



Article

Connected Matters

Nana Francisca Schottländer: *Bodyscaping*, 2021. Produceret af Metropolis. Photo: Nana Francisca Schottländer

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Collaboration and Care in Nana Francisca Schottländer's *Bodyscaping*

By Solveig Gade

Over the past decades, an increasing number of performance and theatre artists have responded to the ecological catastrophes ensuing from the massive current climate changes by addressing how future survival on “a damaged planet” (Tsing 2019) may unfold in a more sustainable, and less exploitative manner. Dedicating themselves to new ways of imagining human activity and inhabitation of the planet, such practices have often initiated encounters with more-than-human agents, such as animals, insects, plants, and landscapes. To mention but a few recent Nordic examples, we may point to the walking lectures about/with bees, ants, and wolves by the performance group Secret Hotel (*Banquet for Bees*, 2020; *Walking Lecture on Ants*, 2017; *Wolf Safari*, 2017); the dance company Recoil's performance with worms (*Mass-Bloom-Explorations*, 2018); Annette Arlander's performances with trees (*Performing with a Pine Tree*, Stockholm, 2019); or the Copenhagen-based festival Metropolis' recent *Talking Landscape* series of conversations (2022), which amongst others included a *Parliament of Things* in which human participants were asked to address matters related to the climate crisis from the perspective of non-human matter, such as trees, plants, buildings and so on.

In relation to an art form that has historically been understood as based on the actions and interactions between *human agents* (Aristotle 1987, 65; Bentley 1964, 150; Fischer-Lichte 2008, 38; Sauter 2008, 29), the collaboration in current theatre and performance between humans and non-human actants challenges long established notions of the fundamentals of theatre. Indeed, in his *Poetics*, Aristotle famously defines tragedy as “representation of action” (Aristotle 1987, 65). The kind of actions, Aristotle is concerned with, are human doings that are “serious, complete, and of a certain magnitude” (ibid, 37). The magnitude of the actions should match the status of the tragedy's hero, typically a king, more rarely a queen, who by the end of the play must undergo a change in fortune owing to the hamartia, the “mistake”, of the hero. In the tragedy, the represented actions should unfold in a plot, whose sequence of events ought to be necessary and probable and constitute a structure containing a beginning, a middle, and an end. Aristotle's instructions have proved highly influential for *the dramatic ideal*, to use literary scholar Peter Szondi's term, that formed in the Renaissance through the re-discovery and interpretation of the *Poetics*, and later consolidated itself in the classicist rule poetics of the 17th century. According to this ideal, the drama must be absolute: Centered on human relations and propelled causally forward by the exchange of human wills, the drama ought to evoke a fictive here and now; a world set strictly apart from the lived experience of the audience, the playwright and the actors (Szondi 1967, 15-19). Emblematic of 18th century bourgeois tragedy and 19th century realist theatre too, the linear dramaturgy associated with the dramatic ideal continues to play an important role in mainstream Western theatre and film.

Obviously the linear, conflict-driven dramaturgy prescribed by Aristotle and developed in the dramatic ideal is not a universal, but a distinctly *Western* formula. To mention but a few alternatives, one may think of Yoruba ritual dramaturgies, or the rules laid out in the ancient Indian *Natyastra* on how to best combine different *rasas* within performing arts. Also, within a Western context, the Aristotelean paradigm has been challenged time and time again: From the anarchistic dramaturgy

of Aristophanes to the carnivalesque dramaturgies of the Middle Ages and beyond, to the late 19th century¹ and particularly the 20th and 21st centuries' forging of a plethora of heterogeneous dramaturgies. One may think of Strindberg's station dramaturgies, the epic dramaturgy of Brecht and Piscator, the simultaneous dramaturgies of the avantgardes and Antonin Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty, the circular dramaturgies of the theatre of the absurd, as well as the wave of non-text based dramaturgies that have come to the fore since the 1960s and gone under names such as dramaturgies of weaving (Barba 1985), spiral dramaturgy (Ryum 1987), new dramaturgy (Kerkhoven 1994), visual dramaturgy (Arntzen 1991), postdramatic dramaturgy (Lehmann 2006), or ecodramaturgies (Wojnarski 2020). Indeed, we may say that the non-linear paradigm has long been the norm in contemporary experimental European theatre and has by now become rather uncontroversial. Consequently, we may ask whether the linear/non-linear binary has exhausted itself as a tool for engaging with contemporary theatre?

