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Missing Names

LIESBETH GROOT NIBBELINK

IN WANT OF A NAME

‘Can you not think of a name for your methodology?’ my co-promotor enquired, looking at the almost finished PhD manuscript of *Nomadic Theatre: Staging movement and mobility in contemporary performance* (published 2015). She pointed out that it was rather unique, this way of using a self-invented concept (nomadic theatre) to mobilize and expose the connections between performance analysis, interdisciplinary theory and meta-level reflections on how to put such a concept to work. ‘It would make it much easier to communicate about your work.’ I could not think of a name. A concept-based analysis? Working with performative, diffractive concepts? A transversal concept? None of these terms succeeded in tackling this method precisely. So, I could not think of a name. Now I have a hard time explaining that ‘nomadic theatre’ is not a genre but a concept, deployed to move back and forth between performance analysis and the performance of theory.

‘What are actually the main strands of research and methodologies in our field?’ asked a younger theatre scholar, who recently started her PhD research. She had been teaching in a few courses in the gender studies section of our department, and noticed that in that field there are some strong theoretical traditions; she wondered who are our Donna Haraways, Luce Irigarays, Judith Butlers and Rosi Braidottis, and what are our equivalents of ‘standpoint epistemology’, ‘situated knowledge’, ‘politics of location’ and so forth. I thought very hard and answered that I actually wouldn’t know. I started to explain that in theatre and performance studies, somehow,

the debates seem primarily organized around *topics* instead of concepts or methodologies. On the theatre studies side, for instance, one can discern debates on participatory performance, immersive theatre, theatre and technology; on the performance studies side, one can think of archiving and memory studies, disability studies and focus areas such as duration, objects or posthumanist performance – well check the *Performance Research* or *TDR* archive and it becomes abundantly clear.

Both issues and questions kept playing in my head, and gradually evolved towards the impression that something is missing in our field, which is a joint practice of establishing discourses in which we give names to debates or approaches – names that could serve as beacons in that discourse. Instead, our ‘debate’ seems to be hidden in a process of ongoing proliferation, moving in any kind of direction without any sense of orientation, which makes it very hard to identify a specific theatre and performance studies perspective or to recognize methodologies specific to the field. The problem of this wide variety of approaches is that it renders theatre and performance studies invisible as a specific expertise. How are we to be recognized in an increasingly transdisciplinary field? We borrow from gender studies or postcolonial studies, or new materialism, philosophy and critical theory. But what distinguishes a theatre and performance perspective from precisely these and other domains of critical thought? And what are our own theoretical contributions and methodologies? Is it not ironic that the term ‘performativity’, probably the most-used performance-related term in the expanded field

of cultural theory, primarily has been developed outside our field, namely in linguistics (Austin), philosophy (Derrida) and gender studies (Butler, Barad)?¹

I wonder whether others share these observations. This contribution therefore enquires into the practice and politics of naming, and the absence of that, to ask some questions about the state of affairs in theatre and performance studies.

WHAT'S IN A NAME

When Juliet enquired why Romeo could not let go of his name, she sought to resist the close bond between a name and a family. Theatre and performance scholars, too, seem to belong to certain families – families that are informed by the specifics of local practice, educational contexts or affinities with a particular subset of the field. Families have grandparents and ancestors, stubborn nephews and the occasional 'black sheep' or the peculiar aunt. Who are the identifiable families in our field? Of course, we could think of Richard Schechner in performance studies, and when I was an undergraduate student in theatre studies in the 1990s, Erika Fischer-Lichte and Patrice Pavis were the recurring names on the theatre studies side. In this essay, I am not in search of proper names, however, or heads of families or star scholars, but instead on the look-out for naming practices.

When Juliet wondered if a rose could not smell as sweet by any other name, she queried a position that comes along with being born into a specific family, a position that also involves tradition and social status, an opposition with the Montagues. Names, then, conjure up *positions*. Since this contribution will be an essay on (non-hierarchical) positioning, it seems fair to address my position as well, which explains the recurring references in this essay, to my work as a teacher and researcher at a Dutch university, in the theatre studies section of a media and culture studies department.

In this essay, I will often use the anonymous 'we', deliberately bypassing local or cultural

differences. 'We' does not assume we all work in the same context or under the same conditions. 'We' simply means 'more than one': more than one scholar who is engaged in theatre and performance studies. 'We', however, does specifically address those who experience a growing indifference or even animosity towards art and art studies, and are confronted with the necessity of having to 'prove' the value of art to an opponent who is inclined to favour instrumental use over intrinsic value.

