

# Thinking Matter(s) in Theatre Practice A Dramaturgy of Assemblages

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## ABSTRACT

This article discusses a materialist approach to dramaturgy framed as a dramaturgy of assemblage. It is inspired by posthuman thinking and draws on theory from new materialism (Rosi Braidotti, Jane Bennett, Elaine Gan, and Anna Tsing). The dramaturgical approach is developed through artistic research, and the article refers to the performances *Childism* (2015) and *Jeg vill høre havet* (2017), which serve as examples of this practice. I articulate the movement from dramaturgy as a collective practice to exploring a collective which includes more-than-human collaborators. Rosi Bradotti's work on the nomadic subject (drawing on Deleuze and Guattari) has inspired the notion of the nomadic dramaturge. In her book *Posthuman Knowledge*, Braidotti discusses what "we" are in the posthuman and post-anthropocentric condition, suggesting that the posthuman subject is (part of) a collective. Following Braidotti, I introduce the concept of dramaturgy of assemblages as a place for this collective subjectivity. A dramaturgy of assemblages responds in practice to the question of how a posthuman framework affects theatre and performance-making. What is presented in this article is all about shifting perspectives. When we think differently, we act differently, and different things are formed.

## KEYWORDS

dramaturgy, posthumanism, new materialism, performing arts, assemblages, relationality

# Thinking Matter(s) in Theatre Practice

## A Dramaturgy of Assemblages

### **The Nomadic Dramaturg**

I work as a practising dramaturge, teacher, and practice-based researcher in a European context of the arts and humanities. As an artist, I have been part of an independent, interdisciplinary performing arts field based in Oslo, Norway, since the early 1990s before moving my artistic work into an academic context. Since 2006, I have developed my research within a performative paradigm and artistic research methods.<sup>1</sup> A performative research paradigm implies a process where the practice and knowledge production intertwine in constant movements of becoming. It means that the empirical material is produced alongside and between the analysis of – and reflection on – the same material. These processes are not separate but mutually affect each other. As a dramaturg, this research always takes place in the collective with whom I collaborate. Thus, it draws on unstructured, ongoing dialogues, both verbal and non-verbal, with human and more-than-human collaborators. My research grows out of these relations, experiences, and impressions. It is how this material connects and resonates with posthuman theories that I will explore in what follows. I refer to posthumanism here, including new materialism and parts of speculative realism in line with how Christel Stalpaert, Kristof van Baarle, and Laura Karreman frame posthumanism as being “not only about the relation between human bodies and societies and technologies, but about how that relation has an impact on and emerges within ecologies, and requires alternative frameworks and concepts to think and act”.<sup>2</sup>

Through my experience of working, mainly in devising processes with dance, theatre, and experimental music, I have become interested in what I, in the role of the dramaturge, contribute to processes where dramaturgy is developed collectively. I have argued elsewhere for dramaturgical work as a shared and dialogical practice,<sup>3</sup> which implies embedding in depth listening into the process, following its twists and turns where rhythm is a central guiding principle, rather than a more analytical approach. It is an approach that is as much about tearing down structures as building them. “To be part of such a process can at times feel aimless, often challenging when considering one’s own norms and ‘quality standards’; other times it is like an intentional ‘micro-collapse’ (...) which allows the work to follow its own movement and transformation from one form to another”.<sup>4</sup> When the dramaturgy of performance is constructed collectively, I have searched for a relevant vocabulary to express the role and position of the dramaturge in such collaborative and dialogical work. Philosopher Rosi Braidotti’s writing (with reference to Deleuze and Guattari) on the nomadic subject has inspired me to think of the dramaturge as a nomadic figure.<sup>5</sup>

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1 Østern 2017; Østern & Jusslin et al. 2021.

2 Stalpaert et al. 2021, 7.

3 Eeg-Tverbakk 2018.

4 Eeg-Tverbakk 2018, 23.

5 Braidotti 2011.

Coming from the independent art scene, having moved between positions as a dramaturge, performer, curator, and producer and between dance, theatre, music, and visual arts, I have long been interested in questioning hierarchies, authorship, and organisational structures. Facing the current climate crisis, the question of how to work in a sustainable way has become acute. These questions involve thinking through collaborative methods and a nomadic position. Braidotti's concern is to think of a nomadic subject as an "affirmative mode of engagement"<sup>6</sup> to create new concepts and critique.