On the other hand, we should not ignore the persistent prevalence of linear structures in contemporary mainstream theatre, film, literary fiction, and – in a wider sense – social models for structuring our lives into meaningful narratives. Nor should we forget the persisting *ideological* implications of such structures, indebted as they are to notions of strongheaded, self-contained individuals (typically men), who through their strength of will unleash magnificent, sea-changing actions. It is exactly this narrative and ideological paradigm that American writer Ursula Le Guin's 1986 essay, "The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction" positions itself against. In the text, which in recent years has experienced a remarkable revival across the Humanities and the arts, Le Guin argues from a feminist position that it is due time to change the story of human evolution from one of heroic killing with sticks, and spears, and swords (Le Guin 1986, 150). Indeed, if we want to change our ways of inhabiting the world, we must, Le Guin continues, go beyond existing narrative models and instead look for the "other story, the untold one, the life story" (ibid, 152). This would imply replacing the emphasis on heroes, linear action, conflict, and animal hunting with all sorts of stories collected along the way and bundled into a carrier bag, while one was busy securing the supply of plants and barks for the winter and tending to the child on one's arm.

While the hero-driven, causal narrative model that Le Guin criticises has long been abandoned in experimental literary fiction – just think of early 20th century writers like Virginia Woolfe or James Joyce, to name but a few – it is of course the broader ideological models for *storying* that Le Guin is preoccupied with in the essay. And the reason her work is picked up so enthusiastically in contemporary ecocritical discourses no doubt has to do with the fact that the Modern narrative of human progress and prosperity is currently being dismantled and criticised as unsustainable against the background of a planet on the verge of ecological collapse. "The story *must* change", Donna Haraway writes in her influential book *Staying with the Trouble* with direct reference to Le Guin (Haraway 2016, 49). She is seconded by anthropologist Anna Tsing, who, also echoing Le Guin, claims that: "The time has come for new ways of telling true stories, beyond civilisation's first principles. Without Man and Nation, all creatures can come back to life." (Tsing 2015, vii).

The call for other ways of *storying* voiced by Haraway and Tsing may be related to New Materialist thinking's critique of the assumed superiority of man over matter implied by the Modern narrative of subjectivist potency and human progress (Coole and Frost 2010, 8). Represented by

1) In Szondi's account, the dramatic ideal encounters a major crisis towards the end of the 19th century, which extends into the 20th century with the emergence of a plethora of non-linear dramaturgies and the increasing deployment of epic elements (Szondi 1967, 20 ff).

thinkers such as Rosi Braidotti, Elizabeth Grosz, Bruno Latour, and Jane Bennett, New Materialism implies a radical challenging of the hierarchic relation between mind and body entailed by René Descartes' famous "Cogito ergo sum" declaration. Against this way of casting man, conceived as a rational, free, and self-moving agent, against matter, understood as inert and passive, political theorist and philosopher Jane Bennett has famously argued that matter has "thing-power". Implying that matter should be seen as vibrant and saturated with generative powers and agentic capacities rather than as dead material to be manipulated and mastered by human master minds, Bennett's theory of vibrant matter entails a shift from epistemology to a heterogeneous, yet relational ontology where man and matter mutually affect one another (Bennett 2010, 3). Instead of envisioning agency, then, as anchored solely within a human agent, agency is imagined by Bennett as distributive and as distributed across an ontologically heterogeneous field. When engaging with questions of agency and action within a vital materialism perspective, it therefore becomes imperative to acknowledge that rather than self-contained agents, there is "always a swarm of vitalities at play" (Bennett 2010, 31).

