

Darkness – The enemy inside, a collective writing endeavour

Language constitutes the text. The text is a laboratory. In it, we can do what we want. Change the rules and change the perspective. As long as the universe holds. As long as the game is sound. As long as the reader or the audience wants to *play*.

TO WRITE TOGETHER

In today's reality, writing together has become just one of many ways to write a play. Writers pair up. Theatres involves teams in the development of new plays, theatre groups write together using devising techniques or other tools, etc.

The collaborations can come about for various reasons, also artistic – and include playwrights, actors, dramaturgs, directors, researchers and so on.

Paul C. Castagno writes in his book New Playwriting Strategies, language and media in the 21st century (Castagno, Paul C., *New Playwriting Strategies*, New York, Routledge 2012): *The rigid paradigm of the playwright as the sole creative source has become less the mantra ...*

Together with this trend comes a merging of traditional and new poetics, and with that a re-theatralization of the play. This produces, states Castagno, the most prevalent form of plays today – the hybrid.

The development of the play *Darkness – the Enemy Inside* was a collaboration between five different playwrights and the goal was to produce a hybrid play (See: *Darkness the Enemy Inside*).

The project was a part of the main project EU Collective Plays! Called *the collective plays!* aiming at promoting the creation of plays which are the result of a collaboration between playwrights of different nationalities (See: <https://khio.no/forskning/kunstnerisk-utviklingsarbeid-og-forskning/eu-collective-plays> and <http://www.eucollectiveplays.eu>). The playwrights meet and cooperate to create a narrative structure, which is organic but at the same time incorporates different perspectives, styles, languages and idioms.

Oslo National Academy of the Arts was one of seven partners in this project, with Gianluca Iumiento as the one holding it.

In 2015, Iumiento invited me, as a playwright, dramaturge and PhD fellow in playwriting, into the project as a dramaturge and head writer. My project PhD-project, *from 1:100 – the performative hybrid text as a feedbackloop*, offered many overlapping focus points with the EU project, and as I took on the job, I had already a wide experience from other collective writing endeavours.

Together, and with the assistance of Gian Maria Cervo, we put together a team consisting of five interesting writers from different northern European countries: Sigbjørn Skåden from Sapmi and Norway, Kristín Eiríksdóttir from Iceland, Albert Ostermaier from Germany, as well as Iumiento and myself.

The project was directly inspired by new playwriting strategies, as unveiled by Paul C. Castagno in his book. The task was to produce a final play that never tries to homologate the different styles, but, on the contrary, tries to highlight their contrasts by creating a collective narrative structure, which resembles a cubist painting.

READINGS AND CONTEXT

In the proximity of this collective writing project, the theatre department at Oslo National Academy of the Arts established a research group consisting of head of acting Iumiento, of pedagogue and writer Øystein Stene, of professor in playwriting Jesper Halle, and of myself. This research-group came together developing and discussing their own writing projects, reading relevant literature, and also followed the project as it developed. They read various drafts, adding valuable comments and reflections as it progressed. The master students in theatre were also introduced to the work, and through this gained insight into the project and the ideas and techniques it explores.

On the 16th of June 2017, there was a reading of 30 pages of material at the conference for Translation into theatre and the Social Sciences in Oxford. The reading was the performative part of Professor Paul C. Castagno's presentation at the conference, and it was specially assembled by Paul C. Castagno and I.

Preparing a text for this reading was the first step towards piecing together a performative text from the various material. I called it *Darkness – a bric-a-brac version*, trying to take care of the differences in the material, not the overlapping qualities of the writing. The reading showed that there was obvious potential in the material (see the full text [here](#)).



Through the three years period of development, the Academy has also done different readings and staged readings of the play. These readings have been directed by Iumiento. In the second reading of the play in November 2017, we invited five experienced actors to do a stripped down, staged reading of the material almost in its full length. The research group, former and current master students in playwriting, and colleagues at the Academy constituted the audience. Again, the material showed promise, and a new version was developed for a staged reading at Oslo International Acting Festival in June 2018. Iumiento directed the reading that also introduced video and live filming as a part of the artistic components.

In October of 2018, the third-year students in BA in acting at the Academy performed parts of the text in a shorter performance version of the play, under the title [*the Island*](#).