Braidotti argues for a nomadic subject as one in constant flux, engaged in dynamic power relations and always intrinsically Other. This approach to dramaturgical work would imply a less stable position in the working collective. A nomadic approach challenges the way artists use, cite, and transform the material they work with. It allows room for a relational space where the way we are positioned towards each other and the things and material that we are working with is constantly shifting, thus questioning power positions and what and who are inside, outside, at the margins, in the centre, or elsewhere, within the collective process.

The nomadic subject will be motivated by a strong will to change the way relations between things function, questioning an anthropocentric structure relating to other beings and materials rather than defining them. The foundation (for the nomadic dramaturg) is not primarily the interpretation and structure of the text but rather to sense, capture, and find structure in the rhythms, energies and atmospheres appearing and disappearing throughout the work and how all things influence the process.<sup>7</sup>

### Working as a "We"

In her book *Posthuman Knowledge*, Rosi Braidotti discusses what "we" are in the posthuman and post-anthropocentric condition, suggesting that the posthuman subject is (part of) a collective. "The posthuman is a work in progress. It is a working hypothesis about the kind of subjects we are becoming".<sup>8</sup> Her book attempts to unpack what that "we" is and how to keep it collectively open, multiple, and non-hierarchical. I believe that performing arts, in general, and thinking and working with what I call a "dramaturgy of assemblages", in particular, can play a part in the quest to understand how posthuman subjects work and act in the world. It is a dramaturgy that, in many ways, protests a globalized, late capitalist control of time disguised as efficiency and critiques linearity and instrumentalization. Braidotti's project is to open a space for the posthuman subjectivity that offers hope in a world in crisis. She points to how humans are embodied and embedded, always situated in relation to everything else that exists on this planet. This is the perspective that a dramaturgy of assemblages strives to actualize by slightly shifting the focus from human-centered matters to seeing ourselves as part of – and entangled with – everything else. This work also requires a different relation to time (which may also challenge the working principles of established theatre institutions). It does not necessarily mean more rehearsal time in terms of days or weeks but rather a different understanding of efficiency and productivity. For a dramaturgy of assemblages to work, we need to slow down, listen, and take part in our relations in ways that are often unfamiliar to the Western, late capitalist subject. Braidotti asks what it means to be relational within a posthuman paradigm: "The knowing subject is not Man, or Anthropos alone, but a more complex assemblage that undoes the boundaries between inside and outside the self by emphasizing processes and flows."<sup>9</sup> She demonstrates a strong belief in the force, joy, and desire that drive creation. She describes how one of the key features of posthuman subjects, and I would add also of a dramaturgy of assemblages, is "(...) a materialist process ontology (...) defined as a creative praxis of actualization of the virtual."<sup>10</sup> The virtual here refers to the plane of potential forms that lies inherent in all things. These are possibilities not meant to serve human needs or any other purpose, but are rather a sign of life. Shifting perspectives, figuring out the posthuman position, and what the "we" is within each context is a practice where thought, concepts, and practical

6 Braidotti 2011, 8.

7 Eeg-Tverbakk 2016, 166.

8 Braidotti 2019, 2.

9 Braidotti 2019, 46.

10 Braidotti 2019, 54.

doing need to be processed and embedded over time.

The dramaturgy of assemblages offers a paradigm shift that evidently will tell different stories which may teach us other ways to become subjects in this world. It does not mean that human artists are left out of the loop and that text-things and other things are taking control of the process of making a performance. It means that humans are one of many actants that are part of shaping the piece, as much as anything else. This demands a practice of listening, taking a step back to let other things affect and do things in the spaces of rehearsal: Questioning the human position of power and, perhaps the most difficult thing, letting go of power, ego, and the need to shape things. Braidotti insists that "What matters is to negotiate collectively about what exactly we are in the process of becoming, and how much transformation, pain, dis-identification or enhancement our embodied and embained selves can take."<sup>11</sup>

What I explore in what follows is perhaps not so much a new way of working with dramaturgy in practice, but rather a posthuman framing of how we think about artistic approaches and methods. Changing the ways in which we understand the work we do will contribute to developing new methods and artistic work. This is a process that can contribute to collectively creating spaces for posthuman knowledge.

