

In the shade we stumble

Theatre laboratory as a living archive

Annelis Kuhlmann

«With what must the country be built? Traffic laws in this country determine basic rights and duties. One direction is a very basic premise. We would like to point out that the one who will forward always has priority that you always have the right to a full screw [...]» – this is part of the line from the Danish lawyer in Odin Teatret's latest ensemble production, *The Chronic Life*.¹

The performance is dedicated to Anna Politkovskaya and Natalia Estemirova, Russian writers and human right activists, murdered by anonymous thugs in 2006 and 2009 for their opposition to the Chechen conflict [Programme text 2011].

There is at first sight nothing “stumbling” over Odin Teatret's latest ensemble production, *The Chronic Life*, where the notion of history is central. To remind about those, who were made silent and disappeared, is here a thematic revitalization of search in the art and of making a difference. In the theatre this is realized with moving voices and bodies, which here appear in a remarkable form of imbalance. That people disappear, as Diana Taylor describes in her book *Disappearing Acts* on the dirty war in Argentina, where women manifest the loss of their men and sons [Taylor 1997] – this very problem is in *The Chronic Life* an important issue in the montage of the performance, and as such it brings a special message to spectators. The stumbling can be seen in the theatrical appearances of the actors on stage, which is shaped like a simple raft with spectators on both sides, and that uncovers many types of disappearance. The stage director Eugenio Barba has used blindness as a device on the spectator's gaze in order to instrumentalize a labyrinth of disappearances in the show. This blindness is perceived as the director's selection principle in his development of the montage technique of the production. The recent decades of increasing focus on the exploration of history as a materi-

¹ Text fragment by the poet Ursula Andkjær Olsen to *The Chronic Life*, theatrical performances with the entire Odin Teatret ensemble. Dramaturgy and staging: Eugenio Barba. Dramaturg: Thomas Bredsdorff. Literary consultant: Nando Tavian. Lights: Odin Teatret, Jesper Kongshaug. Stage design: Odin Teatret, Jan de Neergaard, Antonella Diana. Music: Odin Teatret, traditional and modern melodies. Costumes: Odin Teatret and Jan de Neergaard. Technicians: Fausto Pro, Raúl Iza, Pierangelo Pompa, Ana Woolf. Premiere: August 2011.

al source have emphasized creative and reflective processes behind identity-making profiles from the theatre world. Actors and performers now frequently also draw on resources like immaterial experiences in order to extract strategies to establish a creative vision for the future of their work. Archives of identities and historical events are taken up in reflecting historiographies, often occurring as a dynamic interaction between the stage and the surrounding world. Sometimes, this historical turn could be witnessed as a kind of re-enactment. At other times it becomes a question of the scenic presence, which is closely connected to an understanding of times – present, past and future. Eventually, there are also examples of theatre productions and performances, where the historical turn may be experienced as an artistic agenda on scenic presence in the enunciation of the very performance production. After all, what is history, if it is not presence in the/of past?²

1. *Historical background for the theatre laboratory*

The investigation of the notion of scenic presence in modern contemporary history of theatre is closely linked to history of theatre laboratories, originating from the period around the turn of the 20th century and historically linked to the Russian actor and pedagogue, Konstantin Stanislavsky (1863-1938). A theatre laboratory often consists of a group of actors, usually under the leadership of a prominent actor or director. The actors of the group immerse in acting and in the techniques of the art of stage directing mainly for the purpose of refining their skills, in the first place without necessarily having to presenting it to spectators. The theatre laboratory was historically a training form inside a relatively closed environment [Schino 2009]. For decades after the Second World War, when the wave of new alternative theatre companies spread, the theatre laboratory developed for strong identity building practices. These groups somewhat reflected ruptures in search of mimetic forms in acting in the theatre. Post-war drama was characterized with several ruptures as for example the theatre of the absurd, and visual arts like street actions an installation art in galleries and for example factory spaces, deliberated from the previous production aims. In many ways, the post-war theatre became a form of showdown with traditional forms of working methods, dealing with realities in art. This line of activity forms in theatre history characterizes the theatre laboratory as a special form of working ethos and gives the turn of history of the theatre laboratory a privileged status as narrative.