Returning to theatre and performance studies, scholars engaging with issues of ecological challenges and climate change have equally stressed the importance of acknowledging entanglements of human and non-human matter rather than perceiving of man as a self-contained individual and sole initiator of actions. To point to but a few recent positions on the subject², Peter Eckersall, Paul Monaghan, and Melanie Buddie have promoted a notion of "dramaturgy as ecology", arguing that "to think of dramaturgy in terms of ecology foregrounds the crucial importance of *connectivity*, of relationships between people, objects, natural forces and their interaction in the human/natural environment." (Eckersall et. al 2014, 20). Continuing along these lines, in *Ecodramaturgies* Lisa Woynarski has coined the term *bioperformativity* as an analytical tool for doing away with anthropocentric binaries such as human/non-human, nature/culture, natural/unnatural and for recognising the capacity for agency in the more-than-human in ecological performance (Woynarski 2020, 71-106).

This article seeks to contribute to the burgeoning field of eco-performance theory by honing in on the ways in which notions of self-contained human agents are being challenged by collaborations between human and more-than-human entities in contemporary performance. Second, it focuses on how the Modern notion of linear temporality is countered through a recognition of the diversity of temporalities at stake in more-than-human matter. For this purpose, anthropologist Anna Tsing's concept of "collaboration as contamination" will be central, alongside environmental humanities scholar Maria Puig de la Bellacasa's concept of "time care". My case-study will be the Danish performance artist and choreographer Nana Francisca Schottländer's landscape performance *Bodyscaping* (2021), which I will approach analytically through memories of my own phenomenological bodily encounter with the piece as well as an analysis of the score for the piece and various background information kindly offered to me by Schottländer.

2) For a thorough account of the development of performance and ecology, see Woynarski's three wave history in the introduction to *Ecodramaturgies* (Woynarski 2020, 1-31). See also Baz Kershaw: *Theatre Ecology: Environments and Performance Events* (2007); Paul Lavery: *Performance and Ecology: What can Theatre do?* (2021); Wendy Arons & Theresa J. May (ed): *Readings in Performance and Ecology* (2012); Theresa J. May: *Earth Matters on Stage: Ecology and Environment in American Theatre* (2021).

Body-Scaping and Ritual Dramaturgies

Danish artist Nana Francisca Schottländer has engaged with relational, site-specific encounters for the past twenty years in formats ranging from dance, performance, and installation to video, photography, and interventions in public space. For the past seven years or so, she has left behind human-to-human encounters in favor of collaborations with more-than-human matter such as stones, fungi cultures, tides, and soil. While such collaborations have typically taken place in landscapes often referred to as *natural*, including the Danish Wadden Sea National Park, the field and dune landscape of Thy in North-Western Denmark, as well the seas and woods around Silkeborg, also in Denmark, in *Bodyscaping*, Schottländer chose to engage with a “hyper-antropocentric landscape” (Schottländer 2021, 10), namely the *Soil Repository* in Copenhagen. Also, while Schottländer has earlier focused on encounters between herself and various landscapes, in *Bodyscaping* she created a participatory choreography with emphasis on the encounter between the landscape and the audiences.

Located at the tip of Copenhagen’s Northern Harbor, the Soil Repository is formed by human intervention. The area used to be ocean, but after the placing of an iron fence at the bottom of the sea and eight to nine years of filling the area with surplus soil from all over Copenhagen, including construction waste from building sites, the metro construction project, and graveyards, the place is now equivalent to 1% of the total Copenhagen area (Schottländer 2021, 10). Divided into an area for contaminated soil and one for clean soil, the landfill is in a state of constant flux, since new soil is brought in on a daily basis to be filtered, crushed, and prepared for re-use in new construction projects. The area is closed to the public, but during the first Covid 19 lockdown in spring 2020, Schottländer curiously entered it through a hole in the fence that surrounds it. She immediately became fascinated with the landscape – to me she has described her initial encounter with the site as a first *date* out of many³ – and ended up spending more than a year familiarising herself with it; dancing, meditating, sleeping there and so on. However, since only personnel working on the landfill was allowed access to the site, she was often kicked out, and it was only because of her persistence that she managed to persuade KMC Nordhavn and By & Havn, who run and develop the repository, to let her invite other artists and eventually also audiences into the space.⁴