The performance was directed by Belgian director Jacob Schokking. Video was also used in this version, and Jan Tariq Rui-Rahman composed music for the play.



In November 2019, Paul C. Castagno is going to direct a full length, two-act version of the material at North-Carolina University (see:

<https://uncw.edu/events/2019/11/enemy.html> and

<https://theseahawk.org/24623/lifestyles/words-cant-capture-the-essence-of-uncws-darkness/>).

Today, the material consists of scenes, stage directions, monologues and dialogues. The different components function as a set of building blocks that can be combined in different sequels. As the head writer, I composed a whole from these building blocks.

As Paul C. Castagno writes in his book New Playwriting Strategies: *In the polyvocal play, structure is a product of the relational patterns between the building blocks while style is determined by the nature of sequence and transitions. The process of determining the best pattern is a major component in the revision* (Routledge 2012). This has also been the case in the revision of the various versions of this collective endeavour.

A HYBRID - PLAY

The task the five writers were given was to write a *hybrid play*.

According to Paul C. Castagno and his new playwriting techniques – *a hybrid play is a play of hybridization*.

Hybridization is the mixing or clashing of different genres, cultural or historical period styles, and techniques. For example, the farcical mixes with the serious, the high-toned with the vulgar, the sophisticated literary with traditional folk-tales; Eastern performance traditions exist side by side with Western approaches (Routledge 2012).

The writers did not know each other and had no obvious overlapping interests, so the goal was to find a framework for them to write within that would create connection points for the writers, but that wouldn't unify their writing in a plot or an overall aesthetics. We wanted to avoid developing a particular language or one consistent way of seeing the world, and we were striving for a form that offered itself to polyvocality.

Talking together, discussing theme, form, and characters – but writing separately – became the main method applied.

THE PLAY

Inspired by the new playwriting strategies, as unveiled by Paul C. Castagno, I, as the head writer, introduced landscape as a potential *dancing partner* early on in the project. Maybe geography could be the structuring force of the play. It could be a frame to place events, scenes and characters within, and that would give space to different narrative strategies and a potential for polyvocality into the writings. As the work progressed, the setting and the dramaturgy of the landscape where the events took place became formative for the process and the form of the play.

Darkness – the Enemy Inside, or *the Island*, as the shorter version of the play is called – is set on a peninsula somewhere in near future Scandinavia. Modelled on the idyllic suburbia of Nesodden, outside the capital of Norway.

Every day the ferry takes the people living here, back and forth to the city.

The backdrop of this suburbia is a wooded mainland with rivers, ponds, hills and forests.

Living in this suburbia setting is *Julian*, a successful performance artist in an existential crisis, his wife *Kate*, a levelheaded architect, and their children. We also meet their neurotic neighbour *Lina*, and her newfound friend *Emil*, whom awakes a passion in her for target shooting.

In the wooded hinterland, *two hunters* are hunting, revisiting the landscape of their childhood. And as the suburban life plays out as normal, taking out the trash, arguing, doing art, doing nothing – the children go missing. Taking on the figures of animals – a squirrel, a crocodile, a badger and a fox – they leave suburbia. Disappear into the woods and deep into the mainland where the hunters are hunting for their prey. And as this happens, the world cracks open and the peninsula literally starts shaking itself loose from the mainland, leaving an island adrift.

Bye bye mainland. Bye bye hunters. Bye bye children ...

Photo from the performance of *the Island* underneath.



Darkness – the Enemy Inside explores how living in an egalitarian and harmonious society can bring forth an inner darkness, what Gianluca Iumiento calls *the enemy inside*. While catered for by the state, depression, angst, even the thought of suicide floats to the surface. It is as if being protected from outer danger and stress produces a narcissistic angst in the people. This was the premise that was given as we started the project, but as the work progressed, another perspective surfaced. Maybe this angst is not at all narcissistic and irrational. Maybe the harmonious state of things might just be thin glaze covering up a deeper crisis. A real and existing threat. A feeling of that all that has been won, could unravel. That the angst and depression the characters experience are not signs of narcissism, but the results of a real and reasonable fear, a growing knowledge of the fact that the society, as we know it, might not survive the resent global developments, and that the natural forces no longer are under our control. We might be facing a hard and unknown future, and in these ongoing ecological and economic crises, even the Scandinavian model of the welfare state might fall.