NO TO LABEL

In March 2017, Flemish Arts Centre de Brakke Grond and Frascati theatre, a small black-box venue in Amsterdam, presented their annual performance festival *Something Raw*.² This year's edition was titled 'Unlabeled: Celebrating collapsing categories', to underline the radical transdisciplinarity of the experimental works presented in the festival. 'Unlabelling', for example, the refusal of name-giving, was a means to make way for artists in search of new artistic forms and means of expression. It is

¹ See Culler (2000) for an overview and Barad (2003). Kattenbelt (2010) discusses the term from the perspective of theatre and performance studies.

² *Something Raw* International dance & performance festival is a cooperation of Flemish Arts Centre de Brakke Grond and Frascati, Amsterdam.



■ Graphic Design for *Something Raw*. Image courtesy of De Brakke Grond & Frascati. Design: Kok Pistolet / Floris Schrama & Sacha van den Haak

perfectly understandable that artists do not want their work to be labelled. If the value of art resides in showing us new perspectives or pathways, which I do believe, then neither the artist nor the audience is served by labelling or naming categories of art. It is remarkable, however, that a similar preference seems to govern our modes of *theorizing* theatre and performance. Somehow, we seem to be very fond of *not naming* what we do.

By way of a case study, I analysed some reviews of recent publications that seek to map developments in performance studies. Interestingly, those reviews repeatedly address the diversity or heterogeneity of the contributions and such words are almost always indices of a positive evaluation. Take, for instance, the edited volume *A Performance Cosmology: Testimony from the future, evidence of the past* (Christie *et al.* 2005), looking back at thirty years of performance studies and trying to plot a course towards the future. The book itself is advertised, among others, as a *diverse and fascinating* series of interviews, testimonials and *perspectives*, and indeed the diversity is dizzying. This is reflected in the reviews: 'Performance research is *decentered, partial* and *counter-hegemonic* in this work' (Eckersall 2008, my emphasis). The contributions are conceived of as journeys, which 'rarely end at the intended destination' (Christie *et al.* 2005: xi) and are 'intentionally elliptical' as they all profess a sense of '*moving between perspectives and analytical frames*' (Eckersall 2008, my emphasis). Patrick Anderson regards the book as 'a geographical meeting-place of interested parties whose shared vocabulary is always in the process of *being produced, contested, and reformulated*' (2008: 199, my emphasis). Apparently, performance studies scholars deliberately refuse to pinpoint, to anchor, to categorize or to systematize.

In this specific context, I found it a relief to read the following comment in a review of another performance studies anthology, *Performance Studies in Motion: International perspectives and practices in the twenty-first century* (Citron *et al.* 2014):

The main problem is a familiar one. Insufficiently qualified, the 'as' performance approach is unwieldy. The reader may affect polite interest in what each contributor has to say, but without stronger framing by the editors and a shared sense of mission among the contributors, the volume lacks a cumulative effect. (Rae 2016: 163)

I will not venture into the quality of either the book or the review; I have quoted this evaluation instead to address this particular phenomenon, which, in my more sombre days, I name the 'case studies decease'. Over the past years, I encountered many edited volumes, often with insightful introductions that provide some sort of overview, after which the overview gets blurred because the subsequent contributions each move in their own direction, often due to an extremely varied set of case studies. Notwithstanding excellent exceptions, this lack of cumulative effect and absence of mission that Paul Rae mentions is precisely the trap of many edited volumes. One may even call it the *diversity trap*. In the attempt to include as many approaches as possible and to do justice to cultural, geographical, international or any other kind of diversity, one is eager to avoid exclusion but in the end the question remains what is to be gained, apart from reaching the conclusion that indeed the field (or approaches to the topic at hand) is totally diverse. Flemish dramaturg Marianne van Kerkhoven once wisely said: all is nothing.³

A question that becomes more prominent the longer I think of this topic is: why have we developed this fragmented approach, instead of clearly identifiable traditions, theories or schools of thought? This is a vast question, hence I will only briefly touch upon a few possible explanations. Perhaps the evasive quality of theatre and performance somehow gets reflected in our approach to this object, which increases the 'incidental' nature of scholarly reflection, meaning that each scholar seems to build his or her own theoretical framework, always looking for the singular, new approach instead of continuing or adjusting existing scholarly work. On the one hand, this 'reflection' is a beautiful token of the researcher's engagement, and demonstrates how a scholar is always implicated

³ Marianne van Kerkhoven made this remark during an after-talk, in a discussion on dramaturgical choice-making in relation to the work of Kris Verdonck.

in 'theory'. On the other, theoretical mimicry does not have to exclude discursive reflexivity.

