

B&W Art and Support

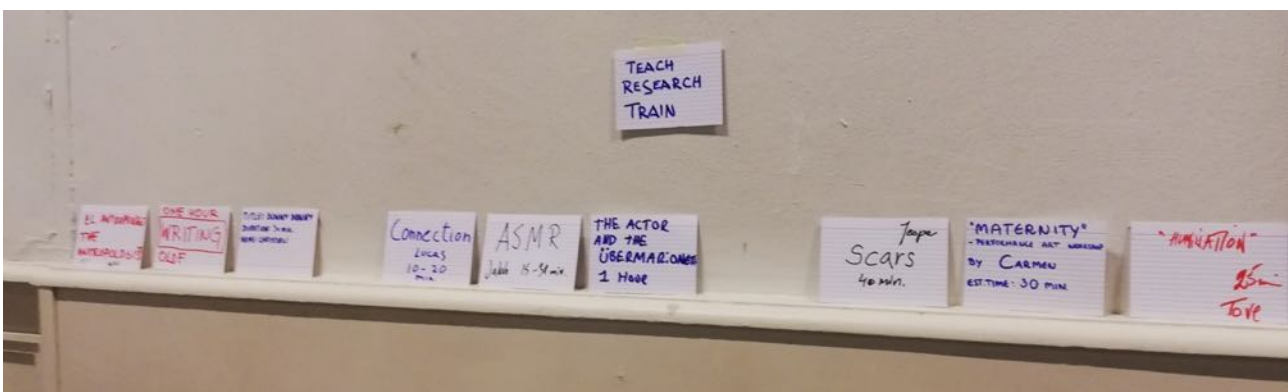
Teaching Each Other Lab Final Report

Copenhagen, 3.-13.12.2018

In December 2018, Dorte and Jörn Burmester Wium from B&W Art and Support invited Peruvian multidisciplinary artist, performer and scenographer Jorge Tadeo Baldéon for a two week residency in Copenhagen. The aim of the residency was to question common strategies of education in the arts. More specifically, the question posed was if and how art practices can be shared without the traditional, still typically vertical power structure between teacher/master/knowledgeable person/teaching subject on one side, and student/learner/blanc canvas/teaching object on the other.

Jorge and Jörn had previously worked together on a series of workshops in performance art, a field where learning processes are less formalised than in most other disciplines. Some methods similar to the ones applied here were first developed and tested with a group of performance artists in Lima. In an additional field of study it was explored how these methods could be transformed to make them useful for practitioners from different fields of performing arts and for people from non-artistic walks of life, preparing for Teaching Each Other projects on a larger scale in the future.

Creators from different disciplines within the performing arts were invited to share a common space, to question the concept of pedagogy as a hierarchical practice of knowledge transmission. and to find perspectives of fluid forms knowledge exchange. All participants were invited to share exercises they used in their own creative work.



The two parts of the Lab

The first week of the residency could be considered the theoretical part. Dorte, Jorge and Jörn met daily for four hours to develop questions, issues for debate and exercises for practical work. Some of the questions were: Which hierarchies in stage art do we criticize, and why? How can we design a workshop-laboratory that invites participants to take over the leading roles from us, who plan it? How do we create a free and open space as a site of a dynamic exchange that generates interest and enthusiasm for the tasks at hand in the participants?

The basis of the experience would be the exchange of the diverse expressive and creative tools that the participants use in their own creative work. As the hosts of the lab we saw it as our primary responsibility to create a framework that would help the participants to introduce and

share their practices. They would freely choose the issues they would cover and the styles of teaching they would use.

To our pleasant surprise, a very diverse group of nine participants signed up, all of whom had significant professional backgrounds in a number of different practices within and beyond the performing arts. The group included:

- Olof Olsson (visual art, spoken word performance)
- Jesper la Cour Andersen (storytelling)
- Lucas Pradino (physical theatre)
- David Sebastian Lopez Restrepo (performance art)
- Jakob la Cour (performance art, game design)
- Øyvind Kirchhoff (mime, theatre)
- Tove Vestmø (performance, dance poetry)
- Christian Rossil (dance, physical theatre)
- Carmen Csilla Medina (dance, circus, performance art).

The public days

The last two days of the residency were a test run for the Teaching Each Other Lab. In order to give the participants as much control as possible, we decided to let them teach each other right from the start. Instead of leading a warm up session, where everyone follows the lead of one or two persons giving instructions, we planned to pass the responsibility for the common work on to the group a few minutes after the start.

This worked in a slightly different way than we had expected. Instead of one person at a time picking up the lead and guiding the entire group through a series of exercises, individual participants started to informally work in small groups of two or three, mostly without spoken language, by simply picking up movements from one another, mirroring, imitating, varying what someone else did. A rather advanced situation of non-hierarchical learning took place completely unplanned, before we had even spoken to the group!