### Assemblages

Post-humanist, post-anthropocentric, and new materialist theory advocates new ways to conceptualize the relations between human and more-than human worlds. This is currently actualized by, among many factors, the precarious period of climate change and a growing interest in indigenous epistemologies. We look to nature to learn how to co-create, co-habit, and become entangled in the quest to construct sustainable worlds. In Elaine Gan and Anna Tsing's article "How things hold" they discuss the ways a satoyama forest in Japan is composed and comes to life as a more-than-human assemblage, where the human is only one of many actors taking part.<sup>12</sup> I am interested in understanding how these concepts play out in theatre-making, particularly focussing on dramaturgical practice. How does a performance evolve and structure itself when regarding human bodies as matter, intertwining and co-creating with other things such as text (what I call "text-things"), voice, bodies, spatial structures, props, costumes, weather, food, and other things involved? A dramaturgy of assemblages seen through a posthuman perspective is about viewing all these matters as things that do not act "properly". Dance scholar and dramaturge André Lepecki writes about the relation between objects and subjects in performance and argues that the counterforce of objects is to become "thingly". He defines things as that which "escapes instrumental reason, whatever exist outside logics of manipulation."<sup>13</sup> Can the human body (with organs), breath, and text become "thingly", and how does that affect theatre practice?

With this as a point of departure I see a need to withdraw (as much as possible) from interpretation and analysis, which is often a very central part of theatre – and dramaturgical practices. Dramaturges, directors, and actors traditionally see their job as interpreting (text) material. Within a new materialist theatre practice, where all the things involved are seen to carry agency, the job is rather to listen and to *let* things happen rather than *making* things happen. It means taking a step back from our tendency to invent, to wait and see what is being formed through the relations playing out in space. This demands a certain level of trust and of letting go of ego-structures, artistic virtuosity, challenging notions of "quality" and perhaps even "professionalism". If we consider a performance to be an assemblage, then humans are only one part of "a multispecies portfolio of activities that makes the [woodland – C. E.-T.] assemblage possible".<sup>14</sup> Gan and Tsing ask how things can hold a place and a situation in precarious times. They emphasize that it does not depend on "communication, a common goal, or human-driven webs of significance",<sup>15</sup> but that timing matters to gather an assemblage, a common place, and situation. This is also well-known in performing practices, but here it does

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11 Braidotti 2019, 74.

12 Gan & Tsing 2018.

13 Lepecki 2016, 29.

14 Gan & Tsing 2018, 118.

15 Gan & Tsing 2018, 141.

not only concern the timing of human actors, but also of other materials inside, and outside, the process.

In what follows, I will use two performance projects I have worked with to demonstrate how a posthuman approach to articulating and conceptualizing the practice has led me to the idea of a dramaturgy of assemblages. The project *Childism* (2014-15) was developed as part of my practice-as-research PhD *Theatre-ting, Toward a Materialist Practice of Staging Documents*, where the practical and theoretical aspects were developed in close relation with all the other materials that were part of the assemblage. The other project *Jeg vil høre Havet* (2017) was funded by the Norwegian Cultural Council and took place at the National Theatre in Oslo. Throughout both projects, I worked with field notes and a working diary as I am primarily researching my own methods, concepts, and role as a dramaturge working through a collective. In accordance with new materialist theory, my starting point was to rethink and work with the body in performance, as well as words and text on an equal footing with all other materials involved.

