on exchange and dialogue. For example, it could involve supporting local artists, developing talent or arranging residencies, workshops and other opportunities for exchange.

After our initial conversations with various partners (before the pandemic), we realised that while theatres and institutions across Europe may have very different ways of producing, they have some core priorities in common. Therefore, we sought to create a project that was not going to involve producing as such, but that would focus on those topics and priorities that we share as cultural institutions.

Tom Leick-Burns, Board Member

We started by gathering representatives from European institutions and thinking together: What is co-producing? What does it mean to support an artist? What does an artist need? What should an institution do for an artist? Already early on, the project was about giving artists the opportunity and time to do research all over Europe. Then the pandemic hit and we saw that the emerging artists were the ones who suffered the most. So we concluded that we needed to take care of them and that the project had to address their needs.

Martin Lorenté, Board Member

The first preparatory meeting I participated in took place two or three weeks before the COVID-19 pandemic broke out. It was a different world; we were meeting each other and exchanging ideas in a context in which the word 'future' had a completely different meaning. Soon, we were forced to interrupt our discussions. When the meetings resumed, we had to think about emerging artists and the future precisely at the time when theatre itself had to imagine its future – we were crossing a threshold.

The Future Laboratory defined itself amidst the reflections on the essence of the performing arts that were taking place at the time. The project reflects on the future of the performing arts with relation to their communities. We focused especially on the ways in which theatres involve their respective city's communities and about the characteristics of each city and theatre, about the place of theatre in our lives – all of this was brought about by the pandemic.

Claudio Longhi
Board Member

We had to ask ourselves: What is an emerging artist? Or rather: Who is an artist? And who is an emerging artist? I have the feeling that the project changed its perspective, or at least that I changed mine as the project went along. In the beginning, I had more 'structured' artists in mind, artists who are young but already have a career. But now, we have artists in the Future Laboratory who are at a point where they are deciding whether they are artists or not. The reflection on the various 'prototypes' of artists influenced which theatres participated in the project.

Claudio Longhi
Board Member

It is an important process to open the doors of a theatre as large as Staatstheater Mainz – to open the doors of German theatres in general – in order to think about how to make theatre more permeable in the sense that more people can participate in it. But it is a very slow process on a structural level, in part because the funding bodies do not necessarily demand such measures. In other countries, the way theatres or cultural institutions should change is sometimes more prescribed.

Jörg Vorhaben
Board Member/Project Coach

There was a key moment during one of our meetings at the Schaubühne in Berlin.¹ We already knew we wanted to focus on research and create an international residency programme. What changed was that we decided to let the artists lead the process and tell us what we as institutions should be doing rather than us commissioning projects that we considered relevant. Over the course of three residences, the artists would research the social context of our institutions, meet with underserved and underrepresented communities and investigate their relationship to the theatre: why some people might attend performances while others did not – and why? The research aimed to identify urgent and important narratives that would provide the basis of a project idea that the artists would present at the end of the Future Laboratory. The aim of these projects was to enable the theatres to increase representation on their stages and reach out to new audiences.

¹ The Schaubühne am Lehniner Platz – although not part of the final Future Laboratory partners – participated in the project's development, and one of the preparatory meetings took place in Berlin.

Tom Leick-Burns
Board Member

We asked each institution – there were eventually 12 partners from 10 European countries – to outline their main development objectives for the next five to ten years. The most common ones were: inclusion, audience development, equality and diversity in audiences and narratives.

To these ideas of social inclusion, new narratives and research in different cities we add the very personal approach of each artist. We must constantly remind ourselves not to anticipate what the results will be. It is also an experiment for us, who do not have all the answers.

The initial goals were to support emerging European artists, especially after the complicated pandemic period, while also trying to connect the cultural institutions involved in a dialogue with vulnerable or less visible local communities. It arose out of the intention to help the development of artistic projects that are rooted in research, which in turn connects them to the relevant themes of today's society. It also aimed to propose a model of best practices concerning the financial retribution of the research process, which is usually still neglected in theatres despite being vital for an artist of our times.

Gianina Cărbunariu
Board Member

ESSAY

Coaching as 'Intensive Listening'

BY

ELISABETH SCHILLING

Summer 2024

Part of the support provided by the Future Laboratory consisted in assigning each artist a project coach. These were established practitioners who guided them on their entire journey and worked with them in between residencies, supporting their research as well as their learning and capacity building. The texts by Elisabeth Schilling and Sára Márc show how the dialogue between the artists and their respective project coaches ideally took place. We have therefore decided to print these two texts next to each other.

I can describe my work as a project coach as 'intensive listening'. When I learnt about and started looking into Sára's research in 2022, I was both surprised and deeply inspired. I had never seen artistic research on non-human storytelling in the way that Sára proposed. After the first meetings, it quickly became clear that there was no hierarchy between the two of us, that we would learn from each other. We complemented each other very well: not only in our artistic research, but also in our methods and approaches.

We met regularly online to discuss Sára's thoughts and ideas. As Sára's strength is clearly rooted in academic research, I always encouraged them to include the physical experience of coal and the architecture and environment of coal-fired power plants in their research – a perspective that I, as a dancer and choreographer, regularly incorporate into mine.

I was and still am impressed by Sára's multi-dimensional thinking, which for me expresses a very contemporary approach: the world is too complex to select and use just one lens for research. Everything is interconnected, interdependent. The challenge is to find order in such complex entanglements; to be able to communicate them artistically without simplifying them. What media or formats can be found for this endeavour?

For me, the special thing about the Future Laboratory is that the different cultural views of Europe are united on the one hand and challenged on the other. We learn from each other, from residency to residency, from coal plant to coal plant, from community to community, from institution to institution. The 'business aspect' of the work (which is so often hushed up in artistic work) – the artistic research, the strategic networking, the goal-orientated thinking – came to the surface again and again in my quiet observation of the residency processes and the communication about the topic, and also with regard to Sára's long-term artistic work.

So I can say that my work as a project coach not only involved artistic aspects, but also encouraged strategic thinking in terms of the 'system' of art making, which includes ambition, the form you choose for the context you work in, and reflective thinking about the audience and the respective artistic institutions.



Sára Márc installing their final presentation, Luxembourg, November 2024
© Juliette Maes Bodart

ESSAY

More-Than- Carbon Imaginarities

BY

SÁRA MÄRC

Winter 2024

“What new disciplinary combinations and alliances are necessary under the pressure of Anthropogenic climate change?”

– Elizabeth Povinelli, *Geontologies* (2016)

“As long as we keep reproducing the same kind of language, the same kinds of scientific gatekeeping, the same kinds of stories about ‘our’ place in nature, we remain numb in the face of collapse.”

– Ida Bencke and Jørgen Bruhn, *Multispecies Storytelling in Intermedial Practices* (2022)

“How can narrative embody life in words and at the same time respect what we cannot know? [...] How does one tell impossible stories?”

– Saidiya Hartman, “*Venus in Two Acts*” (2018)

The abilities of language and writing are often cited as the qualities that set us apart from other animal species and the natural world in general. Whoever rules language rules the world – or, rather, creates it. Man (especially the white cis variety) is the one who writes history, stories and world orders. Everything else must then submit to this worldview or risk its demise.

However, the situation is not so simple and hopeless. Emancipatory, feminist, decolonial, indigenous, queer and post-humanist thinkers have been reminding us for decades that other worlds exist and, despite the dictates of mass culture, tell other stories in which other people and creatures have a voice. In these, the materials and characters that are usually overlooked and neglected actively co-create and re-write histories.

What stories do we tell about the relationship between men and coal? And why should we even bother with such stories in the 21st century?

The industrial burning of coal (and other fossil fuels) has significantly transformed society, economy and technology. But a conventional vision of progress, materialised in the extraction of coal, oil and gas, is increasingly dissolving into carbon dioxide emissions, devastated landscapes and contaminated water. Minerals that have taken hundreds of millions of years to form have become the wealth of men. From the mid-18th century onwards, the ‘planet provider’ became a ‘geological machine’, serving as a tool for production, profit, progress and the exploitation of the landscape as well as of human and non-human animals. The illusion that planet Earth is an infinite reservoir of energy awaiting human intervention has transformed the relationship between mankind and nature and given rise to a fossil culture: the ‘Capitalism of Carbon’ that became the geosocial infrastructure of modern society.

However, only a few decades after a new illusion of prosperity,¹ disillusionment came in the form of a climate crisis threat. In the second half of the 20th century, it became a reality, mainly in the so-called Global South, which had played no part in its creation. In the 21st century, the crisis ‘spread’ to the countries of the North, and now all of society is ‘struggling’ with droughts, floods, tornadoes, extreme heat or cold, mass extinction... The planet-machine has

(long since) reached its limit, or it seems that humans have started to figure this out in the Anthropocene era. Due to the ecological unsustainability and high cost (and unprofitability) of mining, coal mines have been closing since the 1980s and the world is looking for sustainable energy sources.

The story of men and coal is seemingly at its end. The mines are closed or soon will be.² While most fairy tales end with a wedding, we know that in reality there will be more years of coexistence and that there is no such thing as ‘living happily ever after’. Many people have lost their jobs, the ecosystem is ruined and the air is polluted. Through its ‘endless progress’ and fossil fuel culture, a part of humanity has triggered changes that will not end with the shutdown of mines.

Can new perspectives and more-than-human stories offer answers, or even comfort, for a dying planet?

Instead of ‘more-than-human’, you may use the terms ‘non-human’, ‘multi-species’, ‘interspecies’, or ‘post-human’. There might be slight differences in meaning, but generally, all these terms refer to entities that are not human as well as knowledge that challenges how Western society inhabits, controls and uses the planet and its communities. More-than-human storytelling is an effort to think – and narrate – with non-human beings. It could be an animal or plant, a

1 In 1896, Swedish scientist Svante Arrhenius first predicted that changes in the level of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere could significantly alter surface temperatures through the greenhouse effect. In 1938, Guy Callendar linked the increase in carbon dioxide in the Earth’s atmosphere to global warming. See <https://climate.nasa.gov/evidence/>.

2 The last Czech mines in the Moravian-Silesian region producing hard coal should close within two years. The lignite mines in the North Bohemia region are scheduled to close by 2038. There were 991 active coal mines in the US in 2022. In China in 2023, there were 3,092 coal-fired thermal plants. In the UK in 2023, there was a single mine operating, but there are plans to open one new mine.

How to GET TO
KNOW COAL ?

Fossils
"life-non-life bodies"

ENERGY
"valued body"

PIT PONY
"working body"

How to NARRATE
more-than-human
perspectives ?

COAL IS THE STORY

MORE-THAN-CARBON
IMAGINARIES
FIGURES :

GHOST ACRE
"mythical body"

CANARY
"sentinel body"

Toxins
"zombie body"

How to highlight
● socio-political aspects
of a non-living rock ?

How to relate to a rock ?



piece of rock or even a landscape, your computer, air pollution, or planet Earth itself.

What we are trying to achieve with more-than-human storytelling is to change, or at least challenge, our perspective and ways of living. It suggests that other worlds are possible, even present. The voices of more-than-humans, both living, dead and even non-living, might not be as audible and rational as ours, but their witnessing and ways of being still matter. They represent knowledge that Western culture has lost if it ever had it.

My artistic research is a deep dive into the intricate depths of coal mining history, which is full of empty and extracted shafts, collapsed ceilings, assumptions and lost lives. Without neglecting human heroes – miners – I focus on the testimony of those who do not speak a human language and perhaps do not even understand one. Most of them are long dead, some have ‘come to life’ millions of years after their deaths, and yet they continue to influence all of us, including those who have not yet been born.

How can we get to know coal?

In *Geontologies*, Elizabeth Povinelli sets out new ‘figures’ that are imaginative manifestations of contemporary processes, strategies and connections that affect life on the planet. These ‘figures’, which have social, ecological and political influence, are not only living beings (‘bios’) but also non-living or dead ones (‘geos’). Through their existence and action, they transform hierarchies built on dualities such as life and death or subject and object. They are thus certain pieces of evidence, witnesses and agents of an order that operates outside the order of human time and

capabilities, even though these two ‘worlds’ undoubtedly intersect and influence each other.

Povinelli’s work inspired me to set up a few important non-human ‘figures’ connected to coal origin, extraction and production. We may understand them as metaphors, tools or archetypes that contain a significant part of the more-than-human story about coal. These ‘figures’ flow in time and space and carry stories that are forgotten or overlooked. I chose them as relevant symptoms of the periods in which coal is or was present and active as geological, social, cultural, political and philosophical phenomena. More specific ‘figures’ could be found on the topic, some of them may even be more accurate, but these are ‘figures’ I encountered during my research. They are derived from my subjective understanding, relating and thinking with coal.

More-than-Carbon Imaginaries is speculative, long-term artistic research in which I try to awaken the forgotten non-human characters of coal mining. I seek to find and recognise the processes and strategies that accompany the existence and extraction of fossil fuel, to which we owe both civilizational progress and social and climate injustice. I aim to convey a more-than-human narrative where these imaginative ‘figures’ and mining’s non-human animals can tell their version of the history of coal mining and, if we are lucky, offer possible alternative futures.

Translated from the Czech by Nathan Fields and the author.

Call Creation and Artist Selection

A call for applications for the Future Laboratory was launched online in April 2022. The selection process lasted until July 2022, when 15 participating artists were announced. Each was allocated a dedicated partner institution in the country they applied from or one of the project's partner institutions. At the end of this section, we have included an excerpt from the call for applications and from the application form that several of the interviewees mentioned.