The research of Schottländer and fellow artists resulted in the four-hour long performance, *Bodyscaping*, at the Soil Repository in June 2021. The overall dramaturgy of the piece has been explained to me by Schottländer as *ritualistic*. Drawing on ethnographer Arnold van Gennep’s notion of the structure of the *rite of passage*, performance scholar Richard Schechner has famously described ritual dramaturgy as divided into a pre-liminal, a liminal, and a post-liminal phase. In the pre-liminary phase, the individual is separated from an established social order; in the liminal phase, liminal rites are performed in the transitional space between rules and orders; and finally, in the post-liminal phase, the by now transformed individual is re-incorporated into society (Schechner 2002, 50). Theatre and performance scholars have typically taken an interest in the liminal phase,

3) In April 2022, I conducted an interview with Schottländer at the Betty Nansen Theatre in Copenhagen in which she generously shared her reflections on *Bodyscaping* with me.

4) During the research phase of *Bodyscaping*, Schottländer invited a range of other artists, including visual artists, dancers, performance artists, video artists, photographers, and sound artists into the work. In the piece five of them assumed the roles of guides, alongside Schottländer, who led the audience through the landscape of the landfill. Importantly, the artists did not just function as actors in Schottländer’s performance, but as co-creators, who were asked to shape their respective routes and choreographies in response to their personal encounters with the landscape (cf. interview with Schottländer, April 2022).

where subjects, to quote anthropologist Victor Turner, find themselves in a state “betwixt and between”⁵ law, custom and, convention, since it is here that transformation may occur.

Bodyscaping by and large conforms to the ritual dramaturgy sketched out above. Upon arrival at the meeting spot, a building called The Tunnel Factory, audiences were asked to hand over bags, cell phones and other personal items and to put on a grey dust suit. Then they were split into different groups of six and introduced to their respective guides: Schottländer and her five collaborators, the artists Maja Ejrnæs, Mikkel Mallow, Peter Vadim, Sarah Lee Armstrong, and Thomas Smith. In this way deprived of various markers of identity and separated from the persons, with whom they entered The Tunnel Factory, the audience was disconnected from the established order prevailing outside the performance. Subsequently, the various audience groups were sat down in front of the Soil Repository and given various instructions as to how to set themselves in the right mood for engaging with the site. In my group, we were warned that the journey could be physically challenging, that it was important to support each other, that it was preferred that we kept silent, and that we should start out with zooming in on and paying close attention to objects and forms in our closest vicinity. Finally, we entered the site individually through a hole in the fence.

Having now entered the charged space of the Soil Repository and the liminal phase of the performance, we were asked to each pick up two stones, and then lay down on a dirt hill and ground ourselves. As the guide, who headed my group instructed us: “Travel into the layers of soil, dirt, sand, chalk, water, gravel, clay, further and further into the deeper tissue of the earth”.⁶ Following the soil meditation, we were asked to find an intention with which to meet the landscape, before we were finally let loose to explore and encounter it. For the next hours, my group and I moved through sites, ranging from barren moon landscapes, to desiccated mud hills, to lush green fields facing the ocean. As we made our way through first the clean soil area and then the contaminated soil area, we were asked to do all sorts of physically demanding things, such as climbing muddy hills, jumping across brooks, lying down in the grass, crawling underneath bulldozers, and walking in line, forwards and backwards, while holding a rope with our eyes closed. Finally, in a sequence that built a bridge to the post-liminal phase of the performance, we were asked to sit down in the grass and reflect in writing on our encounter with the landscape. Back at the Tunnel Factory, we fully entered the post-liminal phase when shedding our provisional “betwixt and between”-identities, symbolised by the anonymous grey dust suits, and putting on our usual clothes. The fact that we were invited to put up our written notes up on a wall covered with notes from former participants invited us to reflect on our individual experience at the Soil Repository as part of a collective journey.

What particularly interests me about the performance is the kind of collaborations, both human-to-human and human-to-more-than human, that was instigated in the liminal phase of the performance. That is, the phase where participants were suspended “betwixt and between” identities. But how may we understand the notion of collaboration when used in this context?

Collaboration and Distributed Agency

Collaboration may be said to be essential to theatre, dance, and performance, given the collective and interdisciplinary character of the artform. In a more narrow sense, however, collaboration within

5) Turner writes: “Liminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial.” (Turner 2004, 89).

