



# Reshaping the Performing Art Institution

By Mette Tranholm

## Abstract

*Denne artikel beskriver Betty Nansen Teaters eksperiment med at omforme institutionsteatret mod mere bæredygtige produktionsvilkår. I artiklen fokuseres der på kollektiv praksis, tværfaglig skabelse og dokumentation af processen. Formålet er at undersøge, hvordan kunstnerisk værdi kan integreres i eksisterende strukturer og kulturelle diskurser.*

*This article describes Betty Nansen Theatre's experiment to reshape institutional theatre for more sustainable production conditions. It focuses on collective practice, cross-disciplinary creation, and documentation of processes. The aim is to explore how artistic value can be integrated into entrenched structures and cultural discourses.*

## keywords

*performing art institutions, sustainable production conditions, collective practice, institutional transformation, artistic value*

*In the late winter of 2020, I was sweating heavily as I tried to carry a large wooden table into the Silo, a small black box stage at the annex stage of the Betty Nansen Theatre. While doing the heavy lifting, my mind raced with thoughts about how I was going to mix the right ingredients to make a large amount of clay that could safely be smeared onto the bodies of several actors and how to clean it up afterwards. The conceptualising team and the actors had just begun a three-week workshop for the performance The Picture of Dorian Gray – almost a year before the premiere. The air was buzzing with unanswered questions about how to conceptualise the performance as well as the workshop itself. It was clear that the group felt grateful for this time together and had the kind of eager, creative and exploratory energy of wanting to make the most of it, to share inspirational material and images, and to test and improvise. The raw brick walls were quickly turned into a mood board filled with images and handwritten questions. My mind wandered back to the materials for clay. It was my second day working at the theatre and I was reluctant to ask for help. However, I knew very well that I needed backup, so I reached out to our production manager and stage manager. When I got the job, I knew that my skills in artistic research exceeded my skills as a stage manager, though both skill sets were required for the position. To my relief, our experienced stage manager had worked with clay before and knew everything about how to mix ingredients. While mixing the*

*clay, I wondered: How did the group prepare for the workshop? How do I document this artistic process? What role can I play in preparing for the next Dorian Gray workshop?*

## Disposition and methods

As the Slovenian performance theorist Bojana Kunst points out, the production conditions have been overshadowed by the artwork both in practice and theory: “Art often addresses political and social issues and produces commentaries and criticality all the time, but very rarely institutionally and structurally makes these differences an intrinsic part of its contexts, economies and conditions; the ways in which art is made, produced and shared are mostly staying the same.” (Kunst 2021)

The main task of an institutional theatre is to create performances; however, with *Betty Develops*, we took on the extra task of reshaping the way we produce performances. Our thesis is that collective creation leads the way to more sustainable production conditions. First, I analyse how we experimented with ways to create a more sustainable infrastructure for collective creation through a hybrid production format that provided us with more time together, formats for meta-reflection on process and community building, giving the director the role as the facilitator, using co-facilitation, and through workshop designs. Second, I discuss how reshaping the institutional infrastructure shifts around hierarchies and creates both new possibilities but also challenges in terms of navigation. In my analysis and discussion, my focus is on the productions *The Iliad* (2023) and *Edward II* (2024). To support my arguments, I draw on practical experience, empirical material, and a theoretical framework. As a member of the permanent theatre staff, I have access to the inner workings of the performance-making process. The methodological approach of this article combines autoethnography, artistic research, and qualitative methods. I employ autoethnography because I study a group to which I belong, drawing on my subjective experiences and situating them within broader theoretical, political, and cultural contexts (Hayano, 1979). Artistic research is equally central, as it entails studying art from the ‘inside-in’ (Hannula, Vadén, & Suoranta, 2014, xii), critically reflecting on artistic practices, developing a language to articulate them, and disseminating the findings to others. In addition, I draw on qualitative research methods. I gathered empirical material as I coordinated, observed, and documented over seventy workshops spread over fourteen productions, and attended dramaturgical meetings, artistic council sessions, process-meetings, evaluation-sessions and conducted interviews with the permanent staff and freelancers over the course of five years. I look at the empirical material alongside Bojana Kunst’s theories of production conditions and kinship, Elisabeth Freeman’s concept of chrononormativity, and Karen Barad’s new materialist entanglement theories.