² A number of notable performers have performed the historical turn. Let me bring a few examples: *Undercover* – Hotel Pro Forma's 25 years of work, curated through performing the National Archive in the Royal Library, Copenhagen. Or performance history, expressed through *Marina Abramović: The Artist Is Present*, a performance on "presence", taking place while seven re-performed historical performances in simultaneous meetings at MoMA, New York. The performance was later immortalized in a film. [Both examples: Kuhlmann 2013].

2. *Nordisk Teaterlaboratorium, Holstebro in Denmark*

In Denmark the tradition of the theatre laboratory from mid 1960s took a significant new direction in the national theatre landscape. Odin Teatret soon also was named Nordisk Teaterlaboratorium, due to the many arranged workshops and seminars with masters from different traditions of the world theatre. Above all, the laboratory became a sign for an in-depth interest in exploring the legacy of significant, acting conventions among living theatre peoples in the world. The impact was that Odin Teatret as a theatre laboratory became still richer in art based research transformations. As a *living archive* with layers of different technical skills and scenic forms of presence, the contemporary theatre laboratory can be recognised as coded body signatures in space and through its scenic expressive language. This characteristic became visible in a local context and with a wider global resonance.

3. *Conceptualising the understanding of time*

The living archive of today can be regarded as a multi-dimensional organism that can be involved in different ways of writing the history of activities in the theatre laboratory. The living archive fills in the laboratory as an integrated sum of practical forms of artistic experiences that each individual actor masters. The results-oriented steps in these forms of artistic experiences are also expressed as creative processes, because a living archive provides space for other forms of time perception. The theatre laboratory applies to a large extent to the circular perception of time, which can be identified with a ritual sense of time. But it is also true for the durative time, i.e. the *process of passing*, and not just the time that *has already passed*. The living archive can thus be perceived as an encapsulation of time; a cut-out of time as a workflow that seen from distance can be considered as a process to document. Finally, the living archive also through its preserved practices speaks about how to conceptually organize a narrative about the laboratory as a historiography of an environmental phenomenon. In other words, the living archive of the theatre laboratory is related to a contemporary notion of both genre and history, recently coined through the double notion *performing archives*, that captures the double perspective in itself [Gade 2013].

In this context, it is interesting how we can preserve and store a theatre performance, which per se in its ephemeral nature already is history at the moment, when we have left theatre auditorium. But it is also of interest, how the theatre laboratory in a sense performs its own archive. This double edged sword of *to archive performance* and *to perform archives* sharpens a continuous line in the following: the overlap between performance and archive is related to the theatre laboratory to let the past be a living part of presence. In my understanding this is all exemplified by Odin Teatret's latest production, *The Chronic Life*.

The actors from Odin Teatret come from different countries and have brought their inherited cultural narratives along. However, the influence of archaic, not least

from Asian masters, has given the actors a special capacity to develop their own body repertoire. This dense impact of the masters has become a transformative line of techniques and skills. This influence is especially visible in the repertoire of the actors' primarily physical and dramatic expressions through a kind of inter-cultural influences, concentrated in the live presence of the actor's *body memory*. Little by little, these configurations of training forms have been added expressive dramaturgical images and meta-narrations from predominantly European cultural heritage of theatre. The actors' individual stories can as a matter of fact be seen as carriers of myths in the theatre of the 50-year-old work corpus, which Odin Teatret Archive (OTA) represents today. In this sense, the theatre laboratory represents a highly articulated perspective of historiographical dimensions.³

4. *The Chronic Life*

With the help of the examples from *The Chronic Life* this article deals with the question of dual performance historiography, used in the performance. There is a relation between micro-history and macro-history, evident in the multitude of historically nuanced moments, identifiable in the surrounding world. But the production also holds a methodological approach in the way, how the story of *The Chronic Life* is a stage narrative of loss. This global dimension of the narrative becomes visible in the aesthetic forms of absence, reflected though a persisting scenic presence.