Another explanation, in line with Rae, is perhaps the deliberately wide interpretation of 'performance', that is, the broad-spectrum approach that prevented the formation of a coherent discourse. Perhaps our tradition is one of radical particularity. Perhaps this fragmentation is unavoidable, since a 'field' is not a territory. A field is intrinsically open. Although stemming from two decades ago and related to literary theory, Jonathan Culler's introduction to *The Point of Theory: Practices of cultural analysis* (1994) equally could characterize contemporary theatre and performance studies: literature engages with a diversity of subjects, such as human relationships, material and social conditions of experience, political power or modes of representation and, subsequently, when reflecting on those matters, 'the very comprehensiveness of literature draws theoretical discourses from other fields into "theory"' (16). Brian McHale, in the same volume, observes an explosion of theory in the 1970s, which again could qualify our field as well. According to McHale, this expansion led to a flattening of theories, an increasing horizontality at the cost of verticality (1994: 56).⁴

It is precisely in the 'resistance of categorization' that some scholars locate the politics and power of performance. In *Singularities: Dance in the age of performance*, for instance, André Lepecki equates singularity precisely with that what resists, critiques and subverts the normative categories of a neoliberalist, rationalized 'selfie-society' (2016: 2–3).⁵ Associating the evasive and event-ness with resistance and politics has a long tradition. But does it still work, nowadays, precisely in an era of neoliberalism and anti-intellectual tendencies?⁶ Can we be a recognizable entity, a force, when we continue to stress that we do not tick any boxes, when we celebrate the constant escape, when we do not give ourselves a name, when we opt for imperceptibility, when we say we 'escape the system' while we are in the middle of it, and our

work and working conditions are to such a large extent defined by those same systems (the neoliberal university, right-wing governments, budget cuts in the arts and so on)? In a time when many art studies departments are being threatened with closure, I wonder whether we should not investigate *branding* ourselves a bit more, by naming our modes of theory formation or emerging schools of thought, by giving names to our tools, concepts and methodologies. We may resist branding, in an attempt to defy neoliberal logics. Can we not, instead, *pass through* such an uneasy term like 'branding' and re-appropriate it for our own good?

What's more, branding may also assist in overcoming some of the 'we know this already' sensations when engaged in cross-disciplinary exchange. I expect many readers to be acquainted with this sensation, but to give a brief example: I have noticed an increasing interest among art students for utopian theories – discourses of hope and fiction – and related to this, a huge interest for queer studies and science-fiction. I read Muñoz's *Cruising Utopia* (2009) with some of these students, in which Muñoz proposes to understand queer in terms of potentiality. Drawing on Bloch and Agamben, he describes queer potentiality as 'the not-yet that nevertheless is present'. Reading this, I could not help but think: this is what we do! We know this already! This is the very sensation of a live performance, this is the speculative potential inherent to all theatrical imagination. This is the 'as if' and the 'what if' of theatre. So why is queer theory so attractive, and why do these students not turn to theatre and performance studies texts instead? Is this because the theatre and performance studies approach is not identifiable as such? Because the rich remarks remain hidden in case-study analysis and individual approaches?

NAMING PRACTICES

The resistance to naming is understandable. Naming is often associated with hierarchy, power structures or the idea of a fixed identity. There is a close bond between naming and

⁴ Ana Vujanović (2012) equally criticizes the celebration of pluralism in performance studies and an absence of methodology, pointing to cognitive capitalism and the serialization of theory as possible explanations. She argues for a practice rather than the production of theory, which takes socio-political context and stakes into account.

⁵ Lepecki, in particular, chooses sides with 'those who create the non-recognizable and don't care about being recognized' (2016: 2).

⁶ Lepecki equally targets neoliberalism but (still) puts his faith in ephemerality: 'Indeed, dance's ephemerality, the fact that dance leaves no object behind after its performance, demonstrates the possibility for creating alternative economics of objecthood in the arts – by showing that it is possible to create artworks away from regimes of commodification and fetishization of tangible objects' (2016: 14).