These two ways of perceiving, the connection between personal angst and the nature of the society we are living in, are both present in the play. The dramaturgy does not try to unify or harmonise these two perspectives, but have them co-exist, scene for scene and inside the play as a whole. In this way the play portraits both a sense of inner, narcissistic angst stemming from lack of outer tension – AND a real sense of foreboding and fear. It is the tension between these two perspectives that produces both humour and horror.

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T H E T E A M

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The idea was to gather a team of skilled Northern European writers, and we were interested in writers from regions that had experienced some kind of polyvocal state, or that had lived through an economical crisis. That's why we especially wanted to have a Sami writer in the mix – and a writer from Iceland.

Sigbjørn Skåden is a prize winning Norwegian and Sami author. His Norwegian breakthrough was with the novel *Våke over den som sover* (my English translation: *Watch over the one that sleeps*), an intense piece of writing about suppressed sexuality, self-loathing and self-preservation in the Sami community.

The novel follows a young artists exploration into his sexuality and art – and into the history of his family and the Sami people as the main character researches a case of sexual abuse in a large town in Finnmark for an art project. It explores the borders between the private and public, and between art, crime, tenderness and betrayal in a community where language has been politicized. Where people praxis and choice of Norwegian or Sami languages never can be truly neutral.

Skåden has also worked with several performative projects, like the play *Vidas Extremas* and the project *Golden Aja Casino and Motel*. The last was our first collaboration together. A collaboration undertaken in collaboration with the visual artist Joar Nango in 2015.

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Kristín Eiríksdóttir's playwriting is as dark as it is funny. She is an author and a playwright with a B.A. in Fine Arts from the Icelandic Academy of the Arts. She has written novels, poetry, and a short story collection, and her last novel was published in Iceland the autumn of 2017.

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Her plays are deeply theatrical, as Eiríksdóttir lets her characters continuously evolve and transform. Her writing turns society inside out and often pushes the subtext to the forefront without ever being ironic. There is a baroqueness in her playwriting style that immediately lends itself to the hybrid form.

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Gianluca Iumiento was the one holding the project as the writers came together. He has also been responsible for the readings and the staged readings of the play during the project.

Iumiento is a director, actor and pedagogue. He graduated from the Italian national film school, Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia in Rome, and was for a long period teaching at Oslo National Academy of the Arts, the Theatre Department.

Since 2000, Iumiento has worked as both an actor and a director in several ensemble theaters, festivals, film and TV, while concurrently creating and then curating two acting festivals: the Metodi Festival in Italy and the Oslo International Acting Festival in Norway.

For me, it was important to have the director as a part of the team. So that he himself could follow our discussions, our goals and our challenges as the work progressed.

I myself, Tale Næss (Norway), has functioned as the dramaturge and the head writer for the project. I have also coordinated the artistic process. As a playwright, dramaturge and author I write novels, poetry, librettos, radio plays and make dramatic installations. I hold a Master-degree in film-science and I have been working across the field nationally and internationally for the last 20 years. Often in interdisciplinary constellations.

In my PhD in playwriting, I especially investigate collective writing processes and the different composition tools and techniques involved in creating a performative hybrid text.

Together we started these two and a half years collective writing-endeavor the spring 2016.

THE PROCESS

During the writing process, the writers has continuously read and commented each other's work. Choosing a landscape or a geography rather than a plot as a guideline for the events in the play, we have worked individually, producing characters, settings and scenes to explore the theme and the inner and external landscapes we ourselves wanted to portray, and that we created together.

Eiríksdóttir added the characters Lina and Emil to the mix, Skåden the hunters. Iumiento worked on texts involving the dilemmas of Kate and Julian, and I myself introduced the runaway children. After having established these characters and their place in the geography, we both together and individually started to cross-feed and further elaborate on our characters, events and settings.

The team has also met five times, in Oslo and Reykjavik. Here we have been discussing the theme and the texts between ourselves. Notations from these conversations have been included as dialogue into the play itself by me as the head writer, constituting both a deepening perspective of the underlying theme and adding a meta element to the text.