One thing I remember all through the process were questions of equality, inclusion and diversity. There was a lot of debate around the language used to talk about it, ways of collecting data, and requirements regarding protected characteristics.¹

¹ The term is used in the UK to refer to age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, and sexual orientation.

Mathew Russell

Board Member/Project Coach

We got to a point where we asked people to write about diversity and inclusion based on their experience, their approach and what they want to get out of this project, rather than thinking about their characteristics as individuals.

Mathew Russell

When it came to the eligibility criteria, we debated the concept of 'emerging artist' and discarded age as a criterion in favour of professional experience (two to five years). For the evaluation criteria, a very detailed scoring chart was drawn up by the working group. In addition to ensuring fairness towards candidates, this was an essential phase in defining the shared values and principles of the project. Perhaps it would have been even more beneficial to go further and include artists in the working group. It seems to me that this prerequisite is necessary for a project involving different countries with different histories, cultures and ways of thinking, particularly in connection with diversity and inclusion.

Magali Dupin, Board Member

We were looking for artists who were passionate about research and who had experience working with communities in their artistic work. The open call really seemed to touch a nerve and had a resounding response, with 539 applications from all over Europe. The feedback we received from the artists was positive. They recognised the uniqueness of the initiative and the institutions' genuine care for artists. They also acknowledged the importance of research as an integral part of the artistic process that deserves to be paid.

Tom Leick-Burns
Board Member

At the Comédie de Reims, we involved an artist associated with the theatre in the selection process. As a result, all our assessments and marks for the applications were the fruit of highly fertile and enlightening exchanges between the artist and the institution. Involving artists from the very start of the selection process could be made more widespread, to avoid an opposition between institutions' and artists' approaches right from the start of the Future Laboratory. This was one of the major difficulties we had to face, not in the residencies but in the masterclasses.

Magali Dupin

Because we did not expect that sort of volume, the selection process we used proved quite daunting. The application was a mix between a traditional form, a CV and a questionnaire. Applicants had to answer the type of questions you might ask in an interview. In the second round, they were also asked about the places they wanted to go to and how those places connect to their work. That was helpful; it was driving people to address what we wanted to know. It was also good in terms of equality of opportunity: your perception could not be skewed by meeting somebody, how they look, how they behave, etc. But if you have a spreadsheet with 500 people's data, what you see is lots and lots of columns and lots and lots of names. It was a bit colourless, a bit flat. We were not seeing clear examples of work, and we could not really capture the applicants' spirit. I would have liked an opportunity to meet people. I was pleased to see how much we could draw out in the application about equality, diversity and inclusion, but it felt quite technical as a process.

In reflection, I also wonder whether the call lacked specificity. We could have been more focused on protected characteristics; stricter criteria might have led to an even more representative set of applicants. It is interesting to note that in terms of some protected characteristics, there is a good breadth of coverage in the project. We did everything we could to open up the Future Laboratory to the widest range of people possible. And we always looked at ways of ensuring that all of Europe was included, since not all European countries are represented in the institutional partnership.

Mathew Russell

Excerpt from the call for applications

A network of twelve European partners is launching Future Laboratory, a pilot project of research residencies on the topic of social inclusion throughout Europe. 15 emerging artists will be selected to conduct research in three residencies in three different cities and will benefit from a career development program including mentoring, master-classes and [the opportunity to present their] concept idea for a production to an international network at the end of the Laboratory.

Excerpt from the application form

How would you like to develop your professional/artistic career in the next five years?

Why are you interested in working on a research project in three different countries?

Have you had experiences in using research work in your own artistic process? If not, to what extent are you interested in using research work in the artistic process?

How do you intend to use research work in your artistic process in the future and for this project?

Have you had experiences working with audiences and local communities? If not, to what extent are you interested in working with audiences and local communities?

How do you intend to work with audiences and local communities in the future and for this project?

Have you had experiences working on the issues of diversity and inclusion?

If not, to what extent are you interested in working on the issues of diversity and inclusion?

How do you intend to work on the issues of diversity and inclusion in the future and for this project?

ESSAY

Contemporary Ethnic Minorities: The Perspective of a Researcher

BY

EWA MIKUŁA

Winter 2024

As an Upper Silesian,¹ I have been asking myself for some time: Who am I as a contemporary representative of a minority? Can we find other ways to describe minorities than with a set of stereotypes or blame-based stories that cut us off from others and a colourful tradition? Does my local identity still have a raison d'être in the age of globalization? Is it even worth looking back on 'byproducts of history' such as ethnic minorities when Europe is facing challenges such as migration, war or the climate crisis?

I wanted to see if young people from other minorities are asking themselves similar questions. In particular, I was interested in minorities that do not have their own nation-state. In the framework of the Future Laboratory, I had the opportunity to visit three locations: Teatrul Tineretului in Piatra Neamț (Romania), Théâtre national de Strasbourg (France), and Les Théâtres de la Ville de Luxembourg (Luxembourg).

This journey led to many interesting observations and new relations. Nevertheless, in this short piece I want to focus not on outcomes but on the methods and challenges of artistic research that emerged during the residencies. And I would like to address the questions I had to ask myself before I started this journey. All this would not have been possible without the involvement and support of many people, some of whom I mention along the way.

My first residency took place at Teatrul Tineretului. Although I had prior experience working in documentary theatre as a dramaturge and director, I did not have any

¹ Upper Silesia is a region in southern Poland that is part of the historical region of Silesia, inhabited by Silesian people who have their unique culture, history and language. It is known for its heavy industry, especially coal mining and metallurgy.

experience working with minorities. I felt the need to settle and define my position: Who am I coming to Piatra Neamț as and why? And how should I handle this task properly in just 12 days (which is obviously not enough time to dive into the field, learn the language and be able to understand the singularities of a place)?

In Romania, I wanted to learn about one of the biggest minorities of the country, the Roma. I decided to conduct interviews with the local community and record the material with the consent of my interlocutors.

But what does the 'community' I wanted to visit and the 'identity' I wanted to ask about even mean? The Roma, like many others, are a very diverse group. Moreover, being born in a certain context and with a certain heritage does not mean that one feels part of it. The Roma had in previous years often been addressed by art projects that did not seem to improve their community's situation. This caused mistrust towards such initiatives.

After preparing with my local mentor, anthropologist Valer Simion Cosma, I decided to narrow down my research focus and use music as a framework as it is strongly connected to the history and heritage of a Roma group called the Lăutari. Musical traditions are passed down in families as a love language; music is connected with identity but also with slavery. The most important decision was to ask only about music, never about identity, which might have been perceived as offensive. I let the interviewees decide whether they wanted to link music to Roma identity, which many did. Initially, I was interested in the younger generation, but then expanded my reach and approached people of all ages. Finally, there was the matter of translation. To

make conversation as smooth and convenient as possible for interlocutors, I adopted the following method with my local mentor: we established the questions before the interview, then the main part of the conversation was led by the local mentor in Romanian with a simultaneous interpreter present so I could follow. Afterwards, I had a chance to ask additional questions.

At the end of the residency, there was a presentation, called Open Lab, in which I shared what I had learned. The audience was made up of theatre workers, people interested in the topic and the Romanians and Roma I had spoken to during my research. The second part was planned as a conversation, which held some surprises for me: group dynamics changed and the Roma representatives were curious about similarities and differences between Silesian and Roma minorities. In the end, it was them who interviewed me, allowing us to become equals in our curiosity about each other.

Luxembourg was not my first choice because I thought it did not have any ethnic minorities. Instead, I focused on the Luxembourgish language, which was officially recognized in 1984, having previously been considered a German dialect. Currently it is one of three official languages in Luxembourg, together with French and German. I asked myself: What changes at the state level when a language is given official status? How complicated is the language situation?

Unlike in Romania, it was hard to single out one artistic sphere associated with Luxembourgish, so I decided to include all types of artists based on their connection to it: writers, musicians, filmmakers, actors, rappers, etc. I was also

curious about how multilingual artists choose the language of their art. Another question I had was about how languages are present in Luxembourg's theatre scene. How big is 'the market'? Does the scale of your success as an artist depend on the language you use?

After the first week, I felt trapped in a bubble. I spoke mostly to Luxembourgish people who were born there. At the same time, almost half the people living there are foreigners, and 18% of Luxembourgers hold a second nationality.² Who should I talk to? The majority of non-Luxembourgish speakers or the minority of Luxembourgish speakers? Doubting whether I was approaching the topic from the right angle, I decided to turn my research upside down and break out of the bubble. I asked for additional interviews, walked on the streets, talked to non-Luxembourgish theatre workers and visited a Luxembourgish class for immigrants taught by my local mentor, Anna Schlechter.

At the end, during the Open Lab presentation, I presented a compiled text of interviews that I had conducted during the residency called 'Luxembourgish (dis)comfort'. In a way, Luxembourg felt like a melting pot, revealing the challenges of multilingual society and language as a status-defining element like a European magnifying glass.

In the Alsace region – my third destination – I decided to focus on language once again, but with a different approach. After two residencies during which my method had been interviewing people, I was starting to feel like an amateur anthropologist. This time, I wanted to explore what the 'artistic' part of 'artistic research' means. Moreover, I wanted

² See <https://statistiques.public.lu/en/recensement/nationalites.html>



Street art showing traditional Alsatian dress

© Ewa Mikuta

to use artistic tools to know the field better, integrate with the people, make the process fun and not treat artistic tools as useful only for a final summary.

I was provided with support by anthropologists, sociologists and linguists from the University of Strasbourg and started preparing months before going to Alsace via Zoom meetings. After consulting with my project coach, we thought it was important that I 'knew just enough'. I did not want to overload myself with information before going to Strasbourg – that way it would leave room for curiosity and maybe even obvious questions. In the meetings, I found out there are about 200 amateur theatre groups in the area (mostly in surrounding villages and towns) that create theatre in Alsatian for wide audiences. Amateur theatre is, in fact, one of the last bastions of the Alsatian language, commenting on everyday life, as well as political and social issues.

After consulting with Philippe Gillig, a lecturer in the social sciences and actor in Alsatian-language productions, I decided to organise two workshops for Alsatian speakers, one in the nearby town of Haguenau and one at the Théâtre national de Strasbourg. At the same time, I was conducting interviews. During the workshops, we were trying to express ourselves through theatre and the local language. One of the techniques I proposed to the group was Augusto Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed.³ I did not impose any specific topic, in order to let the participants choose their own narrative. The group clearly expressed the importance

of language as a part of local identity and the long-lasting bond people have with it.

When it came to translation, a French-English interpreter was proposed to me. All Alsatians are most likely native French speakers, so this seemed reasonable. However, I insisted on an interpreter who could handle Alsatian as well, which made it possible to include the precious insight of an Alsatian native speaker, Nathanaël Beiner.

It was meaningful for me to be able to conduct such workshops in Alsatian in the Théâtre national de Strasbourg, an institution originally founded to strengthen the position of French in the region. During the Open Lab presentation, workshop participants, who were welcomed to take the initiative, presented a poem by André Weckmann in three languages connected to their heritage: Alsatian, French and German.

Although I have fulfilled all the requirements for the Future Laboratory, I am still working on the material and will present the outcomes of my reflections next year in Luxembourg during the final project meeting. Having this opportunity – which included both financial support and help with the project itself – enabled me to reflect on the future of local communities on a much wider, European scale. I studied the dynamics between localities and international processes while trying out different approaches and research tools. A reciprocal effect also became apparent: constantly looking at each other's cultures and having emotionally meaningful exchanges with people from different minorities changed my perspective on myself and my own community.

3 Augusto Boal, *Games for Actors and Non-Actors*, trans. Adrian Jackson, London: Routledge, 2002

Residencies I

The research residencies were a central part of the Future Laboratory. Each artist did three residencies at different participating theatres between October 2022 and autumn 2024 to explore the socio-political context of various cities and reach out to underserved or under-represented communities connected to their research. On site, artists could draw upon the resources of their host institution and were assigned a local mentor who served as a facilitator and guide. At the end of each two-week residency, a public presentation, the Open Lab, took place.

As a project coach, I set up a research framework together with Maurin. We defined several fields to study related to his topic (drug addiction) in each country: the legal framework, care (rehabilitation facilities, etc) and the 'heart' of it, i.e. the psychology of addiction. We decided to meet before and after each residency so that he could make progress or shift his focus from residency to residency as needed.

I suggested to Maurin that he should have an anchor point in each city where he could meet and connect with different people on a daily basis. We agreed that drug rehabilitation centres would be good anchor points. His presence there would enable him to create a bond and gather personal stories from people in rehab and the nursing staff. At the same time, he could organise meetings with judges to talk about legal matters. The residencies were rather short, so this allowed Maurin to make the best of his time. This was, to me, one of the challenges of the Future Laboratory. With my company (For Happy People & Co), we usually stay in a particular place for longer periods of time and do theatre workshops, for example, whereas here, the research was less artistic and more journalistic, sociological.

Jean-François Auguste
Project Coach

An interesting case was Ruxandra's idea to do a project on Romanian seasonal workers – fruit pickers – in Germany. They are, to be honest, not a target audience for the theatre because they do not work or live directly in the city. And when they are in the city, they do not have time to go to the theatre. In most cases, there is a language barrier as well. So, it came down to making something *about* the fruit pickers, as a topic, so to speak. Ruxandra had to realise it was difficult to reach them at all. They are not organised, they do not have a 'lobby', and some of them are not even there legally. They were working hard and did not have time to meet with a theatre-maker – or did not want or dare to – and it did not feel right to 'represent' them in any way.

Most artists undergo processes like these, where the topic must first be narrowed down. You often have a large field in front of you that you need to make small and manageable. On top of that, there are great differences between the countries. You have to ask yourself what to research in which place, why, and how it is connected to the general topic.