⁷ Examples can be found in studies of onomastics, that is, the 'art of giving names'. Onomastics seems a descriptive rather than a critical area of study. See Felecan and Bughesiu (2013).

⁸ See, for example, Berg and Vuolteenaho (2009).

baptism, an act of inscribing someone into a tradition, a family line, a canon.⁷ The alliance between naming, power, hierarchy and ownership is perhaps most evident in the politics of place naming, in particular when thinking of the 'semiotics of colonialism', for example, the strategy of claiming territory by (re)naming land, meanwhile suppressing (indigenous) names already existing or denying entirely different logics of naming and indexing property.⁸

The humanities have always concerned themselves with questioning and critiquing such patterns of power and dominance. Fully in line with this, performance studies seeks to undo theoretical colonialism and Anglo-American hegemony, making way for other geographical approaches and traditions. This is evidenced by the 2015 Performance Studies international (PSi) conference 'Fluid States', for example, and publications such as *Contesting Performance: Global sites of research* (McKenzie et al. 2012).

The connection between names, places and (steady) positions is also addressed by Tim Ingold in *Being Alive: Essays on movement, knowledge and description* (2011). In one of these essays, on naming and storytelling, Ingold wonders why humans have names, whereas things and (non-domesticated) animals have not. Humans tend to be identified by proper names, names that are in turn connected to specific places or positions, for instance, a house address. Artefacts, organisms or animals, on the other hand, are referred to by common nouns; they are things-without-names, presented as being without location. Nameless things and organisms are treated as if they could appear anywhere, roaming about in the wild. They are 'positioned', instead, by classification systems and taxonomies. Ingold analyses this distinction in order to criticize the inherent dualism, pointing out how things and organisms, by subjecting them to the vertical system of classification, are deprived of their local context or situated specificity. Ingold then proceeds towards his actual (anthropological) agenda, and introduces a radically different practice of

naming. He explains how the Koyukon people of Alaska give names to animals by describing their behaviour or patterns of activity. Instead of allocating class or type, Koyukon names reflect what animals do and how this doing relates to their environment – an environment that sometimes happens to include human beings. Consequently, 'names are not nouns but verbs' (Ingold 2011: 168). The spotted sandpiper's name translates as 'flutters around the shore', for example; a particular moth is called 'eats clothing'; the mink is called 'bites things in water' (169). Despite his rather different agenda, Ingold's observations are relevant for this essay, as his example suggests an alternative naming practice that moves beyond classification or categorization, and instead foregrounds the articulation of activities and relationships. Branding our field, then, could be an act of naming a practice, a doing, which is also an act of positioning, of placing in relation to some other thing or some other place.

CITATIONALITY

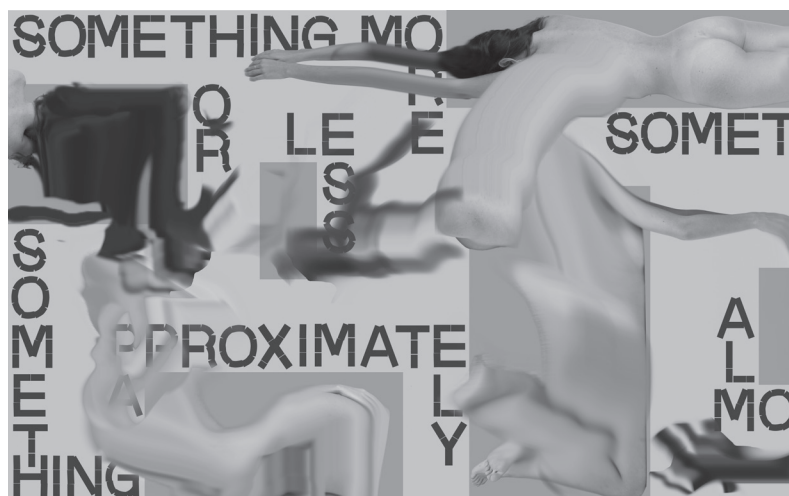
Koyukon naming practices also rely on traditions of storytelling, of passing on and keeping alive name-giving myths and riddles. In Ingold's example, referring to a past is not the equivalent of installing a hegemonic hierarchy. A similar argument can be found in Rosi Braidotti's understanding of citationality. Drawing on Spivak and Derrida, Braidotti regards the practice of quoting or citing others – others who spoke before or whose voices were not heard or recognized – as a means of creating a (feminist) counter-memory. Citationality is also a way of inscribing oneself into a larger collective political movement, of abandoning the idea of a steady identity or a unique, philosophizing 'I', and opting instead for a nomadic, non-centralized subjectivity, plugged into the collective project of thinking (Braidotti 2011: 37–8). Braidotti's citationality accommodates the genealogy of ideas, practices and stories – a genealogy that substitutes the fixed canon with a nomadic travelling or