### **The Performers' Body as Material**

Is this body “mine”? When I focus on the relationship between things I collaborate with, I find this to be an intriguing question. I practise seeing my body as material: flesh, bones, blood, veins, organs, bacteria, etc. Thinking of it as a “becoming-thing” affects the way I act and experience relations within space. Health studies show that less than half of the cells in our bodies are considered “human”. Scientists have discovered that microbes in the gut can affect mood and health conditions. These studies “changed the way we think about biology, and changed the way we think about what it means to be human”.<sup>16</sup> A becoming-thing “might not be such a bad destiny for subjectivity after all”,<sup>17</sup> writes Lepecki when discussing how commodification controls things and subjects through objectifying them. Theories about the body and embodiment connected to feminism have offered important steps toward a renewed interest in materialism.<sup>18</sup> The materiality of the body is to see the body as an assemblage of matter that is connected to and stands in relation to other things and materials. This is not a holistic position, but a relational one. Bennett states that “(...) [i]n a world of vibrant matter, it is not enough to say that we are ‘embodied’. We are, rather, *an array of bodies*, many different kinds of them in a nested set of microbiomes”.<sup>19</sup>

When working with acting students, I often ask them to take a deep breath in the middle of a sentence when delivering a line. This is to interrupt their line of thought, which is often busy interpreting the words and looking for a linear logic. The deep breath, as an exercise, is a tool to open a text, to make it move and be able to sense what it does when uttered. The deep breath is a pause, an opportunity to listen and sense the movement and how it affects the speaking body becoming-thing. It is not to find any particular way or form, but rather to open ourselves up to the unknown through our senses. The deep breath creates circulation within the human body, of neurons, energies, and emotions. It can sometimes create a physical or emotional sensation that comes as a surprise or as a gift to the performer. This makes a deep breath challenging for many students who feel the vulnerability that the breath evokes in them when experiencing moments of losing control. This is also the reason for using it. To let go of control. To take a moment to listen, pause, and experience the body as thingly in a space of many other things. A body is breathing, moving, not owned by anyone or anything, it is in a slow process of deterritorialization moving toward dissolution. It is a thing that is not going anywhere in particular, simply being present with other material things in time and space. Braidotti writes about the posthuman subject as a “we”, as an assemblage that transgresses a conceptualized idea of inside versus outside. The posthuman subject is in constant process and flow. It is an embodied and embedded, relational and affective, collaborative entity.<sup>20</sup>

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16 Lee 2019.

17 Lepecki 2021, 55.

18 Braidotti 2018.

19 Bennett 2010, 112.

20 Braidotti 2019, 46.

### Text-things

Departing from a new materialist approach where text is thingly and understood as matter: how do a text and human body affect each other in moments of performance? I would say they do so through touch. A performer touches a text through their breath, vocal cords, tongue, and lips. In the theatre, we often talk about “tasting” the words. Here, this is thought of in a literal way. Instead of analysing the words, projecting an interpretation, the field of potential interpretations is opened up and explored (together with the audience) through this touch. When working with actors, asking them to find ways of not knowing what words mean, but rather exploring a shared co-creative moment, time and listening is necessary. A way of opening up that space is to work with breath as a sudden break in a sentence. I think of projecting words into the space, as a bridge or stepping stones between performer and audience to explore together, co-creating meaning with everything else, sharing time and space at a particular moment, and creating a “we”. To do so means attempting not to explain or represent a chosen meaning of the words, to analyse as little as possible, which includes not imagining what the text means but discovering what it can mean in each moment. It implies trusting the text and its ability to communicate what it needs to without further mental or emotional explanations.

“To explore the text and how it becomes a thing means to see the text as a relational and connective tool through which proximity, intimacy, trust, power, violence, distrust, and distance can be played out and made present, depending on all other things the words relate to when articulated in a specific time-place. Breath is an ethical tool when performers relate to text as a thing; it is a way to touch the thing with air, vocal cords, tongue, and mouth”.<sup>21</sup>

This approach to text-work asks the performer-ego to withdraw, or at least attempt to step back and leave the material to act and find agency. It is linked to the way Gan and Tsing explain that humans in the forest in Japan are only humble helpers or perhaps facilitators in making the forest ecosystem work. Humans are needed, but they are not more important than the trees, the earth, and the fungi. They are needed to sweep and keep it open enough for the sunlight to reach the forest floor. When actors speak text-things they are simply helpers in making the words heard. The actor articulates the text-things, sending them out into the space to discover, together with the audience, how the words move them. However, the performers’ subject-body also affects the spoken words and becomes one part of the assemblage.