6) My guide was artist Sarah Lee Armstrong, who has kindly provided me with the script she created in collaboration with Schottländer for her part of the performance.

the field of theatre and performance studies is often associated with 20th century experimental dance and the postdramatic theatre with its shift from the text to the multiple theatrical parameters of the performance as the organising principle (Trencsényi, 2016: 216). Furthermore, collaboration is affiliated with collective and process-led methods of co-creating, as found, for example, in devising. As observed by Jane Milling and Deirdre Heddon, burgeoning in the, often political, theatre collectives of the 1960s and 1970s, such methods have typically been associated with notions of resistance to authoritative and hierarchical structures, including the idea of the director as the master mind and sole creator of the performance (Milling and Heddon 2016: 17-19). Collaboration, therefore, often implies trespassing between disciplinary boundaries as well as a working against notions of the self-contained genius artists. In recent years, collaborative and collective practices have experienced a remarkable revival across the arts – just think of *Documenta 2022* – with notions of solidarity and social sustainability plotted against the precarious production conditions offered by our individualised, competition-driven contemporary present (Daugaard et al 2020: 8-12).

Bringing these reflections on collaboration into dialogue with the materialist thinking accounted for above, particularly Bennett's notion of distributed agency is intended to think of the more-than-human as a possible collaborative partner in contemporary eco-performance. However, since eco-performance is either staged or framed *as performance* by human agents, one needs to acknowledge that while the act of staging something is a conscious and intentional act on the part of the human collaborator (Fischer-Lichte 2002: 299), this is not the case for the more-than-human collaborator. This does not mean, however, that we may not speak of the *agency* of the more-than-human. For, as Lisa Woynarski writes: "Agency is not employed here (ed. in relation to ecodramaturgy) as "intention", "choice" or audience agency as it has been positioned within immersive and participatory theatre scholarship. Rather, it is configured as the ability to produce effects and to affect, influence or to make a difference to something, not necessarily within the realm of the human." (Woynarski 2020: 73). If we accept this definition of agency, we may both be able to grasp the collaboration between different species staged *as performance* by human agents as well as the collaboration between human and more-than-human matter going on in much eco-performance.

In her book *The Mushroom at the End of the World*, Anna Tsing has coined the concept "contamination as collaboration" as an analytical tool through which to consider the ways in which cross-species collaborations challenge the modern notion of the individual as a self-contained agent. Writing against the background of a damaged planet, riveted by ecological disasters, Tsing argues that we have by now entered a "third nature". Whereas "first nature" means nature as ecologies, and "second nature" refers to capitalist transformations of the environment, "third nature", in Tsing's account, designates the nature that manages to live despite capitalism and ecological disaster (Tsing 2015: viii). Tsing's argument is that if we want to survive in the "ruin that has become our collective home" (Tsing 2015: 3), we have no other choice than to look for and collaborate with the lives, we find in the ruins. She writes: "staying alive requires livable collaborations. Collaborations means working across difference, which leads to contamination. Without collaborations, we all die. (Tsing 2015: 28). Maintaining, then, that future survival on the earth depends on encounters and collaborations that contaminate the individual, that is, the modern fiction of a pure, autonomous, and self-contained individual, Tsing argues for the relational and ever-changing connectedness of diverse materialities, human as well as more-than-human. In particular, she is interested in the "disturbance-based ecologies in which many species sometimes live together without either harmony or conquest." (Tsing, 2015: 5).

When employing Tsing's concept in a theatre and performance studies context, it is of course important to note that while Tsing writes about contamination as collaboration in relation to mushrooms, a theatre and performance perspective needs to attend to matters of symbolic representation too. This, however, is precisely what I aim to do in the following analysis, in which I will account for the collaboration with the site, where *Bodycaping* took place as well as the encounters between audiences and the more-than-human instigated at the site. I will be referring to such encounters as *contaminating collaborations* in the sense of Tsing.