becoming. Interestingly, both Deleuze and Guattari as well as Braidotti note that a nomad follows customary paths and traces its own tracks (Deleuze and Guattari 2004 [1980]: 19; Braidotti 2004: 61). For Braidotti, such movements are closely aligned with (nomadic) identity: identity is a meandering, backward journey – a moving forward while revisiting the places and positions one passed (2004: 61).

To recall the younger scholar I started this essay with, she remarked that she would have had much more confidence as a theatre scholar if she would have known more of traditions in theatre and performance research and how these traditions have their bearing on educational programmes: 'I would have felt more secure with a bit of history in my back.' To have a bit of history in your back can also inform a sense of identity.

Perhaps this example reflects only a local educational context, where the history and philosophy of science has not been at the forefront of the curriculum (luckily a development in reverse at the moment). But maybe it is part of a wider phenomenon. In his 2008 essay 'Intercultural theory, postcolonial theory and semiotics: The road not (yet) taken', Marvin Carlson traces and critically questions the disappearance of theatre semiotics in favour of intercultural and postcolonial performance theory. Testing the validity of theories is of course very healthy, and changes in theoretical models do reflect changes in a field. Simultaneously, Carlson's account provides an insightful example of wiping out one's tracks, instead of tracing them.

Articulating the (changing) identity of theatre and performance studies is of crucial concern, in my view, in a time when the humanities increasingly seem to get swallowed by the (values and norms of) the social sciences. If I take Martha Nussbaum's *Not for Profit* (2010) as an indicator, this development is not at all restricted to our university but a widely distributed phenomenon. One of the signals of this development is the emphasis on methodological justification of research, where methodology is distinguished from employing



a theoretical framework. In our department, this led to fierce discussions about this weird and unsatisfying separation. Nevertheless, the distinction has crept into our evaluation forms and performatively changes students' papers as well. So we require our students to explain their methodologies, while meanwhile I often wonder: what *are* our methodologies? In many theatre and performance studies publications, authors hardly spend any words on (naming) their methodology. If professional scholars do not do this, how on earth can we ask our students to do it? In some of these methodology discussions it was jokingly remarked that none of the great thinkers in (continental) philosophy like Derrida, Foucault or Deleuze would pass if they were assessed by the norms and thesis forms that we now apply to our students.

One can of course resist this quest for methodology and pseudo-clarity. On the other hand, the methodology discussion also did some good, in that it revealed the implicit approaches and un-named habits of a field. It made me remember again that our way of using theoretical frameworks as a perspective to study phenomena and express our understanding of it, is hugely indebted to hermeneutics. Strikingly, no one refers to hermeneutics anymore. I would be very grateful if Marvin Carlson or any other scholar would explain to me what happened to hermeneutics.⁹ And if others would investigate other 'what happened to' topics. This way, the reflection on methodology could evolve into

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⁹ I noticed the emergence of 'post-hermeneutics' as a reading-group topic at various universities; in *Postphenomenology and Technoscience*, Don Ihde devotes a chapter to material hermeneutics, which in earlier work is also referred to as expanded hermeneutics.

a practice of naming and positioning various schools of thought.

Contrary to Braidotti's citationality, our tradition of referencing seems relatively 'light'. For sure, we do refer to each other's work but we do not really build upon each other's work. We tend to cite a few related scholars and, occasionally, we use a term introduced by someone else, but then we set off to do our own thing and write our own analysis. Sometimes it looks like we are Baricco—an barbarians ourselves: surfing without diving into deep water. Don't get me wrong: I have read ample publications in which a single scholar seriously engages with certain theoretical ideas from others, yet somehow it seems as if we always start from scratch. Remarkably, nine out of ten times, the quoted authors stem from the domain of philosophy or cultural and critical theory. There is hardly an accumulation of approaches *within* the theatre and performance studies field. Surprisingly, whereas theatre is a socially engaged art par excellence – theatre and performance always involve more than one – somehow theatre and performance *studies* is not a social field, but a co-existence of individual approaches.