Jörg Vorhaben

Board Member/Project Coach

The profile of the project coach – i.e. an experienced artist who is well-versed in working with communities and institutions – seemed highly relevant to me. That way, the artists could be accompanied in their research by engaging in an artistic dialectic, which can be very fruitful, while also building relationships with partners in a European structure such as the Future Laboratory.

Magali Dupin

Board Member

One difficulty I encountered when contacting some communities was explaining the project and providing them with some official source they could check (the website was not translated). I had to count on people's trust and the relationships that already existed: in one instance, between a school for Deaf students and the mediation team at Teatro Municipal do Porto. Sometimes the residencies really depended on personal relationships – I knew someone here and there and could call them and ask for a favour – and I do not think they should have to. That process could be more structured. What keeps the project from being more impactful is the way the communities are involved. The project, the teams and the communication have to be designed not only for the artists but for the communities as well.

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I hope that meeting communities really changed the artists' projects; it should be consequential. For me, talking is revolutionary. The conversations should have a big impact and not just confirm previous assumptions or thoughts. I hope this potential for change materialises in the artists' projects, that their research really makes them rethink what they are doing.

Raquel S.
Local Mentor

The question of invasiveness, for me, is the biggest issue. For the project to step up and meet its objectives, it would be crucial to think about cultural mediation. Even though a mentor can be an important artistic peer that can help to contextualise things, in some communities, the mentor occupies a very voyeuristic position. A cultural mediator can help artists be more intertwined with the community, give them advice about what to do, what to say. It is important that the mediators and the communities receive money from the project too. There were people who really helped us, who gave hours of their lives, and could do amazing work in community research if they were paid to. It would also be more empowering for the community; they would get to decide what to show. At the same time, it would put artists and mentors in a less voyeuristic position.

Raquel S.

In my role as a local mentor, I was sometimes a translator between languages, but more often an interpreter between different social frames. I had worked with international artists before and thought that in the Future Laboratory it would be more about training artists. But that was not the case: you have to work together, and the artists will learn from that work.

What was more important than the interviews, which the artists could have scheduled without me, were the talks we had before and after. It is not just about what people say during the interviews. When they invited us to their homes, they were performing their identity, their lives in front of us. They tried to impress us. Whether you are an anthropologist or an artist, you must see through this and get to what they are really saying. You cannot ask, 'Are you Roma? Are you an artist?' because then it's like an exam and people feel like they must give the right answer. You have to be easy-going and share things, let them control the discussion

Valer Simion Cosma,
Local Mentor

ESSAY

The Fluidity of Artistic Research

BY

ANNE SOPHIE KAPSNER

Winter 2024

I am travelling by train from Munich to Berlin and from Berlin to Warsaw, watching the landscape pass by, listening to the unfamiliar sounds of the Polish language that are seeping into my ears, and thinking about my research topic: queer bodies in repressive systems. I have a broad focus so that I can immerse myself as much as possible. This is both a blessing and a curse – it makes it difficult for me to find interview partners, because strangers would like to know in advance what they are getting into. At the same time, it opens up a sizeable space for me to fully engage with whatever I encounter.

The process I am experiencing in this project, the Future Laboratory, is very dynamic. I realised this in Warsaw, no, actually on my train ride there. I came with ideas, plans and visions, and once I began my research, the topic transformed, took on a life of its own, and surprised me. I left this place as someone else, filled with images and stories I could not have imagined before.

For example, one of my interviews started at 5pm in a bar and – after a walk – continued in another bar where it ended around 1am. I could not have imagined such an interview beforehand. The fact that it went on and on happened in that specific moment with a specific person.

I am a good listener and like to ask questions; I want to understand and get to the core: What makes us who we are? How do we deal with what happens to us in life? What drives us? I am interested in untold stories – and my counterparts start to let go and really tell their stories.

As I write this text, just over halfway through the two-year project, I am experiencing unforeseen changes to my plans.

The original plan was to research queer bodies in three locations and create an international intergenerational play. But I have only been able to do one residency so far – in Warsaw in March 2023 – because I had to leave my second residency in Madrid early due to the death of my younger brother. Now I have two residencies and the final symposium coming up in 2024. And I am faced with the fact that I will change my research topic due to what happened to me. I am confronted in a direct way with the inseparability of my work as an artistic researcher from who I am as a human being.

I keep asking myself: What exactly does artistic research mean and how should I conduct it? Where is the guide for this process? Is there one? How does research become art, or is my research already art because I am an artist, a theatre director? How do I handle the material, how much caution is required? Where do I reach my limits?

This way of working is a continuous learning process. I have to remain flexible and fluid, to react spontaneously to the unexpected, and to maintain openness. I am constantly confronted with myself – with the way I function as an artist and as a person.

During my time in Warsaw, from 19 March to 2 April 2023, three main pillars of my working method crystallised:

COLLECTING–TALKING–WRITING

I kept a photo diary and photographed everything that caught my eye. While walking in the park I processed what I experienced and came up with thoughts: ideas for the beginning of a play and images for scenes and short dialogues, which I began to write down as a fragment titled WHAT YOU DON'T

SEE or EATING TRAUMA. I read newspaper articles about the situation of trans people in Poland, theatre scandals in Poland, the conviction of an activist who helped a woman get abortion pills. I read the novel *Swimming in the Dark* by Tomasz Jedrowksi. I watched movies such as *Operation Hyacinth*. I went to the theatre and saw two shows at Nowy Teatr and one at Studio Teatrgaleria. I went to museums: the POLIN, the Museum of Life in the Polish People's Republic, and the Wola Museum, where I saw a Kim Lee exhibition and met the curators. I took lots of notes and made mind maps. I went to queer places such as the Ramona Bar, Plan B and Butero. I worked in my dreams. I took part in a rehearsal of the queer choir *Voces Gaudii*. I checked in with my local mentor, the writer Weronika Murek, told her where I was at, and we put our brains together, exchanged ideas and met people together.

And I did interviews: I asked questions to many different people and let them talk. And I recorded those conversations. Each interview started with me introducing myself and my topic, and then took its own course. I talked to about 25 people: people from the Kem School Collective and the Goethe-Institut, a journalist and dramaturge, political activists, theatre-makers and performers, bookstore employees, a ballroom scene participant. I also had many informal conversations in between.

My ears heard stories they had never heard before; my eyes saw sights they had never seen before; my nose smelled scents it had never smelled before; my tongue tasted flavours it had never tasted before; and my imagination created images it had never thought of before.



And what now? What will happen to the recordings, the images, the thoughts and the ideas? Will they ever end up in a play – since directing is my profession? Will something beyond the research remain? One can hope so, but of course it is uncertain. As long as we are part of the project, get paid and there are concrete deadlines, we will exchange ideas and meet. But after that? My hope – and what I am working towards – is that the long duration of the Future Laboratory will deepen some relationships to the point where they become sustainable, long-term collaborations. I also hope that the collaborations between institution and artist will develop beyond the project's themes.

I am continuously working on my ideas. For example, my fragment *WHAT YOU DON'T SEE* or *EATING TRAUMA* will be presented in a performative reading in Munich in January 2024. For my residency in Madrid, I am planning to start with a concrete performance idea that will revolve around how we deal with grief and suicide in our society. And for my final residency in Piatra Neamț, I will start with researching the story of my grandmother, who was born in Romania.

It is a privilege to be part of this project and I, for one, plan on presenting more than just one scenic idea at our final event in Luxembourg. Of course, I cannot be completely sure that will happen, because if there is one thing I have learnt, it is that nothing is completely certain – and that is, in a way, a relief.

Excerpt from WHAT YOU DON'T SEE or EATING TRAUMA

Frank's Dream

It is a picture without words. You might want to close your eyes.

Frank is a 45-year-old cis heterosexual white man from Denmark. His Marco Polo travel guide for Warsaw tells him to go to La Pose to have a once-in-a-lifetime queer experience. If they say so, Frank thinks. At the door of La Pose, the security guard explicitly tells him that he is going to enter an LGBT club, to be sure that he's in the right place. Frank is so excited. He is. His hands even get a little bit sweaty. He gets a table in the restaurant on the ground floor and orders a 'La Pose 75' from a cute gay waiter. OMG – he will be at a drag show for the first time in his life. At around 10:30pm, he takes the stairs down to the happening place: there is fog and pink light and loud music and he feels like entering another world. His head is spinning. There is this prickling in his body and – whoop – he makes a tiny little jump. Suddenly there is a voice: *Komm zu mir*. He turns his head. What? And again: *Komm zu mir, Frank. Komm. Komm zu mir*. Excitement and fear are mixed up within his stomach, but he follows. The voice is calling him and this is HIS moment. The entry into a whole new world. The world where everybody can be everything. The world of joy and freedom born out of necessity. There is an urgency roping Frank deeper into the unknown.



Kathrin Liess in Anne Sophie Kapsner's final presentation,
Luxembourg, November 2024

© Juliette Maes Bodart

Residencies II

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Continued from pp. 52–57.

I wonder whether preparatory visits would have been good. The artists always need three or four days to settle in and familiarise themselves with the city, the place, the theatre, the people, the impressions. You start to do a bit of research and then you already start to worry: 'What am I going to share during the Open Lab, and how am I going to manage it?' There is a lot of pressure, especially for the first residency. A lot depends on how you approach the artists as an institution, how you communicate.

Jörg Vorhaben

Board Member/Project Coach

The short duration of the residency can be a problem, especially in the first residency. You are navigating a new cultural space, new people and a topic you are not so familiar with. You have to discover and learn as much as you can, and at the same time be creative. So, you are in two different mindsets. There is this pressure on you, and you might not allow yourself to learn enough to create something relevant later on. The need for translation can also create difficulties.

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The talk at the end of the residency can still take place, but it should not have to enter too far into artistic possibilities. After two weeks of field work in another country, the artists need time to process the experience. It is better to expect something from them two or three weeks after the residency than during it, because it is very exhausting and stressful, and they do not have the chance to immerse themselves very deeply. The artists need more intense contact with research in the humanities and social sciences, but you could separate that from the creative part. One possibility could be doing two research residencies plus one residency with a creative focus, where you work with other kinds of mentors on turning your information or experience into a performance.

Valer Simion Cosma
Local Mentor

Sometimes, as artists, we are overachievers when it comes to residencies. We want to do lots of stuff, and it is impossible to do it properly. It is important that we remain flexible when working with 'marginalised' communities. It is difficult to get contacts ahead of time, nor does it make sense for some communities, so the scheduling cannot be too rigid. Good mentoring also needs to be flexible. I had to adapt from project to project. →

Raquel S.
Local Mentor

There were many people at Ewa's Open Lab whom we had interviewed before. Some had travelled 20 or 30 km from their villages, and it was the first time that they were at the theatre. They talked to the staff and realised that it is also a place for them. They really felt good there and I heard that later some returned to see plays. There were also people present who were interested in the topic and attended without having been invited directly, which was also positive.

At Carlota's Open Lab, it was good to see a large number of people with disabilities present. For them, it was an opportunity to talk about themselves and what they need in terms of access to art. When we invited people, they asked whether we were showing a play and we said no because we did not want them to just sit and watch. We said it was something interactive, that we would present something and wanted to hear their opinion. They understood this to mean a kind of debate. Nonetheless, the event was productive because it is not very common in Romania to address these topics and audiences outside the big cities. One of the results was that the Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu, which had been interested in doing a project on disability theatre before, has since started that project.

Valer Simion Cosma

I encouraged artists not to waste too much time on their Open Labs. Even though it is a public presentation, it should not take away from the residency and research. The Open Labs turned out very differently from artist to artist in terms of content and length.

One aspect of the residencies I found fruitful – and which could perhaps have been explored in greater depth – was the mutual knowledge gained between the guest artist and the theatre. During each residency, it was very interesting to take the time to talk about the inner workings of theatre in France, and also to understand how each guest artist lived his or her art and what production conditions they worked under. This dimension was a positive side effect of the residencies but could have been better thought through and integrated into the project.

Magali Dupin
Board Member

For the Open Lab, 20 people came and the entire management of the theatre was there: the artistic director, the managing director, the head of public relations, the head of dance and the head of opera. So the feedback the artist received was closely linked to our institution. That is important for the artists because they realised: 'What I did had a value and I am not doing it in a vacuum, or just for myself... I may still be in the process of searching on a thematic level, but there is someone here who is interested in the topic'. One thing I would re-consider, though, is that the artists' project coach should be invited to the Open Lab. Currently, they only get a video recording.

Jörg Vorhaben



Cru Encarnação and Odete in Odete's final presentation,
Luxembourg, November 2024
© Juliette Maes Bodart



Maurin Ottés's final presentation,
Luxembourg, November 2024
© Juliette Maes Bodart



Giulia Sangiorgio preparing her final presentation,
Luxembourg, November 2024
© Juliette Maes Bodart



Vera Boitcova, Madame Yoko and Friday the Professor in
Vera Boitcova's final presentation, Luxembourg, November 2024
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Alexandra Vieru in Ruxandra Simion's final presentation,
Luxembourg, November 2024
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BETWEEN PRIVATE AND PUBLIC

A Journey into the Theatre Transformation
through Photography and Artistic Research

BY ELENA RABKINA

WWW.RABKINA.COM



Elena Rabkina and Hanna Karpenko in Elena Rabkina's final presentation,
Luxembourg, November 2024
© Juliette Maes Bodart



Teja Rot preparing her final presentation,
Luxembourg, November 2024
© Juliette Maes Bodart



Simon Restino and amateur performers in
Simon Restino's final presentation, Luxembourg, November 2024
© Juliette Maes Bodart

ESSAY

Past- Present- Future Laboratory

BY

CÉLINE CAMARA

Summer 2024

Céline Camara was selected as an artist for the Future Laboratory but left the project. She explained her reasons in a video shown at the Milan masterclass in November 2023, which became the basis for the contribution below.