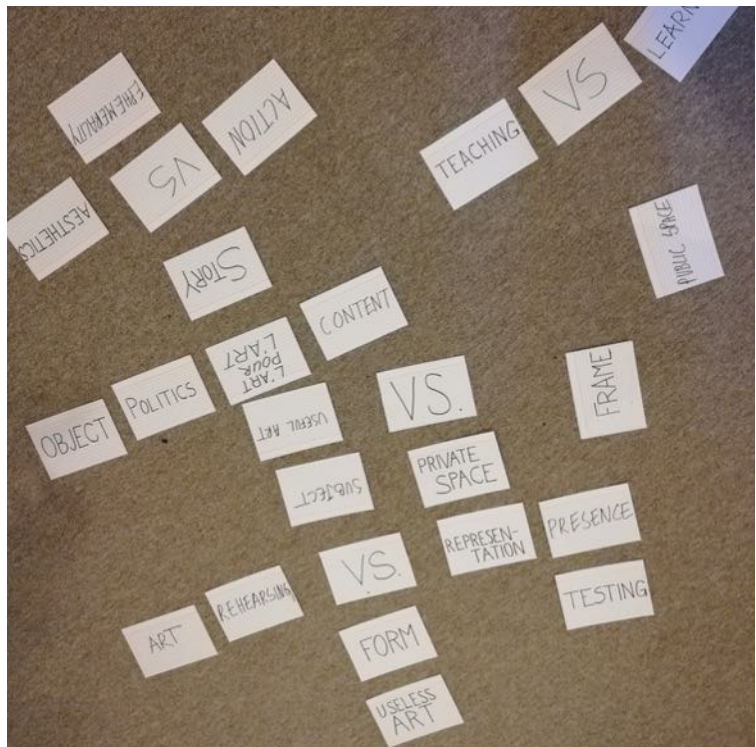
Each day for lunch we cooked a collaborative soup. Each participant would bring one ingredient, without any further planning. We would take a break from the workshop around 11 h, to clean and cut the ingredients seated around a long table. While they were boiling, we would continue with the practical work in the space and around lunchtime the soup would be ready for a common meal. We did not use recipes or plan what each one would bring. The soup made itself, out of the common process, with everyone sharing responsibilities for bringing ingredients as well as the cleaning, cutting, stirring, seasoning and raiding the fridge for extra ingredients.



The main part of the Lab were the Teaching Each other sessions. Each participant was offered a time slot between 1 and 60 minutes to teach the group something from their personal practice. No one took the opportunity for the very short slots, so time became scarce in the end of the days.

Wednesday

Work began with a common talk, with the participants introducing themselves to each other and a discussion of the issues at hand. Index cards were used as a tool for non-hierarchical writing to record the course of the discussion. As the cards were arranged and re-arranged in different sequences and patterns, they allowed for a series of different non-hierarchical texts to emerge and transform. The cards are moving according to the progress of the debate and supplemented as the understanding of issues progresses. Series of cards were spread out on the floor of the space to initiate group discussions. Additional cards and marker pens were provided, to add new themes. The index card method provided a tool to collaboratively create potentially infinite maps of thoughts, exchange and discussions.



After lunch, the Teaching Each Other Sessions commenced. Here is a list of the exercises taught by the participants.

Jorge: El Antropologo

Everyone finds a partner. One is the anthropologist. They explore the body of their partner using all five senses, beginning with sight and sound, moving on to touch, smell and taste. After 5 minutes, partners change.

Olof: Writing for performance

Olof presented a performance lecture about writing for performance. Some lessons were: Pay attention to materials, don't wait for ideas, write before checking your phone and mails, write away from home, on a park bench, in a café, don't correct while writing. Some of Olof's lessons can well be applied to any form of art making. His style of mixing message and humor made it enjoyable to listen to his lecture. In a second part, participants wrote and edited short texts about three everyday objects Olof brought. After a short writing session the texts were presented in micro performance lectures.



Christian: Bunny Bunny

Bunny Bunny is a choreographical/musical sequence of three movements connected to vocal sounds that Christian taught the group. The three basic movements were at first practiced in a rules based choreography, and later components of a game that were freely exchanged between the participants. The session concluded with a free rhythmical voice and movement improvisation based on the three elements.

Thursday*Lucas: Connection*

Lucas conducted a series of physical and awareness exercises entirely without spoken language, simply with eye contact and hand gestures. He lead the group in a warm up session that also, through eye contact, served to establish the namesake connections between participants.

Jakob: ASMR - intimate sensory performance

Jakob introduced the group to the practice of ASMR (Autonomous sensory meridian response), an online phenomenon he studies and participates in. ASMR is described as a pleasant sensory reaction that can be triggered by a variety of auditory or visual stimuli, usually provided through online videos on YouTube. Jakob then led the group in a number of experiments, trying to establish ways to use or recreate this type of pleasant sensory experience in a life environment, stating that he was interested in using similar techniques in his performance work.