In line with the light-hearted reference, and similar to the methodology quest, I wonder: where are our debates? Phelan–Auslander is ages ago.¹⁰ Who are our Bishops and Bourriaud in the debate on participatory performance, for example?¹¹ Where do we test one another's work or suggest adjustments? When do we *respond*? With these questions in mind, I did another small survey, scanning through *TDR* editions from 2008 to the present, in particular the book review section. I noticed that at least there we do respond, and some references to related aunts, uncles or nieces are made. Yet this review mode is hardly present in scholarly essays themselves.

Take, for instance, an often-referenced book like Lehmann's *Postdramatic Theatre* (2006). Many of us welcomed the book (at least on the theatre studies side), but why did that not start up a (international) debate? Some critique was given by Elinor Fuchs, one can find others' small

side remarks in an occasional introduction and a few books continue Lehmann's line of thought.¹² By 'debate' I actually do not mean polemics, such as in the Lehmann–Fuchs exchange. I wonder why we did not further conceptualize the notion of postdramatic theatre, collectively, which would cause postdramatic *theatre* to evolve into postdramatic *theory*.

COLLABORATIVE BRANDING

We cannot read everything. There are simply too many publications and there is too little time. Can we not collaborate in a different way, apart from the edited volumes, by pointing out strands of thoughts to one another,¹³ by engaging with one another's work beyond the light reference, by taking some time to position oneself in a debate? This would imply a joint act of naming the patterns of our activity, without installing new hierarchies, where singularity is built into a collaborative and affirmative practice. This is what defines nomad thought, in which singular expertise is a building block in an accumulative event that, following Brian Massumi, does not adhere to laws of power but instead produces force:

Nomad thought replaces the closed equation of representation, $x = x \neq y$ ($I = I \neq \text{not you}$) with an open equation: $\dots + y + z + a + \dots$ [...] The modus operandi of nomad thought is affirmation, even when its apparent object is negative. Force is not to be confused with power. Power is the domestication of force. Force in its wild state arrives from outside to break constraints and open new vistas. Power builds walls. (Massumi 1992:6)

Yet these new vistas should perhaps move beyond the poststructuralist agenda, and follow a path of collaboration, where, as Bojana Cvejić sees it, "we" isn't unison, but taking responsibility for relations "with" in working with one another, with no compromise of tolerance, but sustaining the differential in contact' (2005).

Ingold observes that, for the Koyukon, every animal 'is known by the signature of its activity' (2011:170). To articulate the signature of our activity, is perhaps to focus on what Brian

¹⁰ I am referring to the 'liveness debate' here (Phelan 1993; Auslander 1999). See also Power (2008:147–74) and for a brief impression Fischer-Lichte (2008:68–9).

¹¹ Nicolas Bourriaud (2002 [1998]) introduced the notion of 'relational aesthetics' in curating; art critic Clair Bishop (2004, 2012) critically examined the 'merits' that Bourriaud ascribes to relations, arguing instead for keeping artistic criteria in view.

¹² See Fuchs (2008) and responses in Lehmann, Jurs-Münby and Fuchs (2008), and for examples of continuation Jurs-Münby *et al.* (2013) and Swyzen and Vanhoutte (2011), respectively addressing the role of politics and the 'status' of text in postdramatic performance.

¹³ Like Rebecca Schneider's overview of new materialism in performance theory (2015).

McHale calls middle-range theories. In his contribution to *The Point of Theory*, mentioned above, McHale connects the flattening of theories, since the 1970s, to the disappearance of ‘mid-range theories’ – theories that do not pretend to be the grand overview, nor focus on separate works, but describe characteristics of phenomena such as genre, an artist’s oeuvre, schools of practice or traditions of writing, specific literary modes or techniques and so on (McHale 1994: 59).