I started this programme filled with enthusiasm and optimism, ready to embark on a unique artistic journey and looking to the future... until the present and past caught up with me.

How can there be a future when the past and present are neglected? Reflecting on my experience of the Future Laboratory made me question what the word 'future' actually means. In this humble contribution, I would like to tell my personal journey through this programme that brought me to the conclusion that there ain't no consistent and meaningful future without facing and challenging the past and present. For the sake of clarity, I will give a personal definition of past and present.

The past: As a Black person born in France and whose parents emigrated from a former colonised country, I have integrated racism within me as a norm. I was raised with two principles:

- You have to work twice as hard because you are Black.
- Never assume the problems you face are due to racism.

Raised in this context, I grew up trying to achieve excellence to fit in, while simultaneously internalising inequality and my own unquestionable inferiority, with denial as my main defence mechanism.

The present: This refers to several crucial months in my artistic life (from March 2023 to September 2023), with key events including: a traumatic production, my first Future Lab residency in Porto on Afro-descendants and their relation to identity, and how I left the Future Laboratory.

1. Facing the present...

In spring 2023, I worked in a theatre production as an actress. The play was about the power struggle, patriarchy and oblique racism in the theatre industry – very ‘meta’. Context-wise, it is important to note that I am one of the very few Black actors in Luxembourg. This play, which included an explicitly Black character, was a sort of opportunity to bring a Black character onto our local stage, as well as to address the issue of racism (among others). It is both ironic and sad that, of all the productions out there, it was this play that failed to provide a safe space for a Black artist.

Indeed, the directing team decided to whitewash the first scene of the play: by giving the text of my explicitly Black character to another actress who was White. This decision had, inter alia, racist repercussions and did not only harm me, but amounted to killing the strong voice of a Black character. Indeed, losing this empowering speech in the first scene left my character with only one scene, which was, of all things, a scene of sexual violence that included nudity. Despite most of the team members – including me – feeling something was off, nobody managed to address the issue. Things finally burst out on the day of the dress rehearsal: the whole team gathered and we managed to address the issues.

After this pretty traumatising experience – and I do not use this term lightly, as it involved moving through self-doubt, fear of judgment and the possible consequences of being associated with and reduced to that trauma in the future – I was very willing to understand how we (collectively) could let that happen. I had a feeling of isolation, exhaustion, unfairness and powerlessness. I wrote a letter to the team to explain the personal impact of the piece on me as a Black person living in a White people’s world, as one of the very few Black performers in Luxembourg. I also expressed the urgent need to tackle these taboo issues and perform group facilitation work in order to better understand what happened and address the responsibility of each and every one of us in this problematic production, including how small, apparently insignificant turns can have a domino effect.

Organising this facilitation work was a struggle for me notably because of the power dynamics. I was an actress having to face an institution that was not ready to take actions and assume responsibility in this situation. It cost me a lot of energy, sleepless nights and deeply affected my physical and mental health. This inaction produced further anxiety and despair that all the hurt caused would come to nothing.

During this period, I discovered two sociological concepts that became key to my understanding of what was happening: racial load and White fragility.

Racial load:¹ Maboula Soumahoro says that we, as Black people, have the exhausting task of explaining and making discriminatory or racist situations intelligible. Our responsibility is twofold: to endure these situations and then delicately find a happy ending to the aggressions and injustices we have suffered, whether small or large.

White fragility:² Robin DiAngelo uses this term for feelings of discomfort White people experience when they witness situations related to racial inequality. White fragility leads to reactions such as expulsion, silence, tears and guilt on behalf of White people, which deflects from the problem at hand and therefore also the possibility of tackling it.

White fragility is a corollary of racial load, and I got myself trapped in that: unable to be fully heard and having to fight for maintaining the dialogue, reassuring crying people and telling them they are not bad people and at the same time trying to take care of myself. It was very lonely.

A protective framework of care does not exist on its own. This is why the leaders, in this case the institutions and directors, are the ones who have to create it – because it is they who create the work environment and have actual authority. It is difficult to create that framework from the bottom up.

I was the person in the most vulnerable situation and yet I did a disproportionate amount of ‘heavy-lifting’.

1 Maboula Soumahoro, *Le Triangle et l'Hexagone: Réflexions sur une identité noire*, Paris: La Découverte, 2020

2 Robin DiAngelo, *White Fragility: Why It's So Hard for White People to Talk About Racism*, Boston: Beacon, 2018

2. ...by saying no to the future to grieve the past

This experience happened in parallel with the Future Laboratory; things got entangled on various levels.

It was a revelation for me that I needed to be in the present, speak up, fight, face my trauma, but also to say no to the future. To say no to my enthusiastic self who started the programme only looking to the future with wishful thinking, without being in touch with my past, my internalised racism and my unconscious, docile resilience towards it. I needed to take care of myself; I needed distance to understand what happened and how this was possible. I therefore left the programme to be able to heal (therapy, coaching for creative people with a focus on structural inequalities, research and readings, etc.).

3. Facing the future

I learned a lot, including the fact that issues surrounding racism are still extremely taboo and hard to tackle at an institutional level. It is costly to initiate structural changes, especially when it becomes uncomfortable because it requires accountability and actions. The fact that individual people and institutions are filled with good intentions is not the issue or even relevant.

I direct the last stretch of my reflections to us, collectively and especially to institutions:

- How can we create a future without first being aware of past and present hierarchies and where each one of us stands?

- How can we create a future if we do not question or unveil denial and privileges?
- How can we create future narratives without first contextualising representation and power dynamics in the art world?
- How can we create a future without pre-existing safe processes to raise issues of discrimination or without a framework of care for the contributing artists?

I had the opportunity to speak with other Black actors during my first Future Laboratory residency and realised we were having similar experiences. I am ready now to embrace the future, because I allowed myself to embrace my present while embracing my past.

This was the beginning of my artistic journey on my own past-present-future laboratory. I am now more aware of the world I live in from a systemic and structural perspective. I am no longer afraid not to fit in the mould or to challenge things. I can now design or create my path, cherishing my outlook and taking responsibility for my artistic choices.



Halfway event, Milan, November 2023
© Marta Cervone

Masterclasses/ Artist-Institution Relationships

The Future Laboratory hosted three multi-day events, initially labelled ‘masterclasses’, which were attended by all artists and participating institutions. The first one took place in Liège in October 2022 and the second in Milan in November 2023. The final event took place in November 2024 and is discussed in a separate section (see p. 106). The events comprised various formats (workshops, talks, reflection sessions, presentations, etc.) and were frequently also a place where the structure and goals of the Future Laboratory itself were discussed.

After the masterclass with Milo Rau in Liège, which was quite tense, I had a coffee with the young artists. I am from an older generation that still had ‘master directors’ who were impossible to knock off their pedestals. With the younger generation, that is no longer the case. They do not want to be told what to like and what not to like. So they were not ‘afraid’ to question and criticise Milo Rau’s approach to the representation of violence, with which most of them disagreed. And to be quite honest, so did I. What was interesting, apart from the generational gap, was the question of the legitimacy of the subjects an artist takes on, and the question of documentary theatre. Can reality be criticised? This is precisely the question of perspective.

As an artist, I think you can deal with any topic, but you really need to immerse yourself in it, do extensive research. And you need to position yourself with the regard to the topic, inscribe yourself in the creation. In Marcus Lindeen’s talk, we also touched upon this question of legitimacy. You interview people and then ask for permission to use their story. Someone asked whether the interviewees are paid. I found it strange to see this as a financial transaction rather than as an encounter, an exchange of experiences.

Jean-François Auguste
Project Coach

As the project took its course, some artists realised that meeting underserved and underrepresented communities required a lot of specific skills and entailed a big responsibility, particularly in terms of managing the expectations of those communities. Some artists felt they were doing the audience development for the institutions rather than leading a research project on social inclusion.

We realised that we had underestimated the challenges the artists would face during their research and that our communication about the research outcomes had not been clear enough. Artists were unsure whether their project ideas would be produced or if they were just presenting research.

During the second masterclass event in Milan, we spent a significant amount of time discussing everyone's expectations of the Future Laboratory and its outcome both for institutions and artists. A crucial moment was the final session, where we collectively agreed to increase artist participation, transparency, mutual listening and to co-create the final event.

Tom Leick-Burns
Board Member

There was mistrust in the sense that artists feared that theatres would instrumentalise their research. I wonder about this possibility. Even if the theatres wanted to gain the communities the artists researched as new audiences, it would have to be done via the artists, by commissioning works about these marginalised groups. The artists may have felt this way because they are worried about their future and would like the project to end with a production. This is understandable; support for artists differs widely from country to country. In France, for example, we have the intermittence system. However, the Future Laboratory was purely about supporting research – I believe that was clear from the start. Of course, this research can result in a production, but that is not the primary goal. In this respect, Marcus Lindeen's talk in Milan was very useful, as he explained that he sometimes abandoned projects that could have been productions after doing some research.

Regarding our meetings, it is important to mention that Céline's story also revealed something about our times, and of the mechanisms of discrimination at work in our societies and in the cultural sector. And it is more than urgent for our sector to take up these issues and respond to them through art. I do not think we have managed to talk about this in a constructive way yet.

Jean-François Auguste

Céline felt she could not continue with the Future Laboratory due to negative experiences, including discrimination, tokenism and racism on another project. Her statement, shared with other artists in Milan, sparked a significant discussion on racism. Institutions were questioned about their anti-discrimination and anti-racism measures. This highlighted the need for institutions to take responsibility for artists and abandon their 'the show must go on' attitude. It is important that we listen and change so that such things do not happen again.

Tom Leick-Burns

After an initial, very emotionally charged discussion in which a lot of generalising statements and attributions were made from all sides, we progressed over several stages from the large to the small and were ultimately able to establish, in various small mixed groups, that we had extremely similar expectations and hopes for the project and its output(s). The way we managed to move on from the big, confrontational clash on the first day to a place of joint reflection and to formulate a will to continue on the last day was probably one of those rare experiences that shows how much learning potential there is when you do not break off communication as soon as things get difficult.

This conclusion can also be transferred both to the micro-level of the various artistic projects within the Future Laboratory and to the overall objective of the Future Laboratory. Communication is the key. We can only learn about each other if we talk to each other. Not about each other.

Katharina Greuel

Board Member/Local Mentor

INTERVIEW

Reflections on the Future Laboratory

BY
ODETE

After the Milan masterclass (or half-way event, as it came to be known) in November 2023, we (Stefanie Husel and Jeff Thoss) saw the necessity of speaking to an artist about the issues raised there. Hence, we interviewed Odete in February 2024, which formed the basis for the following text.

The start of the Future Laboratory

For me, the most important part was meeting the other artists. There is something very beautiful in this. Even though we're very different, it is so special to be able to meet people who are doing or want to do the same thing as you, who might be struggling with the same things as you, and who you connect with regarding this ambition, but also the understanding of how precarious that ambition could be. Because we live in a certain type of world. Sometimes, we would not even talk about anything specific or art-related. We were just having drinks or eating something together and I truly felt like, 'Oh, I can belong in these spaces!'

Of course, I also had the sense that maybe I do not fully belong because I am Portuguese and, back in Portugal, everything is so precarious, so poor in terms of the arts. And some of the people at the Lab have had access to so many more things, and are so different from me. But, at the same time, we are sitting at the same table and discussing things, and we view each other with respect and understand each other's difficulties. At the beginning, the beauty was really being able to sit at the table with these young people and to – I know this might sound cringey – imagine what Europe could mean artistically. To reimagine it as well. I remember

discussing with certain artists about what our role as artists, as European artists, is – also politically. What should we speak about? How do we speak about it and how can we be mediators between certain communities and institutions? Also, how can we rethink the role of artists in connection to this European space which is so politically charged? And how can we use that position as a fighting position, but also as a healing position, a connective position?

The first residency at Piccolo Teatro, Milan

Being involved in the fabric of the city of Milan, it was also important for me to learn about the aesthetic history of Italy. A lot of things came up that even I did not know about, such as certain historical contexts or the Southern Italian gender identity called 'femminiello', which was a revelation for me because it was deeply connected to my research. The residency was very productive, and the people at the theatre were so generous that it was the perfect environment for the research to bloom in its first stages. I feel like I left Milan with a bag of things. It could be knowledge, it could be references, it could be just food. They also had a translator who knew Portuguese, English and Italian. This linguistic fluidity was also so important. The translator would walk with me and show me the city, and she always knew where to go to get something that I wanted. That was amazing.

The Milan half-way event

The incident of institutional racism that occurred in Luxembourg was almost just swept under the rug. The

institution thought they had dealt with it, but the artists were clearly in need of more information because we had been put in this situation. As people who also act as (political) mediators, it is important for us actors to collectively unpack what these things mean. And when you do that, there is a lot of inherent pain and tension. Maybe some people from the institutions misinterpreted this and maybe we artists also misinterpreted this kind of tension, because it is part of situations like these. There is no way to ease into it, it is not easy. It will hurt. It will require some effort. It will be tense. It will be awkward. It will be difficult. But it must be dealt with. We have to do it. It is the only way to move forward. If we take three days to do it, let us take three days. It does not matter. I think this was where conflicts arose. We wanted to continue dealing with the problem to understand it properly, realising that it would leave a scar. But it is more important to acknowledge the scar than just pretend it is not there. We have these two different approaches. That is why the masterclass was so intense, because we artists wanted to put our finger in the wound and the institutions wanted to move forward.