Øyvind: The Actor and the Übermarionette.

A short glimpse at a field of study that Øyvind has pursued for several years. Based on studies by Edward Gordon Craig¹ he and various groups he works with explore marionette-like qualities in actors in order to find new means of expression on stage. The idea is for the actor to give up their free will, including the control over the physical functions of their own body.

Øyvind led the group in a series of exercises from his Übermarionette-practice, with participants guiding one another's bodies in ways they would not normally move. Next step was for the "marionettes" to remember and recreate a series of movements the "puppeteer" had taught them on their own, without actually being guided.

Unfortunately, the last three sessions had to be cut short, as the end of the Lab was approaching.



¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Edward_Gordon_Craig

Jesper: Scars

In groups of three or four everyone tells the rest of the group the story of one scar they have on their body. Out of the three or four stories that are told in your group, one story that takes place in one day is composed. Finally, one member of the group tells the composite story to the rest of the participants, the other two or three “perform” it, in sounds and/or movements.

Carmen: Maternity

Each member of the group writes down words and short phrases they connect with maternity. Select three elements from the list/text you compiled and develop a sequence of movements from this shorter list. Perform it to the group.

Tove: Humiliation

Remember a time in your life when you have been humiliated. Develop a text/movement sequence from your memory. Three people stand in front of their group and perform their sequences at the same time. The remaining members of the group watch and listen as members of an audience. They can jump into the action at any time as performers, by relieving one of the currently active performers and taking over their position from them.

**Background**

Today performance art as a form of art is widely recognised within the art world. In recent years institutions of official art like museums, art market and universities have successfully included performances into their canons and curriculums. This has not always been an easy task, because traditionally performance art sees some its roots in resistance against creating marketable objects, against categorisation. Performances are seen as ephemeral, accessible only to the audiences, often called witnesses, who are there while the event happens. And something that disappears in the moment of its making can't well be historicised or bought. For the same reasons, performance art has ambivalent relations to teaching and learning. Until recently, most artists developed their practice by themselves, based rather on previous practice and experience than on codified knowledge of what performance art should be like. Until just as recently, most performance began their practice as an extension of a pre-existing art practice that they

considered lacking certain aspects of what they desired. Performance practices were as individual as the artists themselves. It is an open discussion, if performance art should even be taught, and if so, what should be the contents of such teaching.

Jörn saw himself faced with this dilemma when invited to teach a workshop in the framework of festivals and artist's seminars organized under the title „Encuentros de la Carne“ by ElGalpon Espacio in Lima/Peru in 2015 and 2017. As a solution, some of the methods used as a starting point for the Forsøg in Copenhagen were developed in collaboration with local artists there. While many of the participants of these events had practices or backgrounds in theatre or dance, all of them were also familiar with performance art as a means of visual art and political activism. One of the challenges of the Forsøg in Copenhagen was to find out if the questions posed would be interesting for artists from the performing arts or, more generally, from a wide range of artistic practices. That question can be answered with yes, as we experienced a huge interest in the strategies tested within our „Teaching Each Other Lab“.

Criticism and Future Plans

Due to the limited time that was available during the two open days of the lab, not all sessions could be carried out according to the plans made in advance. Some processes had to be cut short. This should be avoided in future editions, because often new developments happen through repetition, after new ideas are sufficiently understood and tested, at a point when initial ideas are used up. This poses an interesting challenge for planning future labs: On one hand the processes happening within the group of participants should be allowed to proceed with as little interference as possible. On the other hand it is necessary to prepare a reliable schedule before the meeting commences, although it is impossible to say whether any given process will conclude within the given time frame.

Also due to time constraints there was not enough time for moderated talks. In future labs, equal time should be allowed to practical exercises and for reflection and criticism. The lab lacked the aspect of theoretical reflection about the main issue of hierarchies and the chance to draw conclusions with the entire group. These reflections are fundamental in a non-hierarchical environment, where the future directions of the research should of course be determined by all that contribute to the process.

Finally, the original plan had been to end the lab by bringing the different methods together in a common group performance. This did not take place because the time dedicated to the lab ran out when the teaching sessions were concluded. At this point, after two days of common work, which for the most part still relied on the position of a teacher, it would be time to collaboratively invent and test new methods that would challenge common preconceptions of teaching environments even more than the ones tested here.

In spite of these critical remarks, B&W and the participants were very pleased with the results of the Lab as a first test of testing new ways of teaching and learning from one another. A variety of formats for future editions are currently in the making. As a next step a longer forsøg, stretching over a period of five days, will be proposed to Forsøgsstationen. This new edition will serve to develop additional methods to eventually create a Teaching Each Other Festival, that will introduce the methods devised in the lab to broader audiences and, most importantly, invite people from different walks of life to teach their knowledge to anyone who is interested in an open, non-hierarchical space.