## The institutional landscape

“In a Danish context, the art institutional landscape has been under pressure for the past two decades from cultural politics and a battle of values sparked in 2001 by the right-wing Prime Minister Anders Fogh Rasmussen, resulting in budget cuts, decentralisation, neoliberalist streamlining, and

effectivity. In 2016, Prime Minister Lars Løkke Rasmussen's right-wing government established a two per cent annual budgetary savings on government funding to many workplaces in the public sector, including the cultural sector and impacting museums, theatres, and art education. The advent of hyper capitalism and neoliberalism in the Danish government-funded performing arts institutions instigated institutional changes, such as the spread of quantitative performance management instruments, which control and internalise key performance indicators (such as number of audiences and performances) in performing arts institutions, including the Betty Nansen Theatre" (Tranholm 2024). Consequently, the institutional economy depends on hyper productivity, a need for massive earnings from tickets sold or private funding, and the theatres are pushed to hire fewer artists for shorter periods of time, and implement huge cutbacks in ensembles, so as to plan efficient, predictable, and 'cheap' production processes. Though the BNT are first movers in a Danish theatre institutional context we are not alone in moving toward more collective organizational forms. In recent decades, collective movements have gained traction across society and the arts in Denmark - from the independent performing arts field and music to traditionally more individualized practices such as visual arts and writing. This resurgence can be understood both as a response to the contemporary (neoliberal) demands for flexibility and individual performance, and as a reaction to pressing global challenges that call for collective solutions, including climate change and global inequality (Schmidt, Daugaard et al. 2020).



Bojana Kunst clearly pointed to the pain in the infrastructure caused by financial capitalism. In her article “Making temporal kinships: Beyond the project” (2022), Kunst argues that specific changes from the 1970s with the rise of post-Fordism production, financial capitalism, and neoliberalism erase relational, communal, and collective forms of working, separating and fragmenting people, and also devalue the work of social reproduction – not included in the production of (economic) value (Kunst 2022). According to Kunst, project work is the ideal temporal form of working in capitalism because of the specific relationship between work and the future: “A project is a specific temporal form of work, where the value of the work is projected into the future (...) we have to show what kind of value our work will have in the future yet to come – so we must always work harder and work strategically to be productive, organising time for the future to come” (Kunst 2022, 15). As a result, value is mostly attributed to the final product and how many tickets it will sell in the future, which means that it becomes less relevant how we get there. How does this capitalist logic affect the way we produce art? Several voices (Kunst 2015 and 2022; Lindelof and Janssen 2023; Campenhout and Mestre 2016) within the European performing arts have pointed out that the advent of neoliberalism and New Public Management into the performing art institutions is a broader European tendency that creates institutional pressure or, as Henk Slager writes, it brings out: “exhausting achievement-oriented and instrumentalized tendencies” (Slager in Lindelof and Janssen 2023, 215). Theatres tend to pick the safe and more conventional bets in terms of repertoire and casting. It also pushes theatres to work from a top-down management model because it is the most cost-effective production model. This affects both the quality of the artwork and what (the idea of) the artwork is – it reduces the artwork to a product, of which theatres must produce as many as possible. These changes do not leave much room for the institutions to develop and improve the institutional production conditions with care and counter-hegemonic practices. However, there are examples, such as Toneelhuis collectively run by eight artistic directors since 2022, Theatre Neumarkt under the management-trio Tine Milz, Hayat Erdogan, and Julia Reichert (2019-2025), and KSV under Jan Goossens and Danny Opdebeeck (2001-2015), who have experimented with collaborative management models and practices.