The relationship between artists and institutions

The question of who represents an institution is a tough one because people are not institutions. People are people. However, there is a hierarchy among us, at least in the project. We brought attention to that in Milan, because there are people with power and people without power. There are people who can choose, people with money; then there are

artists who are going to pitch their project at the end and some of them do not have access to touring budgets, funding and so on. If you put all these artists – some of them from minority groups, some of them from very precarious situations – together, what do you expect? Of course, we know institutions are people. But at the same time, we see the power structures in front of us. We see that there are formal meetings between the theatres announced in the calendar – and that there is no such thing for the artists. So, we see that decision-making power is located elsewhere. Some people decide the project's structure, budget and so on. And this was always transparent: the institutions did not hide their power within this project.

There is also a lack of transparency, a labyrinthine notion that you can never change things that are connected to the very idea of an institution. That is also why we as artists felt so impotent somehow, so used. Even though we felt like we were part of this macro-structure, we could not really take it and transform it. And it is not because people are bad or have bad intentions. No, it is due to the structure, this labyrinthine quality that institutions have. This is what an institution is. It becomes this mode of operation in between humans that is hard to get away from.

On the Future Laboratory as a 'pure' research project

I noticed that some artists – maybe due to precariousness and the fact that we never know how to enter this system of production – wanted to have a piece as a result. And they wanted institutions to be transparent about whether they

wanted this as well. For me, openness is exactly what makes the project appealing, but I also understand how tense it is for young artists who are eager to have a show, to show their work – and when you take that from them, some of them will feel lost and angry at the institution. It is already so hard for us. But for other artists like me, all I want is to be able to research, work and not have to present anything at the end. It is a very privileged position, and I am grateful for that. Still, not everyone has the same type of practice and mindset, so this also creates tension within the artist group.

Masterclasses/ Artist-Institution Relationships II

Continued from pp. 80–85.

During the meeting in Milan, some tensions emerged from the artists, revealing the inner contradictions that the performing arts are experiencing right now. I have the impression that we quickly tried to forget the pandemic, but it marked us and left something behind: a malaise, a wound we have not yet been able to suture. When I talk to other theatre directors in Europe, everyone says they are having a hard time managing the various communities within the theatre. The pandemic traumatised us and we have not yet been able to recompose ourselves. The Future Laboratory is a small window from which we can examine this enormous problem. It offers us a perspective because we must find answers to the questions raised by the pandemic.

We dealt with the relationship between research and practice in an empirical manner, and it was difficult to find a common understanding about what we were doing. For the theatres, it was clear that it was about research, not about creating productions. The Future Laboratory wanted to give artists the freedom to have different experiences. For the artists, this was not so clear. This question about research and production, process and product, is also vital for the future.

There is a feeling of antagonism between independent artists and institutions. We have to work on this. We have to question the systems of production and the artist–institution relationship, as well as the necessity of institutions, in a more mature fashion. Everyone wants to talk, but few people want to listen. Hence, we need to create the possibility for an ongoing dialogue and regain a curiosity about each other.

Claudio Longhi
Board Member

What led to the turnabout in Milan was further empowering the artists, letting them determine the agenda, giving them more choices about what would happen. The institutions responded well to the sessions the artists led; there were some good conversations. It became focused again, and with Marcus Lindeen's talk, we had an artist talking about practice rather than the mechanics of the project. There was listening and reflection.

Mathew Russell

Board Member/Project Coach

The first masterclass in Liège was also a first encounter with some partners who joined the project quite late. I do not mean that in a judgmental way. I just mean that you do not know each other at all and, in some cases, might know relatively little about the structures of the other theatres.

This is one thing that really surprised me during the Milan masterclass: At the end, when we started talking about specific stories in small groups and asked questions, I realised that the Open Labs – and the way in which theatres participate in them – were very different. It was also a problem that there was not a space for the institutions to exchange ideas with each other.

Jörg Vorhaben

Board Member/Project Coach

I have the impression of being identified by young artists as belonging to an institution. But most of the people who coach projects are independent artists with their own companies and 15 or 20 years' experience. We could help the next generation of artists by talking in more detail about their project and their needs, and create networks of artists who are working on the same subject in our respective country, for example. Our position in the Future Laboratory is therefore not very clear; nor are the institutions counting on us, as artists, to allay the fears or doubts of the emerging artists we coach. I would have liked having one or two hours during which only the project coaches would have spoken to the institutions. That could have made things simpler and easier. We need each other's trust to work together. And if there is a problem, we need a dialogue to re-establish trust.

Jean-François Auguste

Project Coach

From the point of view of an (ex-)legal representative and as part of the working group that reflected on the project, I think in general it went very well and the issues that came up were solved in a responsible, constructive and professional way. Some of the problems appeared due to misunderstandings between institutions and artists, and others because the project had a new approach. It proposed building an artistic project from a perspective that was different from what artists usually experience in terms of curatorship and production.

The Future Laboratory's focus was on research and experimentation, not on production; even if that was explained in its presentation, some of the artists were still very attached to the idea of 'production' in various meetings. We addressed this by inviting some to the meetings between the partner institutions and having a dialogue with them. Thus, they could tell us directly what problems they had and also share information with their colleagues, including our reactions and solutions to the issues discussed.

Gianina Cărbunariu
Board Member



Ewa Mikuta's final presentation,
Luxembourg, November 2024
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ESSAY

Removing Social Barriers to Theatre

BY

CARLOTA MATOS

Winter 2024

As part of the Future Laboratory, I travelled to Mainz (Germany) and Piatra Neamţ (Romania) and will travel to Reims (France), spending two weeks in each location and carrying out artistic research on the topic of social inclusion. I studied the barriers that people face in accessing theatre and culture, and explored how mental ill-health and disability are perceived in different places. Along the way, I encountered several questions – regarding research, ethics, the relationship between artists and institutions, and cultural democratisation – that challenged my thinking and practice as an artist.

My starting point was questioning what artistic research actually is. What does it mean to be an artist developing this research, as opposed to a sociologist or anthropologist? What are the differences (if any)? I became interested in exploring how research methods themselves can be artistic. In April 2023, at Staatstheater Mainz, I ran open workshops delving into how we can make theatre more inclusive, removing barriers that people may experience – due to language, disability, mental ill-health, socio-economic circumstances, underrepresentation or others. We tried to make these workshops as accessible as possible, with a detailed invitation, providing large-print and easy-read versions, in English and German, and having a DGS (German Sign Language) interpreter present.

In October 2023, after one week of research at Teatrul Tineretului (Piatra Neamţ), I opened the doors to a 'Day 1 Rehearsal'. For six hours, I took the stage and started the process of looking through the research and developing an artistic outcome. I invited anyone to come and witness my process and research methods, share their own experiences

and thoughts, and help answer the question: 'What are we not talking about that we should be talking about?' I found this was an effective way to reach more people and get a range of perspectives.

As I write this piece, I am planning my third residency, which will take place in Reims. I would like to explore other possibilities of having a conversation with someone that does not require sitting down face-to-face and talking, as I acknowledge that it might not be the way that suits everyone best. I am open to discovering what the alternatives might be, whether it is going for a walk, sharing a dance or creating something together.

Nevertheless, the more conventional meetings I had during my first two residencies, through which I met 50+ people overall, were extremely helpful in understanding the socio-political realities of each place. In Romania, I had support with translation and interpretation, which was a new dynamic for me. Not being able to understand and be understood by someone directly creates an extra layer of separation. This proved especially tricky when speaking about sensitive topics. It was key for the interpreter or translator to understand the research and the appropriate language to use, which can vary in different countries. I am constantly questioning language as I believe the words we choose are important, especially when dealing with identity and in the context of mental ill-health and disability.

I am interested in continuing to explore ways of making work that is radical and delicate at the same time – and embracing complexity. It was key to understand the political context in the places I visited and avoid being reductive.

“Research always requires a degree of reduction, generalisation, categorisation, naming and prioritisation of phenomena, which means that it is unwillingly doing violence to the richness and diversity of the reality out of which it is picking its phenomena.”

– **Mika Hannula, Tere Vadén and Juha Suoranta**, *Artistic Research Methodology: Narrative, Power and the Public* (2014)

While oversimplifying topics may be inevitable, especially considering the short research time (10 days), I was very aware of this challenge and the ethical questions it raised as an artist and as an 'outsider'.

One of the most successful aspects of my residencies was creating and holding space for people to express themselves and be heard. As an artist-facilitator, this is part of my skillset, and I was pleased to work together with institutions to make this happen through my meetings and the discussions at the public Open Lab presentations at the end of each residency. I believe being an outsider can be an advantage, allowing for a degree of impartiality (although you can never be fully impartial). It is like having a blank canvas and being open to any brushstrokes. For communities, it can also feel safer to speak to someone who knows very little about their situation. In both places, my research was met with interest and enthusiasm.

But perhaps artistic research is less about the research methods and more about the artistic outcome. It was vital to be transparent with the people we met with about the ways their stories, thoughts and experiences might inform the work. But although we knew one of the aims of Future

Laboratory was to develop a concept idea for a production, we could not be sure whether that idea might have a life afterwards.

It was important for me to be open to finding the issues of diversity and inclusion in each city, and not have a topic that was too specific. However, I was aware that I should be working towards a concept idea. This step, from open research to a concept idea, seemed too wide for me. Therefore, I started using the residencies not only for research but also as an opportunity for processing that research in artistic forms. I was able to play with and test the integration of creative access in my Open Labs, translation and putting documentation on stage. I found performative ways of sharing my research results and tried to make them accessible both visually and audibly – for example, by playing the audio from interviews while projecting the transcript, or asking someone from the audience to read the translation of something I am typing out loud or to describe the photographs I am showing. The chance to experiment, which is essential in my practice, was only possible with resources provided by an institution.

As artists, we are often dependent on institutions to be able to create and present our work. This imbalance can create a power structure that is harmful to a relationship that should be symbiotic, since institutions also need artists to have work to present. The COVID-19 pandemic further exposed artists' precarity and isolation, leading to the creation of organisations such as Freelancers Make Theatre Work in the UK.

The nature of the Future Laboratory and the way it connects institutions with excluded communities led to

some tensions and discussions about artists being used as means or instruments. At the end of the project, institutions will be better connected. But what about artists' work? What about 'the art'? This instrumentalisation can put artists in a vulnerable position, as they are supported by institutions that are still (or at least should be) working to dismantle their own structural issues of racism, ableism and sexism. It can be deeply frustrating when this work does not feel like a priority, especially due to some people benefiting from these systems of oppression.

Through the research, I observed that there is still some resistance to making theatre experiences more accessible and resistance to change in general in the industry. In Piatra Neamţ, Deaf and visually impaired people spoke to me about the discrimination they still face in society, the lack of accessibility in culture (audio description, touch tours, captions, sign language interpretation), and the absence of their stories from the stage. In Mainz, I found that one of the biggest obstacles for people to attend the theatre was the expected social behaviour and a feeling of inadequacy in those spaces that are meant to be 'for everyone'. People I met with reported that it was the theatre environment itself, including the language used and works that did not speak to them or their interests, or that they did not see people like themselves represented on stage or in the theatre staff. As someone with long-term mental health conditions, I also touched on other invisible barriers in my residencies, such as the lack of content guidance or breakout spaces.

The many changes needed require time and resources, but many can be broken down into more feasible steps, such as: adding visual information to written signs; making

the toilets gender-neutral; if there are surtitles in other languages, including captions in the language being spoken; providing a short audio file and large-print text for each show that describe the set, the actors and any key visual action. These are just some examples – there are many more. Most of them would not only benefit one group but help to support people with a number of different needs. There is still a lot of misinformation when it comes to questions of accessibility and concerns about doing the wrong thing. We are not trying to achieve perfection; in fact, it may just be impossible to make theatre experiences fully accessible. But it is vital to start this process of trial and error, work with people with lived experience to implement changes, and learn from the mistakes that will inevitably happen along the way.

Access to cultural experiences should not be for the few. Although art and culture also exist outside of institutions and should not be considered inferior because of that, cultural establishments have a responsibility towards their local communities. Artists play a fundamental role in abolishing elitism and democratising art, but they cannot do so alone. I believe positive changes come about when artists, institutions and local communities work together.



Carlota Matos's final presentation,
Luxembourg, November 2024
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Approaching the Final Event

The Future Laboratory changed significantly between the second masterclass in Milan (November 2023) and the final event in Luxembourg (November 2024). Notably, the project's governing structure, communication channels and the format of the final event were rethought. Since the interviews for this Casebook were conducted before the event in Luxembourg was held, we asked interviewees about their expectations for it and about major developments since the start of the Future Laboratory.

I hope the event reflects the encounters the artists had with communities and institutions during their residencies. I hope it provides a connection to the world and elaborates today's challenges in an inclusive concept. Given that the Future Laboratory tried to put artists, communities and institutions on equal footing, it would be great to see that reflected.

Gianina Cărbunariu
Board Member

We are working with 14 artists who are not directly represented in the project's board. That is a mistake that is being addressed now. We need to reflect on these governance arrangements, on how to create interesting spaces between institutions and artists that do not have power imbalances, how to creatively, in an exciting and inspiring way, strip these imbalances. If you regularly bring people together to meet as a subgroup to plan an event, you have to empower them so they feel it is their event. Then they can be responsible for steering it through and making it a success.