4.1. *Global narrative of loss*

A major theme of the performance is about a global narrative of authority and loss, seen through a lens of an imaginary future civil war. At this level of fiction the narrative is about a Latin American boy, searching for his dead (European) father. On his way he meets a patchwork of characters like a Chechen woman, a Basque widow, a Romanian housewife, a Danish lawyer, a Faroese rock guitar player, a couple of mercenaries and finally a blind, classical violinist. In other words, the boy meets a world, represented by serious taboo conflicts from different spots. The searching boy has blindfold for the eyes, which makes him serve as an almost paradoxical character with hesitant blindness that highlights the search.

The loss is mourned on a global scale, but at the level of *mise en scene* the mourning becomes part of an aesthetic approach in the production. This approach reveals the characters as strong survivors, and as opposed to the "heroes" in the Danish national tradition, exemplified by the frequently returning song, *In the shade we stumble* (1803), written by the Danish poet, Adam Oehlenschläger (1779-1850). This romantic song has status as leitmotif with its repeated melodic somehow

³ See <<http://www.odinteatretarchives.com>>.

slaving rhythm, composed later by Thomas Laub (1852-1927). This song sounds like a comment to the portrait of “the world’s happiest people”, as the Danes are described these years. The influence of the Janteloven on justice and cultural self-awareness is presented as a scenic legacy with the use of various grotesque devices.⁴

4.2. *Time in the theatre production, The Chronic Life*

The title *The Chronic Life* estimates an insistently vulnerable energy, characterising the idea of strength up against time – time here understood as frame narrative time about the great conflicts and globalization. But also time of intimate tender and fidelity, added the time of search for the leftovers. The artistic track of the performance also deals with the actors’ time as a chronicle of life with spectators in different global contexts for almost five decades. This perspective of time as thematical version of the ephemeral side of the performance shows itself as an act of disappearing, highlighting the loss in a globalised and local (Danish?) society. Suffering and threatened love turn into corrosive images.

Having seen *The Chronic Life* several times, I am still disturbed by various dramatic signs under the surface, or the «elusive order», as Eugenio Barba has called it [Barba 2010, 205]. Especially the striking blindness I have witnessed from different angles during the performance.

4.3. *Time as sight and insight*

What almost seemed obvious in the main narrative about the boy, searching for his late father, appeared however at yet a different level much less obvious, although still very insistent. I refer to *evidence* in the production’s dimension of nature. Not evidence of a regular causality, but evidence as *survey and insight*. This is the first sign of the performance telling that the historical turn conceptually makes use of new metaphorical shifts from sight to insight.

The narrative line with the searching boy is the first visible meeting with blindness as a theme. The boy’s eyes are covered with round white flaps, suggesting a non-congenital but occurred blindness, as if someone had damaged his eyes. The image alludes to King Oedipus, who tore his own eyes out with his mother’s broche. In *The Chronic Life* this blindness prevents the boy from having an “outer gaze” and may be perceived as cultural blindness. The boy is able to sense with his inner eye, or with the third eye, and in this way the blindness indicates both imaginary and playfulness of the performance. This first indication on playing with blindness

⁴ Engl. “The law of Jante” goes back to the Danish-Norwegian author Aksel Sandemose’s novel *A Fugitive crosses his tracks* (Norwegian, *En flyktning krysser sitt spor*; 1933). This law implies a group behavior towards individuals within Scandinavian communities.

could be seen as a sign of Eugenio Barba's vision of the performance, as a sending position. The Nordic god, Odin, has a blind eye that can be perceived as an additional view point for the director through his artistic trajectory.⁵

The performance in *The Chronic Life* has fragmented dialogues between blind people and their sighted informers. This pattern reveals a transcendental power of language, and opens for a specific co-existence between actors and spectators. This co-existence gets the spectators to witness both the outer and the inner gaze. The spectators' sense of time is thus divided into a rift across the narrative of the performance.

In a European tradition the blind man represents the viewer. In ancient Greek tragedy often the blind Tiresias predicts the hero's fate. In Sophocles' tragedy *King Oedipus*, this phenomenon has a poetic sharpness, since the blind sees Oedipus' real tragedy, and as soon as Oedipus recognizes this, he tears his own eyes out. For Oedipus the tragic acknowledgement demands that he must see the inner truth in his own history and remain blind to the external representation of the case. The myth of King Oedipus has, in fact, been a recurring theme in many of Odin Teatret's performances.⁶

In *The Chronic Life* the blind figure is an almost archetypal character who includes a transformation of the spectator to become a participant in the narrative. All the characters in the performance are at one point or another blind, a damaging process that culminates in a collective blindness shortly before the important caesura, which acts as a turning point in the performance at the moment, when the violinist appears.