### Childism

In 2014-15 I worked as a dramaturge on the documentary performance *Childism*, which was devised in collaboration with dancer Henriette Storer, actor Petra Fransson, children’s clothes, a water bowl, earth, pearls, sewing kits, music by Iron Maiden, a video camera, old photos, computers, a projector, and fragments of stories from an informant having lived through abuse and neglect in her childhood. How to treat such a topic artistically is not evident. Actors often work with documentary text material in performance by focusing on understanding, interpreting, embodying, and sometimes even illustrating the text. With material containing abuse and violence, this approach can become ethically problematic. Our starting point was rather that these are stories that are incomprehensible for us as performers. It is impossible for us to think that we can understand or embody this material. Instead, we had to trust the text-things themselves, that they have agency and can do something when spoken and listened to. We needed to acknowledge the gap between performer and text-things, a gap that we were not looking to bridge. This distance allows space to experience a relation in motion with the text material. Our focus was rather on what these text-things, when materialized in space, did to us as performers. What did they make us feel, think, do, and imagine? Our sensuous response was never fixed, but a process of transformation, different each time the words were uttered. These affects were shared with the audience, who then also had their own feelings, thoughts, and imaginations triggered by the text-things which were released into the shared space.

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<sup>21</sup> Eeg-Tverbakk 2016, 209.





Figure 1. Dancer seated sewing during the performance of *Childism*. Photo: © Camilla Jensen.

Throughout the process, we approached the documentary material carefully, focusing on the activities of speaking, breathing, dreaming, moving, screaming, throwing and cutting things, and words. How could we possibly speak or perform anything of abuse to an audience? The dancer used her movement expertise and processed what she learned through her body. The actress processed the material of abuse through breathing and touching text-things with her voice always connected to her body. They were both focusing on how the stories of trauma affected their bodies, movements, and breath, rather than attempting to intellectually understand or interpret the material. I, the dramaturge, had processed the documentary text-things through twenty-five years of friendship with the informant, where the narratives had entered my psycho-physical body in different layers. It has not become knowledge, but perhaps rather left traces in me. In the context of *Childism*, I explored how the other things involved in the process could affect these narratives and offer new aspects and insights. The children's clothes, originally associated with play, fun, and trust, were, in this case, exposed to violence, and in the performance, they were cut and thrown around. In the picture above, you see Henriette cutting the clothes into pieces, Petra lying on the floor voicing text-things of sexual abuse using breath and pauses to let the words act and tune into the space and ears present. I am filming close ups of clothes projected to a screen to render them visible in detail, perhaps performing the role of the intrusive eye of an adult.

Sewing, knitting, and embroidering are activities that have been shared between women throughout history in all cultures. During these activities, the relation with the thread, needles, and yarn has often created space for memories to move, become articulated, and entangled with the fabrics. In *Childism*, each audience member got a little sewing kit with fabric, needle, thread, and some pearls. They were invited to sew throughout the performance if they wanted to. Many took up the invitation and we were often left with those physical marks of how the stories we shared were imprinted into fabric at the hands of the audience.

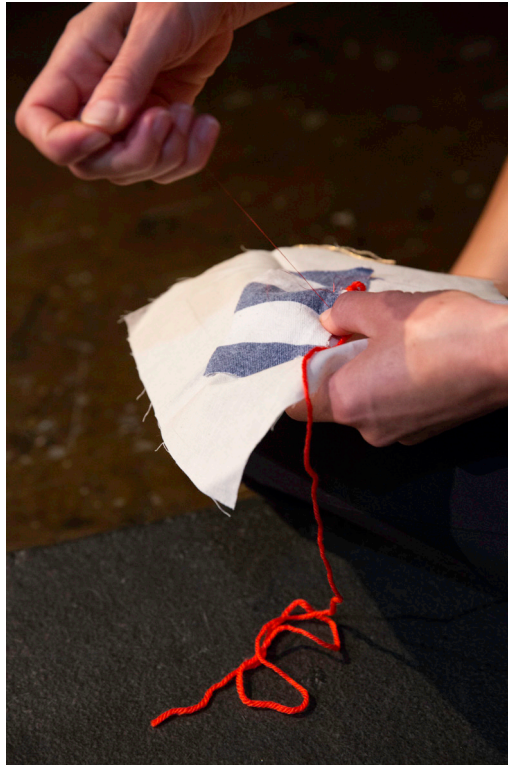


Figure 2. Fabric and hand sewing.  
Photo: © Camilla Jensen.