## Collaboration in performing arts in context

In *A History of Collective Creation* (2013) Kathryn Syssoyeva and Scott Proudfit point out that modern collective creation, “the practice of collaboratively devising works of performance” (Syssoyeva 2013, 1), falls into three overlapping waves. The first, from 1900 to 1950, is marked by the pioneering laboratory experiments of Konstantin Stanislavski and Vsevolod Meyerhold at Moscow Art Theatre, starting in 1905. In Germany, Erwin Piscator laid the groundwork for collectively created epic theatre taken up by Bertolt Brecht who worked with Piscator before establishing the Berliner Ensemble in 1949. The second wave, from 1950 to 1980, is associated with “collective performance creation, egalitarian labour distribution, consensual decision making and sociopolitical revolt” (Syssoyeva 2013, 1) – values pursued in groups such as The Living Theatre and Théâtre du Soleil. Syssoyeva underlines that, though the ideal of leaderlessness is strongly associated

with this wave, the works of second wave directors such as Jerzy Grotowski and Eugenio Barba were actor-centred but “certainly do not fit within the model of 1960s egalitarian institutional structure” (Syssoyeva 2013, 7). That collective creation can accommodate directorial leadership is a central point in Syssoyeva and Proudfit’s new history of collective creation. The third wave, from 1980 until today, is characterised not by an ideological but by an ethical imperative, new devising methods, group process, and an interest in the actor-creator, as seen in companies such as The Nature Theatre of Oklahoma and SITI Company (Syssoyeva and Proudfit 2013). Syssoyeva underlines that what all voices from the three waves have in common is that they see collective creation as “a model for a better way of being in the world together” (Syssoyeva 2013, 2).

### **The hybrid production format**

We cannot change the foundational political and economic reality and conditions of the BNT. However, we can apply for private funding, and we can change the way we work, think, and organise the work processes. Præstiin and Kragerup took over the BNT with a wish to work with collective creation. However, the practical and financial infrastructure of the theatre was not built for collective creation. Roughly outlined, the infrastructure was built for a rehearsal period of 6-7 weeks prior to which the creating artists (the director, scenographer, and dramatic writer or dramaturge) had arranged much of the performance in advance. The performing artists (the actors) then joined for rehearsal to start realising their vision. Collaborative creation is process-oriented and requires time together. Therefore, with funding from the Bikuben Foundation, we reshaped and expanded this infrastructure with a tailor-made workshop design for each performance. Prior to each ordinary rehearsal period, we have several workshops starting 1-2 years before the premiere where everyone starts together. Kragerup explains: “Eva [Præstiin, ed.] and I worked together in The Red Room, a satellite ensemble at The Royal Danish Theatre. Here we were free to develop a collective practice where everyone started at the same time, which gave us more time together. The actors became co-creators and were part of the conceptualising phase, the process planning, and repertoire choices. A collective brain was at work. We started at Betty with the ambition to continue this collective practice by spreading it to the infrastructure of an institutional theatre” (Kragerup in research interview, 2020). With experience from their collective work in The Red Room and Kragerup’s performance collective Sort Samvittighed, the duo created a hybrid production format: this fused elements from their own collective practices and elements from the lineage of collective creation such as prolonged rehearsals, the actor-creator, devising and improvisation methods, ethical leadership, and a continuous collaborative approach. The fused approach also incorporated the set deadlines and fixed demands of the institution. According to Stanislavski, the realisation of his collaborative process-oriented dreams “demanded preparatory laboratory work. For this there was no place in the theatre with its daily performances, its complex duties and its stringent budget” (Stanislavski 1959, 332). He and Meyerhold therefore created the space for it at the theatre through a theatrical studio. Brecht’s Berliner Ensemble also prioritised explorative, collaborative, and long rehearsal processes as documented by Carl Weber (Weber and Munk 1967).



To be clear, we are not doing the same thing as the radical experiments of the Berliner Ensemble, Moscow Art Theatre, or the egalitarian experiments of performance groups and collectives of the 1960s. We take inspiration from them, but we operate in a different time and under different economic, institutional and political conditions and demands. Our collective model is adapted to the conditions we are subject to. On a small scale, we test how collective, process-oriented, and laboratory-inspired performance-making can come into play at a contemporary, state-funded institutional theatre bound by strict government demands in a time of financial capitalism. This is a challenging task. The infrastructure of the traditional institutional theatre is not built for accommodating continuous collective creation nor for listening to the needs of freelance artists. As Kunst (2015) has well described, freelance artists must jump from project to project, each lasting only a few months, which makes it difficult to create continuity, community, and a sense of safety. Nevertheless, we insist on trying. In the following, I unfold how we expand our production format, work with recurring artists, and build forums for community well-being to provide more time and space for collaboration and continuity.