If we maintain focus on the major narrative track, a double perspective of blindness is sent through the performance. One perspective is about the boy's ongoing search. The second perspective refers to the director's comment to the heritage of the art of acting as a special quality of scenic being.

The actors' blindness in *The Chronic Life* is used to emphasize the importance of both a physical and an inner visualization of the very performative. Blindness remains a metaphor for a constant and unpredictable search in art. Here, the metaphor of blindness plays a central role in the way how the montage of the performance is manifesting itself. This is how we gain insight into a chapter of the artistic autobiography of Barba's memories of a life in Odin Teatret as a particular theatre

⁵ According to Norse Mythology the god Odin had only one eye. He is blind, so that he can achieve internal knowledge, sometimes indicated as "oedipism" in Odin's eye. In *Edda* it says that Odin sacrificed his eye to gain wisdom of ages and the knowledge of time.

⁶ Together with the Catalan actor, Toni Cots, Eugenio Barba made the solo performance *The Story of Oedipus* (1984-1990). In the ensemble performance *Mythos* (1998-2005), Oedipus appeared with protagonists from other ancient myths in order to arrange the ceremony, The Large Funeral of the Revolution, which in itself was transformed into a myth [see Andreasen 2000].

laboratory environment. In this way the performance uses the notion of blindness as a theatre professional device, which gives a perception of the experience of time as an active and non-static factor. There is a transformation, and the time that could be perceived as if circular is – speaking with Jacques Le Goff’s expression – «a renaissance time». The character is “reborn” as sighted [Le Goff 1992, 9].

By observing the director’s memory part on loss and by simultaneously keeping the spectators’ perspective in mind, one can recognize that the performance is also about heritage from the very roots of search. In this way Diana Taylor’s description of the archive becomes a layer of repertoire for a way to describe the performance’s use of time [Taylor 2003, 16 ff.]. We witness an archive, containing layers of research through a collective memory of the actor at Odin Teatret and a time-frame that socio-politically can be perceived as a kind of common background. These layers are expressed through a repertoire of fragments from various performances over the years. In this respect, I think we can grasp *The Chronic Life* as a production about recalling histories, bringing evidence, and insisting on its thematic and artistic heritage. It is as if the performance bears the obligation to tell, that searching in theatre not only requires a visual form, but paradoxically also a form of blindness.

4.4. *The director’s gaze*

I have often asked myself how a theatre director sees. How do the actors and the theatre space look in the eyes of a theatre director? But with *The Chronic Life* I have come to the conclusion that I need to reformulate my question because of the specific features. This necessity for reformulation has been encouraged by Jacques Derrida’s *Memoirs of the blind* [Derrida 1993]. My question has become a double hypothesis: theatre direction of the *blind* and *blindness* here is a direction of the blind. And thus follows, that I also investigate blindness in the theatre director’s intentional “elusive order” or dramaturgy. The question is therefore: how does the theatre director transform his blindness to an insight for spectators of the performance? This paradox of how to make the invisible visible has been one of the main tasks in Eugenio Barba’s craft as a theatre director. The paradox of the director is in this way interwoven with the dilemma of *The Chronic Life*.

My own gaze was caught by the “invisible tracks” of the performance in the very act of watching with “blind eyes”, as if the performance favoured Odin’s only available eye. When the spectator senses, that the visual side of the performance is not designed as a building’s architecture on the ground, but in a way making a “decreation” in a cave or an empty grave, the sensory level of perception will be brought in connection with more visible and formal features of the performance. It is as if the performance reveals its own metaphorical use of “ground zero”... This is one of the most continuous images of abyss in the *The Chronic Life*.

The impression of a “ground zero” here is hardly random. The aesthetic form of

the stage has acquired shape from the structural side of invisibility and blindness, in the characters, and partly from the meta-structure, embedded in the enunciation of the performance. The use of the empty space, embodied by the late father's coffin, has a direct connection to the theme of death in the performance. This survival strategy of the literally seductive blindness is a starting point for the major perception, which I go further in depth with.