Contaminating Collaborations

On her website, Schottländer describes the soil repository as “a landscape in constant flux in a living choreography between soil, humans, machines, and all the other forms of life that come into being here” (Schottländer 2021b). The quote may be read as testimony of Schottländer's rejection of the nature-culture binary that has been defining for modern Western societies and is epitomised in the genre of the *landscape painting*. As accounted for by theatre scholar Una Chadhuri in *Land/ Scape/Theatre*, the term *landscape* arose in the visual arts in the 17th century where it referred to a painting depicting scenery or land (Chadhuri 2002: 15). Drawing upon the principles of perspective painting for representing three-dimensional reality on a two-dimensional plane, the landscape painting did indeed bring nature to the spectator, as it were, but only on the condition that the same spectator remained *outside* the landscape. Comparing the rift between spectator and landscape to Descartes' formerly mentioned distinction between man and matter, Chadhuri contends that in this understanding nature is always already a “culturescape”, “an image, idea (...) or fantasy about what's out there.” (Chadhuri 2002: 15). In other words, whether depicted as property, as in Thomas Gainborough's 1750 painting *Mr. and Mrs. Andrews*, or as a spectacle capable of evoking the sublime, as in Caspar David Fredrich's *Wanderer above the Sea of Fog* (1818), nature is first and foremost considered as something to be *contained* by the gaze of the spectator in the genre of landscape painting.

By setting the performance within a “hyper-anthropocentric” landscape – or third nature, to quote Tsing – clearly shaped by man, *Bodycaping* distanced itself duly from the nature/culture binary associated with landscape painting. Furthermore, unlike this tradition and its privileging of the visual gaze, *Bodycaping* set out to create a series of phenomenological encounters between the audience and the landscape. Indeed, as suggested by the title of the performance title, the piece should not be thought of as a pretty landscape or object. Instead, it should be seen as an active process – as indicated by the verb *scaping* – in which different sorts of *bodies*, could come together to form various kinds of *scapes*. Or to quote Tsing, the performance should be seen as a scene, where all sorts of contaminating collaborations, that worked to dissolve boundaries between human and more-than-human, could take place.

Considered at species-level, the dynamic and ever-shifting landscape of the Soil Repository enabled all sorts of unexpected encounters and disturbance-based ecologies. As Schottländer describes it: “Species move in, birds make stopovers and nests. Plants in bizarre combinations grow from seeds brought together here from all kinds of places. Insects find their way from near and far, snails and frogs appear in the more or less polluted reservoirs of salt- and rain water.” (Schottländer 2021: 10, my translation). What Schottländer is describing here is exactly the kind of “third nature” mentioned by Tsing; life lived in spite of the unwelcoming conditions of the landscape and life emerging from cross-species pollination. By framing such processes as performance, *Bodycaping* set them apart from everyday reality, thereby inviting audiences to reflect not only on the destructive

consequences of human interventions in the landscape, but also on the vitality of cross-species collaboration.

At a symbolic level, one could describe the encounters taking place between the human participants of the performance and the lives of the landscape as contaminating and transformative encounters. To mention but a few of the encounters that had the greatest impact on me, I would point to the situation where together with my fellow participants, I crawled on the hard, dry ground underneath a bulldozer that our guide encouraged us to think of as a huge body that during daytime would be busy filtering and shaping the soil. For a moment I perceived of my own body as part of that filtering and shaping process. Another moment that stayed with me was when I was asked to throw the two stones, I had earlier collected into a polluted water hole. My guide asked us to let go of our inner “polluted shit”, when throwing the stones, and when I did so, I felt how waste from my inner landscape coincided with that of the outer. Finally, when asked, after having spent some time engaging with how to greet and attune myself to a thistle, I was asked to lie down in the tall grass and make a small cave for myself, I had a strange sensation of sensing and looking at the surrounding landscape from a non-human perspective. Perhaps that of a thistle, perhaps that of some animal. Common for the encounters was that they literally invited me to shift perspective – they allowed me to look at the landscape and its forms of life with curiosity and less pre-conceived ideas about how to act in and engage with it.