### Clear infrastructure and facilitation

Extending rehearsal periods through workshop-based processes is financially demanding, leading the management-duo to secure an eight-million DKK four-year grant from the Bikuben Foundation. Most of the funds covered artists' salaries. By the end of this period, the theatre had built sufficient equity to partially finance workshops independently. The adoption of an extended, workshop-based rehearsal model entailed both administrative and artistic reorganization. Administratively, collective principles were institutionalized through an equal management duo and an artistic council. Artistically, repertoire development spring from artist-driven practices, with productions emerging from artistic curiosity and experimentation rather than managerial directives. However, our experience is that collective creation requires strong facilitation and leadership, ensuring that openness, experimentation and multiple voices shape the process while decisions, managerial responsibility and boundaries are maintained. Therefore, at the BNT collective creation accommodates managerial and directorial leadership. The management duo are facilitators responsible for creating a framework for collective creation. As such the BNT maintain a hierarchy, not to dictate and control but to cultivate and facilitate creativity.

For the individual performances the director is the facilitator. From our experience creating an infrastructure for collective creation requires clear facilitation and a continuous collective meta-reflection on the process and working conditions. We create forums for process design, reflection and evaluation to learn and adjust our processes along the way. One of the first forums was workshop design meetings. The *Dorian Gray* performance was never finished due to COVID-19, but during the workshops, we learned valuable lessons that helped us immensely in the years to come. When we start together early on with multiple disciplines collaborating, and the material is wide open, the facilitation of a common framework for everyone to play within becomes crucial. Collaborative performance-making with more voices and longer processes is more complex and

must be facilitated carefully. For the second *Dorian Gray* workshop, we applied this knowledge and made a detailed workshop design. Each process is different, but what we learned that holds true across all our processes is the importance of preparing a clear workshop design. Otherwise, the pitfall is everyone running in different directions with their skillsets. A clear framework supports a common creative focus, community well-being, and safe spaces to be brave. Therefore, we make an overall workshop design for each production as well as individual workshop designs for each workshop. The director and the conceptualising group are responsible for formulating an overall focus area and specific questions for the workshop as a frame for the common investigation. During the design process, I act as the link between the conceptualising group, actors, dancers, and the permanent staff.

As another example of a forum for reflection and framework for community well-being, we have 'class-hour' three times during the ordinary rehearsal process on Fridays where everyone on the production has breakfast together. The purpose of class-hour is to have an informal setting where we can talk about a performance someone has seen, share if there are concerns about the production, make small talk, and brainstorm ideas for trailers with the communication department. We do this to strengthen the sense of community between permanent staffers and freelancers. We have also implemented cross-departmental process meetings every second Wednesday where we adjust, renegotiate, and follow up on all performance processes, and staff meetings with a focus on well-being i.e., managing stress levels, collaboration across departments, and social activities. The production department has a meta-meeting during rehearsals to reflect and adjust. These activities are examples of an expanded understanding of performance-making and the artwork.

### Workshop design for *The Iliad*

For *The Iliad* we invited the internationally acclaimed duo, director Eline Arbo and musician/composer Thijs van Vuure, to engage with the hybrid production format. Since Arbo and van Vuure did not know any Danish actors, we wanted them to have the opportunity to cast the actors themselves. We also knew that the music was going to play a large role in the performance since live music is an integrated part of the duo's artistic practice. The adaption of Homer's long epic text also needed special attention i.e., how many and which of the characters should be in the performance, and should we keep the choir. As a feminist critique, Arbo had the idea of telling the story from the perspective of Briseis, the girl who was Achilles' sex slave, who is only mentioned in fourteen lines of the 600-page epic. This provided a clear concept, which we had learned from the *Dorian Gray* workshops is crucial to cross-disciplinary co-creation. Briseis was stolen from Achilles by Agamemnon, which sparked the conflict between the two and gave Achilles a pretext to go to war, but how would Briseis be represented? Once we had this information, the tailor-made workshop design came together: Workshop #1: A casting workshop in August 2022. Workshop #2: A one-week workshop in June with a focus on characters and scenography. Workshop #3: A one-week workshop in November with text and music as the headline. Arbo addressed the impact of the workshops on her practice: "One thing is how you produce and how



much time you have which is different here at the theatre because you have the workshops, here they are bending the production frame. The way theatre usually is produced dictates a lot about the process and keeps it within the classical frame. Usually with the actors you meet them on day one of the rehearsal period. Being able to work like this with the workshops lets us be much more inspired by who they are. Everything we did was very much based on the actors.” (director Eline Arbo in Flensted-Jensen et al. 2023).