The writers has also been given tasks between the different meetings. Sometimes these tasks led directly to fruitful text production, other times the writers themselves derailed from the tasks, inspired by current affairs or by other writing projects, that took the writing process in new directions.

During the process, an overrunning composition was slowly carved out for the piece – and at the end of the process, final sequences and scenes were added. A vital contribution to the process and the play was when the performative stage directions in this piece started to evolve. As soon as they evolved, I recognised a potential for an extra layer of text, and when elaborated on they soon developed a “will of their own”. As such the stage direction begun to take on the role of a performative element inside the play itself. These texts took shape through contributions from the writers but was given its final form by me as the head writer at the end of the project. This commenting text, both epic and gestic in its character – now played its own role inside the play, introduced a new layer of *language* to the whole. A language situated outside of the language of the characters at play. It was even able to address them and direct them, to address the audience and to change and influence the course of events. This was made possible by what Paul C. Castagno calls language-based playwriting techniques. Utilizing these techniques, it is about the journey of the language as much as the voyage of the character, and it rests on the fact that the play in itself is a system of language. Castagno states: It is not about mirroring or representing the visible world; rather the playwright of today establishes a parallel theatrical world. A world with its own ontology and conventions – and this inimitable world enters into a dialogical relationship with the *real* world. This leaves the playwright free to pursue the theatricality of the play, a component that realism tends to downplay (Routledge 2012).

Through the added layer of these performative stage directions, the polyvocality in *Darkness – the Enemy Inside* was not only there in its scenes and situations, but it manifested itself at the structuring chore of the play itself.

CHALLENGES

The writing process was a culminating and fast running process where one text continuously added to the other, but it was not effortless. Writing together is never just easy. There were many challenges on the way.

In this quote is from Castagno's article Collective Playwriting: A European Experience in the Magazine Theatre Times, I try to outline both the task and those challenges:

We want to show – or lay open the hybrid forms, the different ways of using language – maybe even different languages in the composition itself. I ask myself: How can this play come together while the differences continue to be present and vibrant. There is a force in the composition. I am looking for tensions and shifts, for the baroque and the theatrical. It is a challenge to think of this as real experimentation. To make something that can only happen with us, with this theme – at this particular time and space – in this historical momentum with this project, – and not think about: will the theatres like it, who would possibly want to play the roles, etc. I think we have a real chance to produce what you call a hybrid play. And a real chance to make this something from which we can learn.

<https://www.theatretimes.com/collective-playwriting-european-experience/>

Half way into the process, there was a body of text and a need for structure occurred.

This was also when Ostermaier entered the group. As a strong and experienced writer, it was a privilege that he was able to join the team, and during an intense and interesting three days in Oslo, we discussed the various possibilities for a final structuring of the play.

I myself wanted to continue working by creating buildingblocks of scenes and sequences connected by a geography, but there was also other options. Choosing a main character was one, and then using the dilemmas of this character as the engine for the play.

Ostermaier was interested in the character Julian.

Could Julian's art-production be a starting point?

Maybe the whole play could, on a meta-level, be one of his artworks?

Or maybe we, the audience, could be inside or a part of this artwork?

Or maybe the whole play could constitute a discussion of the various consequences such artworks as Julian makes, produces?

The thought was intriguing, but also worrying. The character Julian is a conceptual performance artist. With that comes strong aesthetics, and with those kind of aesthetics come a way of seeing art-production in society, and with that again a view on what role artistic production and audience involvement plays in the arts.

Would we manage to choose this path and still produce a polyvocal play? Was it possible to stay close to Julian, and at the same time include our different languages, writing styles, ethics, characters and scenes around the Julian characters artworks, or would he, or they, start to dominate, and influence the way every other perspective that was introduced into the mix played out?

The discussions were heated, complicated – even hostile at times, but also fun. Some of the members of the team fell silent, and at the end of this three-day period all was up in the air – what would the outcome be?