The distance in time in many ways makes *The Chronic Life* a production of the contemporary visual performance art. The collapse in a world, exposed to political risks is also a narrative about life in a theatre. The loss and the missing father are classic themes in the history of theatre and *The Chronic Life* provides also the opportunity to be perceived as collective memory of a time, we are part of.

4.5. *The question of invisible laws*

At a certain time the Danish lawyer sings the famous lines from Leonard Cohen's universe: «Everybody knows, that the boat is leaking / Everybody knows that the captain lied». This song refers concretely to the stage space as an uncertain raft on a stormy sea, but at other moments in the production the song-statement also works metaphorically with reference to collapsed empires.

The character of the Danish lawyer has a number of lines in Danish, with which the poet Ursula Andkjær Olsen's words draws on a popular and grotesque interpretation of the phrase «With law should the country be built». This is the opening sentence from *Jydske Lov* (Codex Holmiensis – the oldest still existing Danish law text from the Medieval Ages [1241?]), a landscape law, that was delivered by the Swedish authorities back to Denmark in 2011 – the same year, when *The Chronic Life* had its opening. So touching upon this law text in the performance, and turning it into a grotesque satire, takes the production to comment to the canonic norm, which we, if I may say so, *blindly* connects with the construction of our civil society. The performance turns evidence of inherited society into a terrible farce, because the lawyer replaces the written law with a number of unwritten laws, especially from *Janteloven*. Sometimes it sounds as a satire on greedy national self perception: «Thank God, the crisis is over. Now begins the good life. The good life begins in a good home», «with “those whom we have no room for”, the country should be built», and many more.

It is difficult not to see the clownish irony of the lawyer's lines as a socio-political critique, but this critique might also aim towards the regulations of theatre life, as exemplified in Denmark.

5. *A theatre laboratory – what is it?*

The eminent position of the theatre laboratory in the history of theatre, starting from the beginning of the twentieth century, is indisputable. Few other research

topics in the theatre and in performance art have attracted discussions of documentation and of its application. I am here in particular referring to the notion of archives in relation to the theatre laboratory.⁷

While there may be tensions between the live nature of practice and a recording of the work, documentation can be seen as a box dynamic and interactive process between practice, its audience and more traditional written critiques. So from a research perspective, documentation concerns the articulation of practitioners' questions and processes of working [Kershaw and Nicholson 2011, 163].

The theatre laboratory is literally the living archive's perspective as a tool for vision and aesthetic strategies. But the theatre laboratory is also about identity and positions of historiography, here seen through the example of *The Chronic Life*, which performs a vision of its own practices, time and history.

The term "teaterlaboratorium" is literally a working notion (lat. labore), which does not emphasize the art as dimension as much as the artistic workflow in the group. A laboratory – *studija* as Stanislavsky called it – is historically within the theatre and performance art a concept that covers both the space and the investigating activity that takes place. The activity of *studija* has roots in the verb "to study". The term laboratory draws on the working dimension and will here be virtually synonymous with the studio. The theatre laboratory often constitutes a cluster of dedicated individuals, assembled with the aim to organize daily practice through a testing of techniques, primarily acting techniques, in order to be able to master various qualities of movements, actions and dynamic composition in space.

At the beginning, it was Stanislavsky's intention with the concept of *studija* to have a space, where to work out different techniques and to be protected from demonstrating skills as an aesthetic assent to an audience. It was sometimes a kind of inner exile inside the theatre.

5.1. *The characteristics of a theatre laboratory*

There are many similarities between the developments of various theatre laboratories, and apparently, some strong conscious process strategies exist. The artistic identity of the theatre laboratories has been identifiable with a certain sort of repeated patterns of events and actions, reflected in the rehearsal work and in the search for new ways to achieve results. So when we examine a line of theatre laboratory results, it leaves the impression that rehearsal processes were also borne by certain methods, methodological approaches, devising techniques, and by a conceptual strong vision. When a theatre laboratory for example had been in place for some years, we could see daily training practice, transformed into an integrated body

⁷ Please, see http://www.peripeti.dk/pdf/peripeti_2_2004.pdf.

language of the actors, whose expressions could be read in meaning-making patterns.