## Hierarchies of value

In her book *Produktionsaestetik* (2022) performance scholar Cecilie Ullerup Schmidt shows how the idea of the artistic genius can be traced back to the philosopher Immanuel Kant’s *Kritik der Urteilkraft* (1793). Here, Kant says that talent is a gift you are born with and as such not related to others. Schmidt argues that Kant’s view places the artist on a pedestal whereas the infrastructure of people and resources that lifts the artist is devalued and made invisible in comparison (Schmidt 2022). This has led to a hierarchical culture with the creating artistic genius at the top and a binary opposition between the creating and the performing artists where the performing artists, along with the production department, carry the creating artist. However, following the theories of new materialist Karen Barad, the separation that Kant makes between the artist and his surroundings is not final or fixed, which means that it can be enacted differently. Barad’s new materialist ontology is presented in her book *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (2007). In line with feminists, poststructuralists, and queer theorists, Barad’s theories are informed by Niels Bohr’s rejection of representationalism. Through his experiments within quantum physics, Bohr rejected representationalism with its belief that representations mirror the represented one to one because he discovered that when we measure quantum objects, they change. As such, the measured object and the measuring apparatus/agent are interrelated, entangled, and inseparable. Thus, everything in the universe is fundamentally entangled (Barad 2007). This fundamental entanglement renders logocentric binaries between mind and body, nature and culture, discourse and materiality as social constructions. Ethics is at the heart of Barad’s ontology since it is concerned with how differences are made. Barad’s ontology brings up questions of responsibility for inclusion and exclusion and who is given value and agency, which has real consequences for people’s lives. In the context of performing arts, and following Barad and Kunst, we cannot separate the artwork from the social reality i.e., its production conditions and the people involved. Barad and Kunst call for a holistic approach: the artwork, like the artistic genius, is not a separate entity. They are both intrinsically entangled with the social reality. A more collaborative production model takes this entanglement into consideration.

## Co-facilitation matters

*I am in the rehearsal space for the second workshop of The Iliad. I am cracking up at the soap opera-like similarities between The Iliad and Dallas and Dollars. Writer Tom Silkeberg is in the middle of*

doing a thorough and quite entertaining summary of the highlights of Homer's complex epic *The Iliad*. With the help of our production department scenographer Ida Marie Ellekilde prepared the rehearsal space with props, costumes, clay, instruments, and a human-size doll to play with. After Silkeberg's summary, Arbo turns to the actors and asks them to choose a character and then do an improvised reenactment of the entire *Iliad* – or what they remember from Silkeberg's summary. Luckily, these actors have stellar improvisational skills and welcome the challenge. The reenactment is both touching and funny. The actors must stop several times and ask Silkeberg what happens next. Later, I am filming an improvisation: guided by Ellekilde, the actors are testing one of the research questions of the workshop: How do we represent Briseis? The actors are covered in clay, some test performing Briseis, while others try to sculpt her out of clay. This time around I am a bit less nervous about the clay, and we have made sure there are test costumes, robes, and showers ready. During the third workshop, the actors are reading Silkeberg's first draft of act 1. After the reading, they reflect on the scenes, and Arbo adjusts the text. While Arbo is rewriting one of the scenes, van Vuure gathers the actors for a music session. He explains that he knows that not all the actors can play instruments or sing professionally but that he will teach everyone what they need to know to play all the music live on stage. He plays a single string on an electric string instrument to show how they can create a nice large sound from almost nothing. He then teaches the actors a song to hear their voices together.