Finally, in relation to my fellow participants, I experienced a range of contaminating encounters, even if we did not speak during the performance. Instructed to sometimes move as “one organism” and to let our fingers, arms, and legs act as “tentacles registering the landscape” – such as when we walked uphill holding a rope with our eyes closed – I was made aware of my interdependency with the rest of the group. Indeed, rather than some self-contained individual agent pursuing my own project, I was invited to perceive of myself as part of a larger matter. This sense was further deepened by the parallel dramaturgies of the performance. Sent off from different entry points and distributed across the territory of the Soil Repository, the six audience groups formed a pattern, a choreography of moving matter dispersed into space. Sometimes we would pass by each other. Sometimes we would get a remote glimpse of each other. By in this way alternating between a micro-level perspective, zooming in on matters in our close vicinity – two stones, soil, high grass – and a “macro-level perspective” – seeing the other groups from afar pitted against the strange landscape of the Soil Repository – I became attentive to my body’s belonging to a common body of participants as well my entanglement in an ever-changing assemblage of human and more-than-human matter.

Temporalities of Care

At the outset of this essay, I gestured towards a possible relation between the linear temporality favoured by the dramatic ideal and the Modern narrative of prosperity and progress. This relation may be developed further by resort to what Maria Puig della Bellacasa has termed *techno-scientific futurity* in her research on man’s relation to more than human worlds, including soil. In her book, *Matters of Care*, Bellacasa emphasises how since the first agricultural revolutions, soil has been regarded as a resource for human needs, ranging from food production to construction grounds. In the current anthropocentric context of ecological disasters, however, soil has increasingly come to be recognised as yet another environmental matter calling for care on a global scale. In response to this situation, Bellacasa invites us – echoing Le Guin – to move beyond prevalent anthropocentric narratives, in particular the linear temporal paradigm of Modernity and its imperative of growth and association of the future with human techno-scientific progress. Instead, Bellacasa encourages

us to attend the diversity of temporalities of more-than-human matter. As for soil, Bellacasa argues, it includes a combination of deep time, that is the long geological processes of breaking down stones and rocks, and the shorter time scales and ecological cycles of plants and organisms inhabiting the soil, as well as the productionist time regime of humans working on and shaping the topsoil. To approach soil from a perspective of care means, for Bellacasa, to attune oneself to its many timelines and temporal rhythms so as to learn to appreciate it as a web of living, interdependent relations that man is a “member” – not just a consumer – of. Emphasising the effort and the *time* it requires to care for the multi-temporality of soil, for instance through protracted and repetitive practices of observation of soil cycles, Bellacasa argues that such forms of *care time* may have ethico-political implications. “An orientation to the articulations of temporality and care in human-soil relations contributes”, she pleads, “to questioning the prioritisation of technoscientific anthropocentric futurity by making visible alternative timescapes and enriching our temporal imaginings.” (Bellacasa 2017: 18).

Bodyscaping may be viewed through Bellacasa’s lens of *care time* on a number of levels. The first level concerns the time-consuming research process that went before the actual performance. Determined to experience how the landscape changed with the seasons, Schottländer spent more than a year observing and interacting with the shifting forms of the Soil Repository. In the *Bodyscaping* publication, she reports: “In the course of the past year I have visited the Soil Repository in all seasons and at all times of the day (...) My affection has continued to grow with each encounter, each exchange. (...) I have slept in a lush miniature habitat on the shores of a small polluted creek. I’ve inhaled and caressed the asphalt, recieved gifts from the ground, danced with truck tracks, mud and boulders.” (Schottländer 2021: 11). Clearly, the goal was neither to cultivate the soil, like a farmer would do, nor was it to explore the limits of the art institution in the fashion of 1960s and 70s earth artists, such as Robert Smithson or Michael Heizer. At stake was instead the possibility of engaging in an equal encounter with the landscape through spending enough time with it to be able to attend to its many live cycles and in turn its many timelines and temporalities.