These signatures were often recognizable as circulations of body and voice movements in repeatable designs of movement. Over time we could even identify a theatre laboratory through the actors' creative recycling of patterns from their previous artistic results. This form of repetition one can rather describe as an inevitable formal style-side of the laboratory's activities. But it could also be seen as an approach that had been repeated over time, and become a method. This is part of the identity of a theatre laboratory that has had some years of existence.

Summing up, this means that both micro-identifications and macro-characteristics of the theatre laboratory leave the image of a community working culture within the concrete laboratory's own walls, or «a performer's village», as the Danish anthropologist Kirsten Hastrup has called it [Hastrup 1996]. The layers in this conceptual village give in my lens an important context for what I call for a living archive.

6. The Archive

The archive has not only become an instrument to acquire knowledge about the past, but also a tool for future purposes. This means that through this view of the past images are created of the identification symbols that one meets. The theme of identity is thus an important issue for the strategic part of working with archives. This becomes clear, when the very approaching creates identities in a perceptive process dependant on the ways how both the visible and the hidden is organized. The impact is a powerful and crucial concern about what is ultimately available for whom, when and how.

In contemporary culture, which is dominated by an overwhelming need to self definition of cultural identity, the archive has become a vital tool for ways how to come closer to the past. You can see the trend at many places: in families, organizations, companies, etc. This has at least two sides: the material side of the archive and the immaterial conceptual notion of archive. The two sides form a complexity as investigational instrument for those collaborators, who organize the archive but also for the research scholar in the archive. Knowledge and materiality are organized and reorganized on both sides.

The theatre laboratory concept summarizes in itself historical foundations, consisting of legacy roots in traditions of investigational processes. These processes are embedded in a living embodied knowledge as archive, being constantly transformed into a moment of future. So the whole problem also deals with the historiographical turn, strongly connected to new ways of how to deal with new aesthetic sides of archive materiality in theatre. The question of what theatre historiography can take account of is closely connected to the grasping of the performance archive as conscience of an artist.

In contemporary research tradition the notion of the archive often refers to Jacques Derrida's book *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression* [1996, fr. *Mal d'Archive: Une Impression Freudienne* 1995]. Here the dual nature of the notion of the archive as a starting point is identified as «location signifying state authority as embodied in text/word/document» [Derrida 1995, 10]. Today quite a few researchers are concerned about the differentiation of the notion of the archive in this context, so that it recognizes the difference between archive and what Diana Taylor calls repertoire [Taylor 2003]. For Taylor the historical priority of the textual archive has meant the archive of actions (repertoire) of embodied memory, oral history, experiences and tracks from performances that has achieved less importance than they might otherwise have had. The question remains, how we can discover new ways to look at the archive as something that gives access to the original, to history and to experience.

It seems likely that ideas from both Diana Taylor and Rebecca Schneider can embrace the archive from this relatively contemporary perspective [Schneider 2001, 2012]. Where Diana Taylor distinguishes between repertoire and archive spoken sources as opposed to the written hegemony in the archive, Rebecca Schneider introduces the scenario as the dramatic skeleton, we know from the Italian mask comedy tradition (in particular commedia dell'arte) in the 15th century. The archetypical and the performing body actions in, for example, the mask character of Pantalone, was focused on series of knots or turning points, which could be recalled as a vocal score or repertoire, added with a limited set of keywords for the actor's body memory in order to improvise over the narratively established idea. Many scenarios were later assembled as an archive consisting of the actor's physical actions.

The complexity of materials in an archive, especially like the archive of a theatre laboratory, contains a variety of forms in different media, such as visual and audio materials, live recordings, costumes, set designs, music instruments, etc. This complexity requires a broad conceptual approach not only from researchers, but in my opinion also from performance-practitioners in the theatre laboratory itself. This gives a possibility to practice a more complex artistic notion of the body presence of experienced practices on historical productions, i.e. as a living archive of experiences in this context.

This multi-conceptual approach therefore requires a broader perspective to decode images and artefacts in the archive, so that the creative strategy approach can be used in the archive work as a field of research.