Mathew Russell
Board Member/Project Coach

The biggest lesson we have learned – on all of these different points in different ways – is the value and importance of co-creation. Initially, the institutions made decisions with a board that only included them, but we recognised the necessity of involving artists in the process and ensuring complete transparency. Facing these challenges forced us to rethink our way of working on the project. We selected a cohort of artists who care about current issues such as cultural appropriation, representation and a fair balance of power. The project's aim was also to push us to look at how we operate in that climate. It is a learning and research process for both artists and institutions.



In order to provide additional care, facilitate communication and respond to artists' needs, we reinforced the Future Laboratory team with an additional person, who was able to have individual meetings with the artists, talk to them about how their research is going and support them with any questions or challenges. We have also reached out to an organisation that focuses on the well-being of artists and can assist them if they are experiencing mental-health challenges that we cannot address ourselves.

Tom Leick-Burns
Board Member

The artists expected greater transparency from institutions. In Milan, many testified to the need for transparency, dialogue and horizontality. That is why we started a newsletter at the Théâtres de la Ville de Luxembourg. At first it was intended for artists, but then the institutions started to take part, precisely to create this exchange and share information. As part of this commitment, artists joined the board. Decisions are no longer taken only by institutions, but also by artists. In organising the final event, we are working with an external facilitator to foster even more exchange, and even a permanent connection, between the institution organising the event and the artists. →

There was a need for artists to feel that they were not just there to meet a quota or achieve an objective, but to share experiences with people in theatres and enrich themselves as a group; to be aware of how things work and to participate fully in a horizontal system. It was born of a desire to create awareness of what is going on – not just on one's own end, but with the other artists and institutions involved in the project. In short: in order to experience the Future Laboratory as a team effort. There was also a necessity to take the artists' projects and their involvement with the communities during residencies into consideration, and that institutions should cultivate these relationships created as part of the Future Laboratory, and ultimately go beyond it.

And there was a need to be heard not only in artistic terms but also as a person engaged in long-term research. For this reason, I organised interviews with the artists in early 2024 to discuss their needs, and (if need be) the difficulties with their institution or project coach. Sometimes it is difficult for artists to talk directly to the institution because they are still used to this distance. Through these exchanges, I was able to really get to know the artists, hear about their projects, their career paths and intentions for the future.

Jillian Camarda
Artist Liaison

There is a big difference between doing a final event where we talk about how the project went or whether we want pitches that lead to a production. It does not have to be the same for every artist. Not everyone has to pitch – only those who want to. In any case, we have to be clear: Do we want something to mark the end of the Future Laboratory, or should the projects themselves have a future? And if they should, then the Future Laboratory must conclude in such a way that we can continue the discussion. It has to be a joint process where a theatre ultimately says, ‘Yes, we want this production’. That also signifies an appreciation for the artists’ work: you expect artists who have been supported to do residencies for a while to be able to deliver something.

Jörg Vorhaben

Board Member/Project Coach

For the last event, I would like the artists to tell us about the results of their research. I am not in favour of seeing drafts, but of focusing purely on research, to see what the artists have discovered, what it has brought them or not, and in what direction they would like to deepen and continue their research. It does not need to result in theatre, perhaps a podcast or a comic book would be a better medium.

Jean-François Auguste

Project Coach

Of course, we want as many of these project ideas to happen, but their realisation is going to take place outside the Future Laboratory. The Future Laboratory concludes with the presentation of the artists’ research and their ideas for projects for the institutions. These presentations will take on different forms depending on the approach of the artist: while some may choose an exhibition, others might show research footage or do a classic pitch. The final event will be a celebration of their work and the collaboration between the artists, institutions and their communities. As the coordinator of the project and host of the final event, we invited the artists to Luxembourg for the TalentLab in June 2024 to see the venue and find suitable spaces for their presentations.

Tom Leick-Burns

Personally, I do not favour the outcome of 14 artists in a room with an hour each. I would rather have one artist who wants to do something for five minutes on the theatre’s roof and one who wants to do something for five hours in the basement. We need to take over the building and allow the artists to design an outcome that best serves what they wish to achieve with this project. We can bring lots of creativity to that format so that it is exciting and feels stimulating, allowing us to really engage with the artists’ practice and the different ways in which they want to exhibit their work and their ideas for the future.

Mathew Russell

ESSAY

Forced Labour: Project Presentation

BY

NICO JONGEN

November 2024

Nico Jongen's text is an abbreviated version of his presentation at the final event in Luxembourg.

Over the past few years, my company Ça marche (Barcelona) and I have developed projects involving groups of people and contexts that typically have no direct connection with the arts. These projects aim to reclaim a different way of working, one that values the process as much as – if not more than – the outcome. Through our various endeavours we have sought to engage with diverse languages and cultures, and to challenge the assumptions and routines of everyday life.

Out of my two years of research in the Future Laboratory, a performance project created in collaboration with Deaf communities in Liège, Reims, Porto, Bilbao and Barcelona has emerged: *Forced Labour*. I studied the intersection of Deaf culture, non-Deaf culture, accessibility and the performing arts. In each of my residencies, I worked with Deaf youth and adults to explore how the performing arts can become a space for rethinking communication and representation. As a result, I am currently developing a solo performance featuring a Deaf woman as its protagonist. It delves into the richness of Deaf identity and reflects on how we communicate beyond words, questioning our beliefs about language, listening and connection.

The Valencian philosopher Joan Fuster writes: 'The essay is never about a subject, but toward a subject. A path to understanding it: one path among others, one that excludes and forces us to momentarily renounce other

paths.¹ This simple statement captures an experience that is profoundly human: the essay admits that understanding is never total – neither before nor after. This mirrors my experience with my Future Laboratory project, which has produced more questions than answers, yet has offered me a crystal-clear realisation: we need to communicate with and approach one another, even while navigating the mystery and unfamiliarity of the many worlds, experiences and cultures surrounding us.

I am also inspired by Walter Benjamin, who says that storytellers – whom I believe include theatre-makers – are those who offer counsel to their listeners.² Such counsel does not promise easy solutions but rather offers suggestions on how to continue a story, how to keep a conversation going. I identify deeply with this idea of ‘continuing the conversation’, as it reflects my feelings when working on artistic projects. I trust that if I take the first step and the other party responds, together we can rekindle the fire, ‘continue the conversation’, learn from each other, break down barriers and challenge preconceptions. Communication is a recurring theme in my work. I am fascinated by its nature and the structures underlying languages. Quite often, communication is simpler than we imagine. The stories we tell weave connections among people and create shared spaces. To truly build empathy and knowledge, we need the other; we cannot do it alone, from within our comfort zones. We must venture beyond familiar places

to be shocked or moved – by something unknown that can help us better understand ourselves. Ease of communication is fundamental to social interaction.

This leads me to another key aspect of my research: storytelling, which, in my view, is a powerful communication generator. Narratives give individuals a place within a society or cultural fabric. Stories foster empathy and build bridges. I worry that we are losing the patience to truly listen to others’ stories or even tell our own.

This concern is echoed by Benjamin’s idea of ‘continuing the conversation’. I did not have an in-depth understanding of the Deaf world or Deaf experiences before I started this research, but I was driven by an intuition that forging mutual bonds would yield profound insights. This process was itself an act of communication – not merely to tell stories but to create spaces where we could reimagine how we understand each other. Communication, as I strive to address it in my projects, extends beyond spoken or written language. Working with Deaf individuals has challenged my preconceptions in this regard, teaching me to listen in entirely new ways. We often associate culture with oral traditions or exchanges, but it is much broader and my project seeks to explore that breadth. This journey has revealed to me how storytelling through the body, gestures and gaze creates connections that transcend words. In an increasingly impatient world, this experience has reminded me of the importance of pausing, opening up and letting the stories of others expand our understanding of the world.

This search for connection and understanding led me to dedicate two years to working with Deaf communities, and learning from their unique ways of narrating, communicating

1 Joan Fuster, *Consells, proverbis i insolències*, Barcelona, Edicions 62, 1968

2 Walter Benjamin, ‘The Storyteller: Reflections on the Works of Nikolai Leskov’, in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn, New York: Schocken Books, 1969, p. 86

and living. The insights I gained are now channelled into the theatre as a space where, once again, 'the conversation can be continued'. Collaborating with Deaf communities in different cities has been a profoundly transformative experience. It has shown me that beneath apparent differences, there exists a desire to communicate and share stories, even when our methods of doing so seem worlds apart. My research was not about 'explaining' or 'representing' the Deaf community. Instead, it was an effort to approach it with respect and curiosity, creating a dialogue where mutual learning was possible. Through it, I have discovered that storytelling relies not only on words but also on gestures and silences. Working with sign language and its visual narratives has opened up new ways of connecting and creating art, challenging the boundaries of conventional theatre. With this project, I hope to continue exploring what communication truly means and how we can share a creative space where language, culture or societal expectations are not barriers but starting points to imagine new possibilities.

Throughout human history, we encounter figures who choose silence: to speak no more, write no more, act no more, be no more: Empedocles, Kafka, Hölderlin, Woolf, Beckett, Bartleby, Rimbaud. 'Heraldic presences,' as George Steiner would say, 'active metaphors of the modern literary condition. Beyond the poems, almost stronger than they [Hölderlin and Rimbaud], is the fact of renunciation, the chosen silence.'³ But what happens when this silence is not a choice but an imposition?

3 George Steiner, 'Silence and the Poet', in *Language and Silence: Essays on Language, Literature, and the Inhuman*, New York: Atheneum, 1986, p. 47

Forced Labour offers audiences a theatrical experience where these questions intersect with the lived experiences of the Deaf community. An empty stage becomes a space for the unforeseen: a Deaf woman, occasionally accompanied by a sign language interpreter, invites the audience on a journey through stories, languages and gestures that challenge our habitual ways of understanding communication. The solo performance does not use subtitles, demanding a new kind of attention from its viewers. Drawing upon her personal experience as a speech therapist, writer and teacher, the performer will tell stories mixed with those of Scheherazade – a figure who narrates to resist, to build a community. Without subtitles, without concessions, the audience will have to 'listen visually', connecting with the language of the body, signs and vibrations. The performer's stories, interwoven with moments of audience interaction, create a tapestry of meanings where language, accessibility and culture are seen from unexpected perspectives.

Some audience members are invited onstage to be interviewed by the performer, who, without using words, uses her body and signs as vehicles of communication. At other times, the interpreter takes on the role of a character, either revealing or subverting the act of interpretation itself. The stories told are not merely tales; they are threads connecting the personal with the communal, the spoken with the unspoken. Inspired by the power of storytelling to evade, confront or transform realities, the piece explores our need to tell stories and how they shape our perspectives on life, community and identity. Like Scheherazade, the protagonist salvages lost stories and recreates them from the Deaf experience, asking us to look beyond spoken

language and reconsider what it means for something to be 'accessible'.

Building on Oliver Sacks' reflections about sign language as an intimate and inalienable part of Deaf identity,⁴ the performance pushes non-Deaf audiences to abandon their 'naive realism' about language. By suspending what we take for granted – language, immediate comprehension – *Forced Labour* invites us to reconfigure meaning, to embark on a journey towards a different, more embodied sensitivity that transcends the purely verbal. A key aspect of the work is its exploration of sound and vibration as mediums of connection. Enlisting a sound artist, the production uses amplification and vibration to bring the auditory experience closer to Deaf audiences, while simultaneously bringing the world of the Deaf community closer to hearing audiences. Through this dual approach, the piece seeks to bridge distinct sensory worlds, exploring how frequencies and sound textures can become language and shared emotion.

Forced Labour is, above all, an invitation to think through silence, through difference, through what does not fit within established frameworks. It is a space where Deaf identity becomes the focal point of a dialogue that transcends linguistic and cultural boundaries, prompting us to reconsider what it truly means to be present for one another.

4 Oliver Sacks, *Seeing Voices: A Journey into the World of the Deaf*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989



Reflections on a Future Edition of the Future Laboratory

During our conversations, many reflections on the lessons learned were already mentioned. We assembled some of the most intriguing ones in the following section.

When you decide to participate in this kind of project, you have to know your partners, have common artistic interests and be willing to share practices and values because you will have to spend three years in conversation, trying to find the best solutions for different challenges. This was a really rewarding situation in which the partnership worked excellently, even though the institutions' size, social, political and economic context, and level of experience with these kinds of projects were different.

We all know large structures and state institutions are not particularly flexible; they do not change overnight. But even when you try to change them, it takes time because the standard practices are taken for granted by all of us, i.e. by all members of the artistic system, so we really have to make creative and administrative efforts in order to get 'outside the box'. Direct dialogue, constant reflection, solidarity for an idea, empathy, flexibility and an authentic dedication to the initial goals can help to overcome any obstacle.

Gianina Cărbunariu
Board Member

When working with artists, whether they are emerging or more established, it is essential to set up a mutual agreement and outline the roles, principles and values shared by all parties involved. Clear communication, transparent governance, defined roles and a flexible approach are crucial. For example, the Future Laboratory newsletter has evolved in its content and frequency. Now it goes out monthly and includes an noticeboard where artists can share information about other projects they are working on as well as any relevant activities from the institutions. These developments were only possible through continuous dialogue, care and feedback, ensuring real collaboration on all aspects of the project.

Tom Leick-Burns
Board Member

Artists' needs vary, and it is therefore necessary to have a flexible margin in communication so that we, artists and institutions, can create a system that suits personalities, projects and expectations together.

However, for this we need to establish a council where artists and institutions are equally present from the start of →

Jillian Camarda
Artist Liaison

One lesson I take away from the project as a whole is my surprise at how big the topics, discussions, debates and expectations can (and should!) be in such ambitious, international projects – and what central human needs are ultimately at stake for all of us.