The second level regards the ways in which the performance brought the reality of the complex web of co-existing temporalities to the participants’ attention. For me, the most striking example of this was when, located in the vicinity of the ocean, my group and I were instructed by our guide to silently “collect and archive all that is blue” on the ground in front of us. The things we found ranged from wildflowers to plastic containers, to blue mussel shells. As some kind of archaeologists from the future, I thought, we stood there observing our archive, reflecting on how its items may be read as testimonies of different timelines. While the shells from the sea made me think of the evolving of life from water to land millions of years ago, the wildflowers that would wither later in the summer, but return again next year, represented a much shorter ecological cycle. The plastic container, a waste object that may take up to a thousand years to decompose, for its part served as a sign of the *slow violence* (Nixon 2013) that characterises the current epoch of the anthropocene. Together the materials formed a melody composed of different temporal rhythms. And instead of imposing a single linear temporality upon them, the performance insisted on bringing their difference to the fore in a form that appears closer to Le Guin’s messy carrier bag than to the causal narrative of linear dramaturgy.

Finally, the fact that the Soil Repository epitomised the practice of human-driven ecological disturbance – I am thinking of the constant import, filtering, and export of soil taking place at the landfill – served to clearly position Schottländer’s dialogic approach to the landscape against a modern, productionist paradigm. Indeed, instead of regarding the land as a resource to extract

value from, *Bodyscaping* approached it as a living organism or dialogue partner. While the work in this way sought to care for the landscape by approaching it in a curious, respectful manner, it is also in this approach that the work's critical edge and political potential may be identified. Because, bringing human actors together and asking them to publicly re-imagine how to engage with the earth is also a way of rejecting inherited models of storytelling and the anthropocentric, hierarchical world view pertaining to them.

Concluding Remarks

Returning to the linear, narrative models accounted for at the outset of this article, we may conclude that *Bodyscape* did not feature an individual hero or a protagonist in the sense suggested by them. Indeed, rather than speak of a human protagonist in whom the agency of the story is deposited, we may think of *Bodyscaping* as a many-headed swarm across whom agency was distributed. Within the ever-shifting contours of this swarm, numerous contaminating collaborations were established that in turn could be said to constitute the actions of the performance. However, unlike Aristotle's prescriptions, the actions were neither magnificent, nor causal, and they did not result in grand reversals or tragic change. Instead, they led to more modest forms of transformations and temporary shifts of perspective. Deploying Turner's terminology, we may say that *Bodyscaping* created a temporary state of *betwixt and between* in which the human and the more-than-human were experienced as entangled with one another. In this space, the participants were invited to imagine and experiment with ways of engaging with the "third nature" that is becoming our home and which the Soil Repository served as a condensed image of.

In its debunking of linear dramaturgy and temporality, heroic narratives, as well as the ideological doxa associated with those, *Bodyscaping* obviously challenges and critiques a distinct modern and Western worldview that would position man, meaning the white, heterosexual- male, as the master of all things. However, the performance cannot – and this it shares with the other performances mentioned at the outset of this article – be reduced to a mere critical gesture. Nor does it suffice to conceive of these performances as artistic representations only. That is to say, it does not suffice to think of them as artifacts located within an autonomous space strictly set apart from everyday reality, as suggested by the modern, Western notion of art.

Indeed, Schottländer's one-year investigation, or should we say collaboration, with the Soil Repository speaks to her long-term investment in and dedication to the site. She took the time to care. And this, I contend, is crucial to take into consideration when considering eco-performances: To attend not only to the product or the work in question, but also to the process of making it. To the time and the care that went into this process. This applies to the collaborations with other human agents too. Thus, the fact that the artists, who Schottländer invited into her work, are credited as co-creators, and the fact that they were allowed to shape their journeys themselves, albeit within the frame of Schottländer's overall concept, is crucial too. Because, by actually enacting – and not only thematising – the value of collaborative, non-hierarchical processes that challenge notions of genius artists, *Bodyscaping* moved beyond traditional product/process binaries too, thereby inviting us to not only imagine but also *practice* an ethics of collaboration and care between human-to-human and human-to-more-than-human agents.

Solveig Gade, Ph.D. and dramaturge, is associate professor at The Department of Theatre and Performance Studies, University of Copenhagen. Recent publications include the book *(W)archives: Archival Imaginaries, War, and Contemporary Art* (co-edited with Daniela Agostinho, Nanna Bonde Thylstrup, and Kristin Veel), 2020, Sternberg Press. She is currently working on a book project entitled *Documenting War*. She is Co-PI in the Velux-funded collective research project *Oikos: Crisis and Care in the 21st Century*.

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