In the theatre laboratory the actors' experience and tracks from performances form their own shape of traces in their body languages. Witnessing Odin Teatret for several years gives the unique opportunity to be able to recognize experiences and tracks from performances and collaborations as body signatures in performance

space. These embodied experiences and tracks have a significant influence on a particular repertoire of expressions.

The repertoire consists of a vocabulary of actions, *gesti*, movement, vocal scores, etc., which not only points to a theatrical and communicative complexity of forms, genres and styles, encountering the spectator during a performance. It is also a theatrical complexity in the actors' own communication with their own artistic past. The actors are in a dialogue with their individual archives. To the actor this communication is part of an artistic reflection of body memory. In this context the living archive in my view becomes relational and is reflexive by nature.

“Digging” into the living archive does not restrict itself to uncover its secrets on exercises and techniques, as it may also, but in this context, we can learn from the concepts, techniques and exercises, that we work with on an analytical level.

The repertoire includes certain basic scripts or narratives, which seem to follow the body memories. These stories are made up of a kind of master-myths and can be identified by certain theatrical patterns in the history of drama and theatre. I am in particular aiming at tragedies, such as *Antigone*, *Oedipus*, *Hamlet*, *Faust*, seductive narratives as *Don Giovanni*, the works of *Dostoevsky* and *Brecht*, legends from the Bible (for example *Judith*), and other religious myths. It is noticeable that the master-myths also refer to a context of cities and communities, i.e. the surrounding world of the theatre.

When it comes to very individual and personal corporeal issues and artistic tracks one must be careful not to accept that they will be copied as clichés to other various artistic and cultural contexts. It is a tremendous challenge today in a globalised society, consisting of all kinds of communication and forms of co-existence across many types of borders with YouTube and other Web platforms, which can be seen as archives of their own.

7. The Actor-researcher's meaning-making process

The content of the archive of a theatre laboratory, in particular the digitized archive, is not only bits and bytes, but calls on a researcher's meaning-making process. In the theatre laboratory's (more conventional) archival framework actors and directors are researchers in their own material, but by research in the living archive they will inevitably add a meaning-making process to the already stored experience. Some of the meaning-making processes become narrative patterns to the work, produced as artistic autobiographical basic stories of the very theatre group. I would term this accumulation of material as a continuous historical turn, which is transformed while still being live culture.

Many of the double narratives, that I have mentioned, are visible in the actors' work demonstrations, which have a particular status in relation to the living archive as a concept. A work demonstration in the context of Odin Teatret is a staged deconstruction of an actor's bodily procedural reflections on various issues in the actor's

profession. In the working demonstration it means that a staged dramaturgy meets methodological traces in a narrative about how an actor's body knowledge was extracted from the working conditions, which formed the background to the concrete practical work.

One would also be able to perceive a work demonstration as an accumulation of experiences about a specific actor's life in art. The work demonstrations often have the quality of directed artistic autobiographies of an open dramaturgy. In the case of the work demonstrations one can see the conceptual and the metaphorical level being reconciled to a recognizable poetological side of the archive, partly because the narrative borrows from dramaturgical-poetic fragments. While the work demonstration thus frames the more technical factors, it also communicates the day-to-day and very specific sides of the narrating actor's artistic experience.

When the narratives/mythologies are casted with methodological use of working concepts, the metaphorical understanding (and latent misunderstanding) can be seen as a meta-conceptual reality inside the archive. These metaphorical concepts can lead to completely new creative and independent ideas, but, nevertheless, they are rooted in the body, where they were "born", that is, where they turned alive in theatre.

Where the work demonstration performs a deconstruction of a living archive with an explicit purpose, the theatre performances show their knowledge and experience on a different level, where the archive is more implicitly present as living history of theatre. In *Odin Teatret I* I have noticed that this distinction also applies to many of the performances of this theatre group. In the work demonstration an actor, a musician, or a dancer narrates and embodies some thoughts, battles, and "crises" in their lives as performers. Perhaps, the notion of the performer is more comprehensive, since there is in this context fairly not a really clear limit between an actor/musician/dancer on stage. Significant thresholds of varied, individual and very personal kinds for a period of history will be exposed in the work demonstration as ways to obtain artistic balance with frames, constraints and challenges.