What unites us all is somehow, in a very radical way, the desire to be perceived with our needs and our view of the world; to be taken seriously and to have equal rights as a person. We are all human beings. We want to be seen for who we are. We want to be able to tell our story ourselves and tell the way in which it is important to us, without putting the power of interpretation in the hands of others. This realisation describes much of what I experienced during the project and what hopes and expectations I have for possible outputs.

Katharina Greuel
Board Member/Local Mentor

the project. More regular in-person meetings would also allow us to build relationships, get to know each other better and, consequently, help each other and learn about each other's research more effectively. Video conferences are a very practical tool when we live far away from each other, but sometimes people are too embarrassed to speak, especially when we do not all speak the same language. This is why it is so important to prioritise these moments of encounter from the beginning, and to space them out at regular intervals once a link has been established.

What I see as an issue is this long period of over two years. This means the Future Laboratory is always 'on-again, off-again', and you cannot follow it through at an equally intense level all the time. I noticed that myself: you can forget about the project for almost a quarter of a year. There is so much else going on in the theatres and in these talented young artists' careers. Other opportunities come along and it suddenly becomes problematic that you have committed yourself to something a year and a half ago. In other words, there might suddenly be other work that is more important.

Jörg Vorhaben

Board Member/Project Coach

The very idea to accompany artists throughout the process and ensure a balance at certain moments (either at turning points or in crisis situations, etc.) was a very good one in this project (just like the idea of having a mentor for the local residencies). The concept of creating a team (coach and mentor) to support the artists should be maintained, improved and transferred to other projects as well. It could also be interesting to follow our artists as they continue to develop their artistic careers.

Anca Plugaru

Board Member

For an upcoming Future Laboratory, we could do a masterclass on production systems in different countries, as they are not the same – we work in different economic realities – and emerging artists are not necessarily aware of them.

Jean-François Auguste

Project Coach

We are in a very delicate moment in the history of Europe, extremely difficult in political terms. There will be elections that, in my opinion, will change the notion of Europe.¹ And while there is a strong idea of European culture, there is no political consciousness of it. In this situation, theatre has a fundamental role to play, because theatres are one of the places where the idea of European culture has been built for decades. Theatre has to participate in the debate taking place over the next months and years. So, a project that connects young artists through research is fundamental. Creating such networks is vital to guaranteeing Europe's cultural and political heritage.

¹ The interview with Claudio Longhi was conducted in February 2024.

Claudio Longhi

Board Member

EPILOGUE

Future Laboratory: An Ambitious Journey Full of Challenges, Learning and Lessons for the Future

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BY

STEFANIE HUSEL & JEFF THOSS

The institutions that launched the Future Laboratory in 2022 set ambitious goals: the project emerged out of a desire to rethink the co-production model between European theatres. It was the COVID-19 pandemic that refocused attention on emerging artists, as they were the ones most affected by the lockdowns. The partners of the project wanted to offer these artists time to do research in three different European cities to address the broader topic of social inclusion. The aim was to explore the narratives of a European future that had not yet made it onto the stages of established theatres. In an interview, the creators of the initiative described having an ‘aha moment’ that gave rise to the Future Laboratory: At an early meeting, the question came up about what direction artistic research on the ‘narratives of tomorrow’ should take. They realised that, when working with emerging artists, it would be much more interesting to ask them to identify relevant topics and narratives, rather than being the ones to do so.

The core element of the Future Laboratory was thus defined: artists were sent to three different cities to engage with marginalised and underrepresented communities to identify narratives and voices that were still missing from the partner institutions in those cities. The participating institutions wanted to empower the artists and open up new perspectives. In return, emerging artists would be given the opportunity to work autonomously with established theatre institutions and place previously unheard narratives there.

The call for applications that was published in April 2022 sought artistic researchers who had marked socio-cultural interests and experience working with communities, and who wanted to go look for topics and stories that

are still missing from current productions. The response to this very broad call (see p. 42) was overwhelming: over 500 artists applied to be part of the Future Laboratory. The selection process was very challenging. The group of 15 artists, ultimately announced in July 2022, was characterised by a focus on socio-cultural issues as well as diversity. They represented the broadest possible geographical cross-section of Europe's different regions and were able to find common points between their work and the participating institutions.

Shortly after the launch event in Liège in October 2022, unprecedented alliances emerged – because it was only here that a joint decision was taken on where the artists' residencies would take place. A lot of questions surfaced during that first encounter: What kind of cooperation had been prepared and structurally facilitated by the organisers? Who was to learn from whom? It already became clear at this point that a new type of collaboration meant that the relationships between the different parties had to be examined and debated.

The beginning of the residencies marked the start of a very intense, challenging, but also extremely instructive and productive time for the Future Laboratory participants. One of the key things that stands out in the reports we received is that it was about establishing new relationships in many different contexts: new connections were sought, contacts were made and many doors were opened. Some of the paths were dead ends, demonstrating the existing difficulties. The artists-in-residence not only noticed, but experienced and encountered linguistic, organisational, financial and socio-cultural barriers in their harsh concreteness. Dealing with

marginalised communities and their expectations, on the other hand, resulted in participation in the research fields as well as intense emotional involvement and a profound understanding of the cultural order existing in the cities the artists visited.

The host institutions were also able to learn from the strongly socio-cultural and participatory research methods artists had selected for the Future Laboratory. They realised what infrastructure was necessary for artistic research that would enable theatre-makers to tap into previously unreached fields. Working with translators or cultural intermediaries – i.e. people from a particular community who can establish connections between it and the field of art/theatre – also proved especially important.

At the same time, it became evident that institutions wishing to initiate artistic research with socio-cultural aspirations needed to devote as much time and attention as possible to this project to create a welcoming atmosphere, a protected temporal and spatial frame, and a patient and open environment that allows for horizontal communication and constructive feedback. The corresponding structures first had to be created in the hectic day-to-day business of the theatres. Once the appropriate space or framework was established, the issues of invasiveness and exploitation regarding underserved and underrepresented communities could be addressed: instead of engaging in social voyeurism, stories can be shared and discussions can take place. This is an extremely valuable experience that points to a future in which theatre institutions will be able to establish a department for artistic research equipped with its own resources.

At the second project meeting in Milan, it became especially clear that the aim to establish safe spaces and conversations on equal footing was not only central with regard to the artists' projects, i.e. in the relationships between the artists and the fields or communities they researched, but also in the collaboration between the artists and the institutions. In our observations, this was critical for the Future Laboratory. Some habits (such as quick, informal agreements made on the spot) had been adopted unconsciously from the day-to-day practices of the institutions. The fact that these habits did not work in the new context only became apparent when problems arose, i.e. when organisational decisions became untransparent or when there was not enough time and space for discussion. After the Milan event, a number of those structural difficulties were redressed (for instance, by inviting artists to join the executive board of the project). Another outcome was that the project's final event was planned in close cooperation with representatives of the institutions and artists, and involved artists visiting the host venue (the Théâtres de la Ville de Luxembourg) in advance in order to assess the facilities and enable various forms of presentations.

And indeed, the final event realised many of the ideas that had been developed over the course of the Future Laboratory. Co-created between partner institutions and artists, it offered each artist the opportunity to share the outcomes of their research in the format that suited them best, discuss their work and learn from each other. Plus, there were opportunities to spend time together in an informal setting. In reflection sessions, numerous lessons

for future editions of the Future Laboratory were collected. We would like to share the most important points here:

As mentioned above, the biggest obstacle along the way was the lack of opportunities for communication between all parties on equal footing. This was true both in the work with the communities visited by the artists and in the exchange between artists and institutions. The key strategies that helped to address and ultimately often solve these problems consisted in implementing structural changes: the inclusion of artists in what were initially mere organisational matters (e.g. board meetings, the planning of events), the willingness to react flexibly to needs, the enlistment of artist liaison managers and external counsellors, the increase of internal communication channels, the provision of time and space for an exchange that was perceived as safe and sustainable.

The residencies and contact with the communities were perceived as very intense and valuable. They could be further improved if there were more preparation time and if the residencies themselves could be longer than two weeks. The artists would also benefit from contact with each other during the residencies, say, by organising them in different locations in parallel or having various artists in the same location at the same time.

It seems remarkable to us that the Future Laboratory, which was initially planned as an artistic research project for emerging artists, not only provided insights into fields that are often disconnected from institutions – as was intended – but also revealed and subsequently addressed problems with the (sometimes outdated) structures of European

theatres. The issues revealed by the Future Laboratory provide, on a meta-institutional level, invaluable learning about the importance of artistic research and how it could be even more strongly anchored in theatres.



Lucile Saada Choquet's final presentation,
Luxembourg, November 2024
© Juliette Maes Bodart

Artist Bios

Vera Boitcova is a theatre director, dramaturge, artistic researcher, curator, queer performance artist and political activist. Boitcova focuses on 'otherness', 'belonging', and 'home searching' in performance dramaturgy, particularly through the experiences of queer immigrants and refugees. Her work often delves into queer narratives and political themes, examining identity and activism through multimedia, site-specific and immersive formats. In her projects, she aims to bridge art and activism, focusing on creating spaces for underrepresented voices within the queer and immigrant communities.

Céline Camara was born in France. After studying law, she moved to Luxembourg where she started her office career as a jurist. In pursuit of her true passion, she got involved in the local improv scene. After a brief – and ultimately beneficial – existential crisis, she quit her legal career and devoted herself completely to theatre. Céline has trained in the techniques of forum theatre and the Theatre of the Oppressed. Since then, she has played in theatre, improv and film productions in Luxembourg, France and Belgium.

Nico Jongen is a theatre director and founder of the Barcelona-based performing arts company Ça marche. His artistic vision merges theatre, performance, movement and visual arts, exploring the complexities and contradictions of contemporary life. Nico's work often focuses on the intersection between craftsmanship and technique, seeking to disrupt conventional boundaries between professional and non-professional performance. A key aspect of his practice is the involvement of non-professional performers, such as children, elderly people, and members of marginalised communities.

Anne Sophie Kapsner (she/they) is a theatre director, writer and researcher based in Munich. Their interdisciplinary work is located at the intersection of documentation, drama and pop aesthetics, usually starting from biographical events. Anne worked as an assistant director at Münchner Kammerspiele, where they also performed and directed, and has been active as a freelance artist since 2022. Anne's art deals with identity and gender, social structures and big feelings – always from a queer feminist perspective. Humour and absurdity are particularly important in their stage aesthetics.

Sára Márc (they/them) is an art researcher and curator based in Prague working at the intersection of curatorial care, research and multidisciplinary art practice. They combine text, (moving) images and performative moments. Focusing on more-than-human perspectives, their subjects are located between speculative storytelling, alternative histories and presence exploration. Sára has been involved in several collaborative art projects – for example, the Polish Pavilion at the 2023 Prague Quadrennial and the Czech Pavilion at the 2024 Venice Biennale – and is a curator and manager at etc. gallery, Prague.

Carlota Matos (she/her) is a Portuguese theatre and performance artist working internationally with a focus on social change. Her practice addresses questions of identity, migration and mental ill-health in the form of documentary/experimental/participatory performances. She frequently collaborates with charities, artists from different disciplines, communities and people who are not necessarily trained or experienced performers. Carlota is the facilitator for Firebird Theatre, a company of learning-disabled actors. She is also a member of the UK movement Migrants in Theatre.

Ewa Mikuła is a Polish dramaturge and theatre director. Within the framework of documentary theatre, she explores everyday narratives, using them to reflect on larger societal processes. Mikuła made her debut with an autobiographical piece about her working-class heritage. Among others, she has created a performance focusing on alternative education methods based on a three-year documentary process with Polish and Slovak teens. Her latest project explores the boundaries of speech in her native Silesian ethnic minority language, seen through the eyes of young female speakers.

Odete works between performance, text, visual arts and music. She has presented her pieces in different formats and places, from galleries to theatres and public parks. Her work is obsessed with historiographical writing, using erotics and paranoia as two somatic ways of relating to archival materials. She writes through her body, speculating about biographies of historical characters through epidermic pleasures: fashion, personality, presence, fragrance, grace, sensibility. As part of The Cursed Assembly, she investigates the intersections of magic, transsexuality and historiography.

Maurin Ollès graduated from the École Supérieure de la Comédie de Saint-Étienne in 2016 and has appeared in productions by directors such as

Matthieu Cruciani, Marion Guerrero, Benjamin Lazar, Arnaud Meunier and Caroline Guiela Nguyen. He has also created a play about juvenile justice, *Jusq'ici tout va bien*, and assists the feminist theatre collective *Marthe*. With his company *La Crapule*, Maurin creates multidisciplinary work on social issues related to public institutions and marginalisation. In recent years, he has also taught courses at the *École Nationale Supérieure (ENSATT, ESAD, TNS)*.

Elena Rabkina is a Belarusian artist, curator and researcher working primarily with documentary photography and interactive art. She combines her artistic, journalistic and psychological background to create interactive pieces of social illustration and public art. Her journey as an artist has been shaped by her experience as a refugee, having left Belarus due to political protests and the war in Ukraine. This displacement led her to explore public spaces as places of belonging, inspiring her work on theatres as semi-public spaces in transition.

Simon Restino, born in 1991 in France, is a director and scenographer based in Paris and Strasbourg. Originally trained in the fine arts, his paintings extended into space, transforming into installations, writing and performances. He has designed spaces, costumes and objects for productions by Simon-Elie Galibert, Julien Gosselin, Agathe Paysant and Blandine Savetier, and contributed to the French Schools Pavilion at the 2019 Prague Quadrennial. In 2019, he also directed *Kaspar Hauser 1828–1833* at the *Théâtre national de Strasbourg*.