Our field may benefit from an increase of such mid-range theories. Some fine examples are Cormac Power’s *Presence in Play: A critique of theories of presence in the theatre* (2008) or Jon McKenzie’s *Perform, or Else: From discipline to performance* (2001). Both books reflect on how respectively the concepts of presence and performance have been used and reflected upon, in a variety of contexts, and present a systematic approach to understanding these concepts. In a similar vein, we could benefit from mid-range approaches to other issues that strongly manifest themselves in society, such as spectacle, or staging. To take the example of staging: remarkably, many of us write about staging practices and staging strategies, yet there is no ‘mid-range’ reflection on how to study staging, let alone a thorough reflection on that remarkable and evasive creature that is the stage itself. If, say, a mathematician would ask me if I could recommend a book on staging, I would not know what to advise. I would probably revisit Aronson’s *Looking into the Abyss* (2005) and look into more recent studies on scenography as well as mentioning Maaïke Bleeker’s *Visuality in the Theatre* and reflections on *mise en scène* by Pavis (2013) and Fischer-Lichte (2008: 182–90) – meanwhile wondering which books outside the Anglo-American sphere I would miss – and I would invite this mathematician to make the connections himself. It would have much more *force*, though, if I could point towards approaches that name themselves ‘staging theory’.¹⁴

Also, on the methodologies front, I am in need of active, collective reflection. In our department, we have started to name our

methodologies ourselves. Now we work with ‘dramaturgical analysis’ and ‘contextual analysis’, and I have been searching for some time now for something that could be named ‘field research for theatre and performance studies’ and ‘debate analysis’. This field research is a form of performance ethnography, however, one that does *not* look into theatre audiences or community art, but instead provides systematic approaches for studying artistic biotopes; ‘debate analysis’ is a kind of discourse analysis that covers the middle ground between Foucauldian macro power structures and the micro level of the linguistic utterance, providing students with tools for analysing debates in professional journals or online art forums, equally attending to artistic biotopes and cultural infrastructures, yet with a focus on assumptions, norms and ideas about the value of art in society and the ways in which artists, curators, programmers and critics engage in or respond to such discourses.

SCAFFOLDING THE SPRINGBOARD

In another essay in *Being Alive*, Ingold quotes Colin Renfrew who identifies his work as ‘material engagement theory’ (2011: 21). As it happens, my work also deals with material engagement. *Nomadic Theatre* (Groot Nibbelink 2015) actually makes a point of how theatre uses the mobility of spectatorship to emphasize the embodied and situated relations with the places through which we move and that we construct through movement. But it never crossed my mind to call my work an instance of material engagement theory (or nomadic theatre theory), to give it not only a title, but to name my *practice*.

In this essay, I suggested that a practice of naming could be a way of positioning oneself while moving forwards, and branding a form of articulating particularity. With regard to this latter expression, I am indebted to Caren Kaplan who uses the term when explaining the crucial role of the politics of location in feminist thought. Politics of location provided a way of countering hegemonic (masculinist) thought

¹⁴ There seems to be (at least) one extra-theatrical area of study in which staging and *mise en scène* are extensively reflected upon, which is psychoanalysis. See, for instance, Campbell and Kear (2001). Courtesy to Janez Janša for pointing out the connection.

by 'rearticulating marginality or particularity' (1996: 144). Politics of location also opened up the feminist discourse from within, as black or non-Western feminists produce counter-knowledge to Western feminism (Braidotti 2004: 59–60). Both Kaplan and Braidotti point to the relevance of articulating particularity, precisely at a moment a field becomes more diverse.

Likewise, our field becomes increasingly diverse and transdisciplinary. We do not only cross borders with other art disciplines or with sports, rituals and everyday life. When looking, for example, to the work of artists like Christophe Meierhans, Philippe Quesne or Rimini Protokoll, we also engage with other expertise areas such as law, climate change or science. The more boundaries become porous, the more worthwhile is the reflection on the knowledge, traditions and perspectives intrinsic to a field. In addition, identifying characteristics is actually quite relevant when interdisciplinary exchange is to be a *mutual* affair.

One may resist the proposition of branding ourselves a bit more, arguing that diversity and non-categorization precisely reflect the nature of theatre and performance, and that diversity is what characterizes the humanities. The topic of diversity is highly complex and loaded with political implications and burning societal questions. In view of the larger context of world politics, the conservative and nationalist calls to the norms and values of 'the people' show the crucial importance of embracing heterogeneity. On the smaller scale of a theatre and performance studies field, however, we may opt for increasing the visibility of the signature of our activities. This is not a call for 'closing the ranks'; it is a plea for articulating particularity, as a means of scaffolding the springboard for transdisciplinary and interdisciplinary exchange. It is an invitation to develop a joint, accumulative practice that we may understand as an instance of 'fugitive planning', to borrow a phrase by Stefano Harney and Fred Moten (2013). So we may continue acting fugitively, but now with a plan.

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