The track of a living archive from the theatre laboratory is thus not only visible in the work demonstrations. They are also present in a performance like *The Chronic Life*.

8. *The problems and politics of the archive*

«[...] there is no archive without politics of the archive, and indeed some would argue that all archives whether paper/building-based or virtual/digital are the "manufacturers of memory" [Harvey Brown and Davis Brown 1998, 22]. Thus the politics of an archive is embedded in the process and product of the re-/creation of memory» [Gale and Featherstone 2011, 24].

The notion of memory, as it is used by Gale and Featherstone, takes two roads. It goes back to the actor's memorizing of her part, but it also goes forward in the

sense that it builds memory for a future historical turn through an exploration of the archive.

The archive, living or digitized, often more preserves than it actually “explores” the creative potential of the technology. In the theatre laboratory as archive, however, we are witnessing a tradition, where the archive becomes living through the living research practice and will be creatively used with compositional and exploring strategies of the actor-researchers or traditional academia scholars.

This means, however, that in order to be able to be transferred to the reader/spectator/researcher, the living archive requires more than a simple description of its documentary side. A simple description would reduce the material to a certain descriptive representational form and allow the spatially related concepts to become only a background. A textualization like this is a problem for the central medium of the art of acting that the theatre laboratory is all about. In my view, it is obvious that the use of the space, which has its roots in the theatre throughout its history, is a concept that can be transferred to the living archive as a strategy in order to be able to come closer to paper, digitalization, staging work, props, and the very theatre building.

The use of space takes and provides contexts for revitalizing the tracks of knowledge and competences that are kept within the archive as environment. It is revitalization within a dramaturgical legitimate context. And it is tied to a notion of time, consisting of repeated actions.

For me this also means that there will be a need for a kind of space utilization in relation to how one presents an archive and how to leave it representing itself for future studies. The space as a notion to provide with theatrical and performative thinking is after all fairly expensive to build into a traditional archive. But the way how we treat the living archive through the time presentation of spatiality in the body-memory will without doubt include a strong concept of movement and creativity. This will have consequences for the way how we explore the historical turn. The very archive does not have a “brain”; it needs somebody to organize it. In other words, the most important thing concerning the archive is what you are doing about it. The active part of approaching the archive must be underpinned by some methods, talent and strategic use. Maggie Gale and Ann Featherstone explain the transformation from archive to research:

As researchers we re-archive the materials we find in our notes and thoughts. Of course the materials themselves go back to where they belong, back in a box on a shelf or we close the loss online. Metaphorically, however, we replace and reorder our archive materials inside a history; we disconnect them from one context and reconnect them with another or with other materials; we renegotiate their position in a hierarchy and, like the detective, we make our clues *mean* something [Gale and Featherstone 2011, 28-29].

At this point, I would like to agree with them by including also the theatre laboratory, where the actor/stage artists are engaged with creative research. They repose and re-order the archive into dramaturgical material, which in the end will again be reorganized by a director. The use of archival materials will be negotiated at various levels and will achieve new significance in the new spatial composition of body in tempo and rhythm.

I will not here go into the details of questions about index, catalogue and random processes; however, I am aware that these problems can influence on the field of the researcher, who works with the archive as a tool.

In my opinion, we should also in our dealings with the historical turn embrace the serendipitous quality of the found materials and open for the ability to let this suggest or direct research.⁸ Or like Gale and Featherstone have expressed it: «there is an argument for a *creative* archival process, that sense of openness to what the material suggests and where it might lead» [Gale and Featherstone 2011, 37]. This awareness is bound together with the relationship to the historical dimension of an actor's work flow.

For some time we have seen in performance studies, that an increasing amount of interest is turned toward the professional anti-aesthetisizing self-portrait as genre with special focus on the stage artist's body as a living archive. Today, the laboratory and the historical turn as concepts have become trendy, in all possible areas where the so-called creative class has started some activities. This is not to say that all the necessary elements are met, but it means that the search for identity in experiences from those, we are on the shoulders of, it is still possible to get as a live transformation.

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⁸ In the case of Odin Teatret is the serendipitous quality present in the artistic research, as it was discussed at the conference *Serendipity*, organized by Centre for Theatre Laboratory Studies at Aarhus University, 2005.

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