In this collective workshop-based work, the role of the director changes in the sense that she must let go of some of her control and let many others have a clear voice, which means moving from a position of top-down decision-maker to facilitator. To strengthen the cross-disciplinary aesthetic and collaboration, the role of the facilitator is often split between representatives from each art form: those who usually make up the conceptualising group; for example, a composer, a dramatic writer, a choreographer, and the director. In the case of *The Iliad* workshops, director Arbo was oftentimes on the sideline observing and taking notes while members of the conceptualising team took turns facilitating the workshops with input from the production department. Silkeberg, Ellekilde, and van Vuure took turns co-facilitating, and the actors took part in the shared invention process as co-creators. As a result, Barad's questioning of binaries is activated as is the value of collaboration over separation, many voices over one isolated voice, and more time over efficiency.

## Queer temporalities

In her book *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories* (2010), Elizabeth Freeman unfolds a process she calls 'chrononormativity', which refers to normative behaviour related to our culture's expectations of how we distribute our time. These expectations stem from industrial capitalism and the division between labour (factory hours) and leisure time with the purpose of organising individual bodies toward maximum productivity and efficiency. Time regulates and disciplines our bodies. Freeman analyses how queer artists displace chrononormativity in queer temporalities that do not follow a particular order (Freeman 2010). The starting point for the conceptual investigation for *The Iliad* workshops was Arbo's idea of telling the story from Briseis' perspective. Breaking the expectation of a linear progression where everyone works towards

and realises Arbo's Briseis-concept, the concept transformed over time due to input from many voices, extended rehearsals via workshops, co-facilitation, and the extra time to test, improvise, play, discard stuff, and put it back. The improvisations where some of the actors started to build Briseis out of clay contributed to the conceptual transformation from rewriting the story from Briseis' perspective to having Briseis as a human-size clay figure on stage as a strong image of the war story and its lack of female perspectives. The Briseis figure and the decision to make Helena the narrator relayed the feminist critique while telling Homer's original story. The workshops paved the way for gaps, detours, reconfiguration, and transformation; in other words, for a queer temporality that performs a critique of chrononormativity.

## **Edward II: Kinship and community**

*Seven servants dressed in long black robes are slowly and carefully helping Edward II to change into his night attire. The moment they finish, Gaveston steps into the bedroom, also dressed in night attire. Gaveston and Edward meet in an embrace while the seven servants slowly lie down on the floor, form a square, and pull their robes over their heads so they are now completely in black. They transform from servants to a bed for the two lovers right in front of my eyes. It is one of those magical improvisations where the performers are completely in synch with each other and the material. It strikes me that improvisation is a powerful tool for being present together, since it requires that you are fully present and actively listen to each other. The energy in the room is intensely creative, vulnerable, open, and yet it is a safe space. There is an atmosphere of community, kinship, and respect in the room, brought about by the many recurring artists, gathered to tell the story about group dynamics, minorities, and homophobia.*

Kunst refers to philosopher and feminist Donna Haraway's notion of being kin as "in action, actively establishing kinships with bodies (human and beyond the human): objects, atmospheres, things, and environments" (Kunst 2022, 18). Kunst uses the act of building a house as an example: "What enables the house are the temporal kinships between the multiplicity of agents. The house has a future not because of its future value but because the very making of it belongs to the present, to the relations of the very now of work" (Kunst 2022, 17). For *Edward II*, director Elisa Kragerup, scenographer Karin Gille, costume designer Maja Mirkovic, dramaturge Tom Silkeberg, and musician Line Felding discussed their interests in the themes of group dynamics, hate crimes, power relations, scapegoating, and queerness. In discussions, Christopher Marlowe's drama *Edward II* came up as a dramatic text the team could use and rework. They met once a week for six months to discuss themes, read, research, and have dinner together, to the point where what exactly they were working on or doing became blurry, time dissolved, and after six months they had no concrete suggestions for scenography, manuscript, or costumes etc. However, the common material bank they gathered was important as was the time spent in each other's company, getting to know each other, contextualising, sharing references and thematic interests. During this phase, the relevant scenic functions from the production department jumped on board and helped qualify ideas for materials. This experience of time dissolving resonates with Freeman's queer

non-chrononormativity. Also, the extra time with the production team to discuss materials and possibilities helped radical ideas, otherwise discarded due to a lack of time, come to life.