Other consequences of this idea that was discussed: Did we want to choose a white male as the main character? Was it in our interest to have a main character at all? If we were looking for a multitude of languages, voices and perspectives – introducing a strong main character could also introduce a kind of hierarchy in the text, were all the different voices was seen through or experienced by, and thereby already unified in one interpretation by the leading male of the play.

WRITING THE POLYVOCAL

For me as head writer, keeping the polyvocal quality of our work was of the essence.

Castagno writes: *Polyvocality resists the notion of a single or dominant point of view in a narrative, thereby supplanting the single or privileged authorial voice* (Routledge 2012). He also writes: *Multiple language strategies coexist in the play. Characters and narratives within the script may contain diverse interests or objectives, expressed in different speech forms*. It was especially this pull away from the *single or privileged authorial voice* that I was after.

I also wanted to keep a multitude of perspectives and different types of material flowing through the text, from dialogues, songs, found material, virtuoso monologues, jokes and games.

When each of the members of the team returned to their lives, and new material started to float in from the writers, I soon discovered that it was all as versatile and as rebellious as before.

Ostermaier produced a virtuous monologue for Julian, a powerful piece of writing. And all though this monstrous and deeply beautiful text could have been a tipping point forcing the rest of the text to the periphery, as the work found its form, it found its place. To not work around this text, but to push through, accepting also the place of this language and this voice in the play has been demanding, but interesting. And today I think that in sum it adds both beauty and tension to the play (see the whole text [here](#)).

Through these discussions some new territory was gained, as we resumed to develop the play inside the structure of its geography with a deeper knowledge, both of what we were doing and what was at stake. And about the things and perspectives we agreed on, and where we disagreed. My main concern all through the process was how could we produce a strong hybrid play, a play where social perspectives and social views could clash and coexist within the same text.

The job of strengthening the female characters continued all through the process.

A DELIBERATION – THE SPATIAL TURN

We all inhabit the same space. This earth is where we sleep, eat, live and die – and although some very few prepare for a space-shuttle travel to Mars, the rest of us has to stay here, no matter what comes our way.

We live in Anthropocene times. This home of ours is shaped by human actions. Soon, not a corner of this planet remains untouched by man. Silent as it is, the world still has its voice. Its winds and droughts and earthquakes and floods.

Some say the earth has become heavy by our hands, but still it reacts at its own will, not really paying attention to whether it suits us or not.

In their book *Land/Scape/Theatre*, Elinor Fuchs and Una Chaudhuri writes about what they call the spatial turn in theatre. Theatre has been associated with culture, not nature, they state. By art entering the will of the landscape they state, one can offer a fresh framework for thinking on modern theatre.

As the theatre of the last century has challenged the Aristotelian hierarchy, it has been undermined by a flux of dramatic structures and a gallery of fractured subjectivities. A pervasive new spatiality, of which scenography is only the most obvious site, has turned the Aristotelian hierarchy on its head, now spectacle may be the *soul* of the dramatic enterprise (Elinor Fuchs and Una Chaudhuri, *Land/Scape/Theatre*, Ann Arbor, The University of Michigan Press 2002). This has been especially experienced through theatre makers like Robert Wilson, but it can also be seen in text. From Gertrude Stein's *Steinscape*, and Beckett's *Endgame*, central modernist writings for the stage, have taken steps towards giving dramatic form to the natural and built environment of the non-human order.

Although landscape has always played a part in classic theatre, King Lear's storm-lashed heath, Segismundo's desolate cave, something changed with modernism. Theatre began to manifest a new spatial dimension. For the first time, landscape held itself apart from the character and became a character of its own.

One can ask what Fuchs and Chaudhuri means by this, as they take on deliberating on landscape in the case of American drama, looking at writers like Arthur Miller, Sam Shepard and David Hancock as well as examples of sonic landscape and the idea of the de-colonization of the gaze that goes on among feminist and post-colonial writers of today. But one can feel the turn, not only in the work they relate to, but in the thoughts of young artists today.

When we started our collective work, Sigbjørn Skåden early stated that what he was interested in, was landscape as drama. He was interested in the language of landscape and its place in our lives. He was also interested in portraying the effect that loss of landscape has on us, and how it leads to loss of language. How it develops blank spaces in our minds. There is an ecological awareness in these thoughts, and a knowledge about what industrialisation and human colonization of nature has meant to all of us, but especially to people living with and close to nature. Like the Sami people, or the traditional fishing and farming communities of pre-industrial Norway.