A central question when working from a materialist perspective, with a dramaturgy of assemblages, is whose work of art is this? I have outlined a series of collaborators, human and more-than-human, that were part of creating *Childism*. The children's clothes, the activity of sewing in collaboration with the fabrics, pearls, needle, and thread (while listening to Iron Maiden's music), mixing water and dirt with my hands while filming it close up, all of these things create the work and the dramaturgy as much as the human performers and the documentary text-things. It is no longer about devising an interesting concept or having a vision of what the piece should be or how it should be structured. Rather, the challenge is to tune into the situation, to live and experience the relations. As the human agents involved, we must work against the habit of seeing ourselves as the creators in power. This may mean using our skills in different ways. It challenges ideas of artistic freedom, quality standards, and what it means to be professional. It is a fearful feeling of letting go of control, of trusting the process, and of not knowing where to go. To be led rather than to lead, to be formed rather than to form, and to become part of a movement beyond myself where I play one of many parts. Many artists who work with materials like clay, stone, paint etc. are familiar with this, but in the theatre, I rarely encounter artists who experience the relation to their material in this way.

### **Jeg vill høre Havet (I Want to Hear the Ocean)**

In several projects, I have collaborated with non-trained performers in a form I call "Theatre-ting". It is a form where I work on a specific topic together with people who are engaged in and want to share thoughts about that topic with an audience. The idea is to use the stage as a platform to discuss social and political issues. The word "ting" here refers both to the Norse word for parliament ("Storting", "Allting", "Folketing"), and also to materiality ("ting" means "thing" in Scandinavian languages). In 2017, I collaborated with a group of five teenagers and two pensioners who were all engaged in climate issues. I will not go into depth about Theatre-ting as a dramaturgical form here, but I will instead focus on how my engagement with new materialism and object-oriented philosophy affects this work.



It can be argued that, in practice, this work does not differ so much from other devised or documentary theatre work. However, I believe that the materialist approach affects the work deeply. It affects the power dynamic throughout the process as well as in the performing space. This again changes how performers and audience members experience the situation.<sup>22</sup> Interestingly, all images taken by the theatre photographer of the National Theatre in Oslo, are human-centric. Thus, I rather want to use an image of scrap paper to represent the project here.



Figure 3. Stacked scrap paper. Photo: © Camilla Eeg-Tverbakk.

The project *Jeg vill høre Havet* (I want to hear the ocean) dealt with climate change as a topic. The theatre-ting as a form is framed by the notion that all materials, human or more-than-human, have what Jane Bennett calls “thing power”.<sup>23</sup> This means things (as opposed to objects that are already framed and named by humans) have a self-organizing capacity, which is also true, according to Bennett, for the inside of a human body. Taking this as a working ethic changes the approach radically. Human-things, text-things and all other things taking part in the devising process matter on an equal level. I am not referring here to a dramaturgy on equal footing as theorized by Knut Ove Arntzen in relation to the concept of visual dramaturgy.<sup>24</sup> Instead, I am interested in an equal power dynamic between all the things involved, where each thing co-creates equally, forming and being formed through dynamic entanglements and relations. All things involved in the process are seen as vital and vibrant matter, with thing-power.

To be present and collaborate in a space, experiencing one’s own body as an assemblage of materials is difficult. It implies practising a different relationship to oneself. It makes me realize how my body is in a process of decay, deteriorating at a much faster rate than many of the other things involved in the collaboration. Words on the other hand, only exist in the moment they are spoken. Sensing the body as material makes me realize the precariousness of the existence of all matter. Life is precarious and we need to care for the relationships and transformations taking place.

22 In my Phd project, Eeg-Tverbakk 2016, I interviewed the young performers I worked with in the project “Encountering Loss”. The Theatre-ting as dramaturgical form also always includes an audience conversation, which has on several occasions been recorded.