Teja Rot is an urban innovator, architect of peace and interdisciplinary artist who works at the intersection of community activism, urban design, sustainable architecture, environmental arts and technology, and advocates for user-related solutions that enable environmentally friendly living. Teja's research interests lie in the field of aesthetics and embodied perception in relation to games and play in nature. One of her core research topics is the sustainable development of communities and places within current technological reality.

Lucile Saada Choquet (she/adopted – France) is a Brussels-based artist/researcher who develops her own artistic language from a feminist and decolonial perspective situated in the Global North. Trained as an actress, she experiments with performance, dramaturgy and directing, questioning the porosity between the performing and the visual arts. As an activist, she

deals with social movements, their narratives and their impact on the bodies of minority groups, focusing in particular on the relationships between the intimate and the political, literature and archiving.

Giulia Sangiorgio is a director from Bari currently based in Milan. Before leaving Puglia, she worked for four years with the *Diaghilev Theatre Company* and produced a documentary on the concept of 'home' centred on experiences of immigration and emigration. In 2022, she co-founded the theatre company *CORPORA*, with whom she created performances on grief, identity, gentrification and social inequality. She has also created two musical operettas for children with the *Milan Symphony Orchestra* and collaborates with *Piccolo Teatro di Milano* on audience development projects and as an assistant director.

Ruxandra Simion is a playwright and cultural manager based in Bucharest. Ruxandra uses satire, musical theatre and community-engaged art to explore subjects such as climate change, labour, migration, housing issues, and the intersectionality between class and gender. Her work is multifaceted, encompassing writing and staging plays, creating opera librettos and performative texts, developing dramaturgical and digital game scripts, and facilitating numerous workshops using *Theatre of the Oppressed* techniques. Ruxandra also has curatorial and production experience.

Interviewee Bios

Jean-François Auguste is the artistic director of For Happy People & Co, which he founded in 2007. He has directed some 20 shows. For over 10 years, he has been working on the issue of the 'humanities' through the prism of a documentary theatre that links 'art' and 'human rights' in collaboration with living authors who fictionalise the stories. He tackles social issues by immersing himself among the people concerned, and his aesthetics are guided by the message conveyed on stage and consider all media.

Jillian Camarda has been coordinating several projects, including TalentLAB, the Future Laboratory and Red Bridge Project, at Les Théâtres de la Ville de Luxembourg since 2023. Previously, she was an administrative manager at Théâtre Ouvert Luxembourg, where she has also worked as an assistant director on several productions. In addition, Jillian regularly collaborates with the Cinémathèque de la Ville de Luxembourg and the Luxembourg City Film Festival on educational projects aimed at young audiences and schools.

Gianina Cărbunariu is a Romanian director and playwright who uses research and archives as part of the artistic process. She also works with different European theatres: Münchner Kammerspiele, Schauspiel Stuttgart, Centro Dramático Nacional, Madrid; Teatr Współczesny, Szczecin; Teatro delle Passioni, Modena; Slovak National Theatre, Bratislava. She was the general director of Teatrul Tineretului and curator for the International Festival in Piatra Neamț between 2017 and 2024.

Valer Simion Cosma is a historian and anthropologist. He is currently the director of the Lucian Blaga University Library in Sibiu. He founded the Centre for the Study of Modernity and the Rural World and initiated projects such as the Telciu Summer Conferences, the Telciu Summer School, Anonimii Migrației and Culese din Rural. He has worked as a consultant on theatre shows, artistic performances, documentary films, albums, and exhibitions. His interests are the modernization of the rural world, history and the sociology of rural elites, vernacular religion, nationalism and migration.

Magali Dupin is the deputy director of La Comédie, CDN de Reims, a public theatre directed by the actress and director Chloé Dabert. Like every nation-

al drama centre, the Comédie partners with artists in the creation of theatre projects with various aesthetics. These shows go on tour around France and abroad. Magali Dupin has been involved in the whole process of the Future Laboratory in association with La Boussole, a Reims-based cultural association. From 2009 to 2018, she worked at Le Préau CDN de Vire in Normandy and previously with theatre companies in Lyon.

Katharina Greuel is an artistic production manager focussing on exchange and (international) cooperation as well as creating spaces for young talents and new approaches. After holding positions at the New Plays from Europe theatre biennial in Wiesbaden, the International Büchner Festival in Giessen, the Institut français Mainz and the Sharing Potentials international dance congress, among others, she has been co-directing the Mainz Residenz at Staatstheater Mainz and the PLUG&PLAY theatre festival for young directors, co-founded with Jörg Vorhaben, since 2022.

Tom Leick-Burns trained as an actor at the Drama Centre London. He worked extensively in both theatre and film before joining the team of the Grand Théâtre, Luxembourg, in 2005. He completed an MBA at Sacred Heart University in 2012 and was appointed artistic director of Les Théâtres de la Ville de Luxembourg in 2015. The institution's artistic vision is focused on international collaboration through co-productions and participation in networks and European projects and talent development with platforms such as TalentLAB and Capucins Libre, designed to meet the real needs of local artists.

Claudio Longhi is the director of the Piccolo Teatro di Milano – Teatro d'Europa. From 1 January 2017 to 30 November 2020, he held the position of artistic director at the ERT Fondazione. He is also full Professor for Performing Arts for the Department of the Arts at the University of Bologna. Beginning in 1999, he directed many productions for leading Italian theatrical institutions. He has created and curated audience education projects and participatory theatrical projects.

Martin Lorenté is the co-founder and director of Cyclorama, which works in production, consulting, development, and professional training in the field of performing arts in France and Europe. Prior to this he was the director of productions at the Théâtre National de Bretagne in Rennes (France). He worked alongside Les Théâtres de la Ville de Luxembourg to conceive and

write the application for the Future Laboratory and is co-animator of the network.

Anca Plugaru has over 20 years of management experience in various fields. In 2017, she became deputy director of Teatrul Tineretului, Piatra Neamț, during Gianina Cărbunariu's first tenure. Currently, she is coordinating the administrative, production, technical and logistical activity of this public theatre, which also organizes the annual Piatra Neamț Theatre Festival. In this position, she is also responsible for the international collaborations and projects, as well as for the running of all the activities within the EU-funded ongoing projects.

Mathew Russell is a freelance cultural consultant and executive leader. Currently his portfolio includes: executive director, Variable Matter; producer, World Kiosk and New Beginning; consultant, A Good Life, Havering's new Cultural Strategy; independent chair, Havering Changing; facilitator, Future Laboratory final event. Mathew was executive director at Queen's Theatre Hornchurch between 2017 and 2024, where he helped to develop and deliver the Future Laboratory project, and co-chair of Havering's bid to be London Borough of Culture.

Raquel S. is a theatre director and playwright based in Porto. In 2018, she established Noitarder, a company that aims at combining theatre, literature and philosophy. Since 2018, Noitarder has produced the shows *Longe*, *amor.demónio*, *Ruído*, *Cadernos de* and *DESCANSAR*. Raquel was one of the selected playwrights at L'École des Maîtres 2020, for which she wrote *CARNE* (translated into French and Italian, presented in four countries and published in Portugal). She teaches dramaturgy and works as an outside eye in several contexts and institutions.

Elisabeth Schilling is a dancer, choreographer and artistic director. She develops projects between movement, design, visual arts and music that take place in performing arts venues, museums, public space and rural areas. Next to creating stage productions with professionals, Elisabeth initiates and creates community work of various forms and continuously develops new strategies to share her passion of dance with new audiences. Since 2022, she has been an associate artist at Théâtres de la Ville de Luxembourg.

Jörg Vorhaben has been the chief dramaturge at Staatstheater Mainz since 2014/15, where he heads the Mainz Residenz and the PLUG&PLAY

festival. During his studies he was, among others, assistant director at the Maxim Gorki Theater, Berlin, and co-organizer of ARENA – International Week of Young Theater, Erlangen. He was assistant dramaturge at Schauspiel Hannover and dramaturge at Nationaltheater Mannheim and Schauspiel Köln. From 2006 to 2014, he was chief dramaturge at Oldenburgisches Staatstheater and director of the festival Go West, which focused on theatre from Flanders and the Netherlands.

Partner Institutions

Les Théâtres de la Ville de Luxembourg present opera, dance and theatre in four languages. The TalentLAB, a project laboratory and multidisciplinary festival was launched in 2016 to further expand their support to local artists and promote international exchange. They also continue to nurture partnerships with other European venues and networks and have developed a co-production model based on exchange and training. The strategy of blending in-house creations with international co-productions and strong support for artists has increased the visibility of the institution as a producing venue. www.lestheatres.lu

La Comédie, Centre Dramatique National de Reims (France) is a house directed by an artist and dedicated to drama creation and experimentation, with a strong focus on playwriting. They present the festivals FARaway (an international festival organised in cooperation with six others cultural institutions of Reims) and Intercal (a biennial of transdisciplinary artistic projects crossing theatre and digital arts). They are also working on inclusion in and outside of the city with la Comédie itinérante, a travelling theatre. www.lacomediedereims.fr

Conde Duque Centro de Cultura Contemporanea (Madrid, Spain) uses a variety of facilities to promote the creation and dissemination of and research into the most cutting-edge artistic and cultural languages, through an accessible, high-quality programme with a forward-looking and constant vision and a firm commitment to serving the public and the city of Madrid. Its core mission is to promote and foster culture in public space, sharing with the community and help each another understand a complex world in constant flux. www.condeduquemadrid.es

Cyclorama (Rennes, France) is an organisation that has a mission of developing, consulting and supporting artistic projects, primarily in the performing arts sector, thanks to an extensive experience in the field, also in European and international projects. www.cyclo-rama.com

Nowy Teatr (Warsaw, Poland) is a municipal institution that produces theatre performances and performative, musical, literary and educational-

social events. It was born out of the work of Krzysztof Warlikowski, who radically opened up the art of theatre to important and often controversial issues, as well as to bold formal experiments. Nowy Teatr produces and presents experimental theatre from Poland and abroad. It inspires audiences by raising difficult issues, questioning the status quo, and encouraging critical thinking. Its performances are intended for various age groups. www.nowyteatr.org

Piccolo Teatro di Milano – Teatro d’Europa (Italy) was the first public Italian repertory theatre to be established and is the most important both in Italy and abroad. For the future, Piccolo Teatro will work on its sustainability, especially in an urban context, by exploring its link with the city, and is launching a fight against educational poverty with a focus on promoting theatrical culture. The theatre’s priorities for the years to come include support for new playwriting and young artists. Furthermore, Piccolo Teatro hosts and operates one of the leading schools for actors in Italy. www.piccoloteatro.org

Queens Theatre Hornchurch (United Kingdom) is a performing arts institution that operates in an urban area in the greater London area, with a mission to develop creation as well as foster community outreach and audience development in an area with underrepresented and underserved communities, especially working-class audiences. They have a strong focus on social inclusion through culture. The theatre is leading a consortium of voluntary sector organisations that places creative people on projects, with a focus on engaging people that come from underrepresented and underserved communities. www.queens-theatre.co.uk

Staatstheater Mainz (Germany) is an opera, dance and drama repertory theatre, with a large ensemble for all three disciplines. Constant curiosity and a great interest in exchange strongly characterise the work of Staatstheater Mainz and can be seen, among other things, in close contacts with the independent theatre scene as well as in the organisation of the inclusive festival Grenzenlos Kultur, the tanzmainz festival and PLUG&PLAY – Theatre Festival for Young Directors. www.staatstheater-mainz.com

Teatro Municipal do Porto (Portugal), through its two hubs – Rivoli and Campo Alegre – presents a multidisciplinary program open to a wide range of latitudes and audiences. It also hosts DDD – Festival Dias da Dança. They

have developed a support program for artists with the Campus Paulo Cunha e Silva, a centre for artistic residencies and a workspace for the performing arts. These three projects make up the Department of Performing Arts at ÁGORA - Cultura e Desporto, E.M. www.teatromunicipaldoporto.pt

Teatrul Tineretului (*Piatra Neamț, Romania*) has a mission of speaking to young audiences and has therefore developed strong links with the educational sector at different levels. They also organise Piatra Neamț Theatre Festival, an international festival that has existed since 1969. The theatre strives to explore and reach new audience segments and increase its outreach thanks to its repertory work as well as the openings the international festival provides. www.teatrultineretului.ro

Théâtre de Liège (*Belgium*) is very active in several European networks and projects which reflects their search for openness in the context of their location at the proximity of several countries and languages of a great Euroregion. They organise several festivals such as Impact, an arts and technology forum, Pays de Danses, a dance biennial, and Emulations, a festival for the creations of emerging artists. They are working closely with the Conservatoire Royal de Liège and the young artists who graduate from there, as well as with the other drama schools in Belgium. www.theatredeliège.be

Théâtre national de Strasbourg (*France*) has a unique place in the French performing arts landscape as the only national theatre located outside the capital. The TnS hosts and operates one of the leading schools for stage actors, technicians and directors in France. It aims to develop an art theatre that is both popular and demanding and fosters social inclusion by telling new narratives and including citizens in creation-oriented work. The theatre is also working in the public realm by seeing how it can reach communities by investing the public spaces of the city. www.tns.fr

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15 artists were selected for a research residency programme to engage with underrepresented and underserved communities in three cities and discover the European narratives of tomorrow. How can their research be supported? How can the collaboration with local communities – but also the relationship between the theatre and the artist/researcher – be structured?

Future Laboratory: Artistic Research in Theatre – A Casebook is a publication for the creative community of theatre professionals by the European Theatre Convention (ETC), Europe's network of public theatres. It presents reflections, valuable insight and experiences from a variety of participants of the two-and-a-half-year Future Laboratory programme, a collaboration between 12 European performing arts institutions.