Six months before ordinary rehearsal start, a one-week workshop was held with everyone, including all nine actors, participating. The focus of the workshop was collective research, collaborative idea- and concept development, and material generation improvising around the main themes and testing different costumes. All the material from mood boards, improvisations, text, sketches, and scenography was shared in a common material bank. Mirkovic and Silkeberg co-facilitated the workshop with Kragerup, giving introductions to costume ideas and Marlowe's *Edward II*. All improvisations included the use and testing of costumes. Marlowe's drama is set in the Middle Ages, and Mirkovic was inspired by the period but did not want to do full period piece costumes but wanted to include contemporary elements. Workshops were used to test a combination of the two. After the workshop, the conceptualising team sorted the material and brought material from the workshop into the reworking of the text, costumes etc. As such, the text, the costumes, scenography, and music were the result of collective discussions and experimentation where the conceptualising team and the actors (mostly freelancers) and the production department (permanent staff) worked together, forging the language of the performance. Our overall experience was that this collective experimentation strengthened the sense of community, resonating with Kunst's notion of *building valuable kinship in the present*.

## Strengths and weaknesses of collective creation

"The 'collaborative' entails that all the participants develop everything at the same time, talk about each other's practices, have discussions, do collective research, and share the gift and challenge of real mutual interdependence. However, the downside is that it makes it much harder to close the decision process at the 'right' moment, so as to accommodate the previously planned framework, and have the costumes finished when necessary. It is a hard, sometimes exhausting, balancing process of constant negotiation between developing the material together (fulfilling the needs of the performance process) and claiming the idea already set, so that the workshops can start performing their work (fulfilling the expectations of the production)"<sup>1</sup>.

Mirkovic speaks to the build-in ambivalence of process-oriented work where many answers are not given beforehand but must be found in cross-disciplinary collaboration. As a costume designer in a traditional process, you design costumes when all the characters are written, and you know which characters the actors are going to play. However, with the BNT's collaborative practice, the text and characters are written along the way, and the distribution of roles happens very late in the process. Decisions are sometimes made almost too late in the process or out of sync with each other, which causes stress and frustration for those waiting for the other disciplines to finish material to start their own. This is the downside to the entanglement and co-dependence of the disciplines, which requires a large amount of flexibility, patience, and active engagement

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1) Mirkovic, evaluation session, 2024

from everybody involved. The upside is the level of community, ownership, and engagement. For *Edward II*, the theatres' head tailor, Stine Terp, worked closely with Mirkovic. Terp provided test costumes for all workshops and contributed with costume ideas. I argue that the test costumes and the conversations between Terp and Mirkovic allowed Terp to become co-creator. Terp stepped outside her fixed role since she would traditionally make the costumes from the finished drawings created by the costume designer. When the production team and the performing artists are included in the idea- and concept development (usually reserved for the creating artist) you loosen up the binaries and distribute value more equally between director and actor, performing and creating artists, artists and technicians, freelancers and permanent staff. In the process, traditional binaries start to dissolve, but without erasing the differences. As Barad notes "considering them together does not mean forcing them together, collapsing important differences between them (...) rather it means allowing any integral aspects to emerge" (Barad 2007, 25). This emergence allows new constellations and combinations across the traditional binaries to take shape.

### The value of temporal kinships in the present

Bojana Kunst pushes the value of maintaining processes and the care work which is "always bound to the dense relations of the presence (...) enabling the well-being of the many who are together in the now" (Kunst 2022, 15). This resonates with the BNT since collective creation is the primary concern and belongs to the relational present, as do the forums for reflection, design and social community building, and well-being. This is the art(at)work. This work arises from and builds temporal kinships in the present. The focus is not on the individual or the final product, but on how institutions can reshape and facilitate workspaces that assign greater value to relational and process-oriented dimensions. This is a central task. Shaking imbedded infrastructures is challenging, time consuming, and creates trouble navigating for everyone, not to mention navigating the pressure and demands on a larger scale from the culture and political conditions we are infiltrated in. However, the experimentation with creating an infrastructure that provides the time to collaborate and includes and values more voices, makes the experiments worthwhile and meaningful. The extended rehearsals illustrate an institutional redistribution of time and space, designed to reshape institutional spaces by emphasizing relational aspects. It sheds light on what is meaningful in the process and paves the way for a critical, expanded, and process-oriented understanding of what constitutes a work of art that goes beyond the notion of the artwork as the final product.

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