23 Bennett 2010.

24 Arntzen 1990.

As a facilitator in this project, I offer a series of performance practices and tasks that we do together. They include discussions about climate change and the challenges we are facing, research through literature, articles, and news, visits to relevant institutions, conversations with experts and non-experts, writing exercises, movement exercises, finding relevant text sources and narratives, sharing personal stories and opinions, and many other things. Everyone brings material that they find interesting to involve, be it text, sound, music, objects, images, or ideas for actions. It is difficult to understand how something enters the process, why some things stay and why other things disappear again. We try to avoid having too many opinions about what “works” or not, but rather see which things group themselves together. Attempting to listen, being flexible, and not letting humans make all the decisions challenges the habits learned from our social and cultural upbringing. Through years of striving for and learning how to produce artistic quality, this is probably most difficult for the “professionals” like me, the dramaturge. Those standards are questioned through a material-oriented process like this. Letting the thing-power work does not always look the way one likes, and as a dramaturge, I constantly fight my fear of not producing something regarded as quality in my professional context. Throughout this particular process, we ended up inviting a few other collaborators: visual artist Tone Myskja, who developed moving images on the back wall of the performance space, and actor Håkon Mathias Vassvik, who performed an excerpt from Karl Ove Knausgård’s book *En tid for alt / A Time for Everything* (2012). We also invited a guest for each public performance; climate researchers who were given a time slot of six minutes (regulated by an alarm clock) to speak about whatever they wanted. How all these things come together in a performance is difficult to describe. I see it as a process where each thing, or each body, is constantly moving and transforming since it is affected by other things and bodies in the shared time and space. Finally, what is shared with an audience is where this process took us at a scheduled time. The assemblage of things we call a performance could have been different. The entanglements and relations taking place are only one of endless possibilities. There is no ideal dramaturgical structure, in the end the various things find their temporary places, which have the potential to change at another time and place.<sup>25</sup> The intention of a materialist approach to theatre making is not to represent the material to an audience, but rather to share traces from the encounter between the material and the participant’s experience and to offer space for all the materials to act and connect to audiences in their own ways.

### **Dramaturgy of Assemblage**

The materialist perspective in dramaturgical practice changes the stories we tell and the time we spend on dramaturgical work. Ultimately, a dramaturgy of assemblages questions what is meant by having a life, acknowledging that all things matter, move, and are being moved: what we eat, how we sleep, what the weather is like, the spaces we are in, what things we encounter in those spaces etc. It is all about shifting perspectives. When we think differently, we act differently, and different things are formed. Drawing on Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of assemblages, Jane Bennett writes about how an assemblage is not governed by any central head (like the human): “(...) no one materiality or type of material has sufficient competence to determine consistently the trajectory or impact of the group.”<sup>26</sup> The main idea for Bennett and for a dramaturgy of assemblage, is that the emergent properties of the assemblage have much greater force to transform and make something happen, than each thing alone. Additionally, the assemblage is not solid and fixed but is considered to be an open-ended collective of things and bodies. The director, dramaturge, performer, or anyone else involved cannot have the overview or control of what is taking shape. The dramaturgy of assemblages is not going anywhere in particular. It is not looking for a specific outcome of doing good or solving a problem, or even looking good. It is a dramaturgical approach that waits to see what happens, what comes along, and what might take place in the moment of performing the relational threads and movements of the assemblage. It is risky.

As already mentioned, devising processes in performing practices can be seen as

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25 I explore these ideas in depth in my PhD thesis, Eeg-Tverbakk 2016. I had not yet developed the idea of the Dramaturgy of Assemblages at the time of writing the thesis in 2016.

26 Bennett 2010, 24.

already working in similar ways to those I have described here. The difference is how the working process is conceptualized. It matters how we understand ourselves as artists in the collaboration, it is a shift of focus from a human-centred perspective to a more-than-human perspective. A dramaturgy of assemblages can challenge Western aesthetic paradigms of quality in performing arts, and it may challenge ideas of what is “good” dramaturgy or a “good” performance. Instead, it may produce something different and unknown, another sensibility, and the rehearsal spaces and stages may become a place to practice a different ethics and explore the posthuman subject as a “we”.

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