As cultures moves away from their heritage and their way of life, landscape and language are forgotten. This constitutes a drama. And letting this drama play out, like Skåden does in his scenes with the hunters in *Darkness – the Enemy Inside* shows how space, self-understanding, knowledge and language are deeply interlinked.



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THE PROCESS

During the writing process, the writers has continuously read and commented each other's work. Choosing a landscape or a geography rather than a plot as a guideline for the events in the play, we have worked individually, producing characters, settings and scenes to explore the theme and the inner and external landscapes we ourselves wanted to portray, and that we created together.

Eiríksdóttir added the characters Lina and Emil to the mix, Skåden the hunters. Iumiento worked on texts involving the dilemmas of Kate and Julian, and I myself introduced the runaway children. After having established these characters and their place in the geography, we both together and individually started to cross-feed and further elaborate on our characters, events and settings.

The team has also met five times, in Oslo and Reykjavik. Here we have been discussing the theme and the texts between ourselves. Notations from these conversations have been included as dialogue into the play itself by me as the head writer, constituting both a deepening perspective of the underlying theme and adding a meta element to the text.

The writers has also been given tasks between the different meetings. Sometimes these tasks led directly to fruitful text production, other times the writers themselves derailed from the tasks, inspired by current affairs or by other writing projects, that took the writing process in new directions.

During the process, an overrunning composition was slowly carved out for the piece – and at the end of the process, final sequences and scenes were added. A vital contribution to the process and the play was when the performative stage directions in this piece started to evolve. As soon as they evolved, I recognised a potential for an extra layer of text, and when elaborated on they soon developed a “will of their own”. As such the stage direction begun to take on the role of a performative element inside the play itself. These texts took shape through contributions from the writers but was given its final form by me as the head writer at the end of the project. This commenting text, both epic and gestic in its character – now played its own role inside the play, introduced a new layer of *language* to the whole. A language situated outside of the language of the characters at play. It was even able to address them and direct them, to address the audience and to change and influence the course of events. This was made possible by what Paul C. Castagno calls language-based playwriting techniques. Utilizing these techniques, it is about the journey of the language as much as the voyage of the character, and it rests on the fact that the play in itself is a system of language. Castagno states: It is not about mirroring or representing the visible world; rather the playwright of today establishes a parallel theatrical world. A world with its own ontology and conventions – and this inimitable world enters into a dialogical relationship with the *real* world. This leaves the playwright free to pursue the theatricality of the play, a component that realism tends to downplay (Routledge 2012).

Through the added layer of these performative stage directions, the polyvocality in *Darkness – the Enemy Inside* was not only there in its scenes and situations, but it manifested itself at the structuring chore of the play itself.

C H A L L E N G E S

The writing process was a culminating and fast running process where one text continuously added to the other, but it was not effortless. Writing together is never just easy. There were many challenges on the way.

In this quote is from Castagno's article Collective Playwriting: A European Experience in the Magazine Theatre Times, I try to outline both the task and those challenges:

We want to show – or lay open the hybrid forms, the different ways of using language – maybe even different languages in the composition itself. I ask myself: How can this play come together while the differences continue to be present and vibrant. There is a force in the composition. I am looking for tensions and shifts, for the baroque and the theatrical. It is a challenge to think of this as real experimentation. To make something that can only happen with us, with this theme – at this particular time and space – in this historical momentum with this project, – and not think about: will the theatres like it, who would possibly want to play the roles, etc. I think we have a real chance to produce what you call a hybrid play. And a real chance to make this something from which we can learn.

<https://theatretimes.com/collective-playwriting-european-experience/>

Half way into the process, there was a body of text and a need for structure occurred.

This was also when Ostermaier entered the group. As a strong and experienced writer, it was a privilege that he was able to join the team, and during an intense and interesting three days in Oslo, we discussed the various possibilities for a final structuring of the play.

I myself wanted to continue working by creating buildingblocks of scenes and sequences connected by a geography, but there was also other options. Choosing a main character was one, and then using the dilemmas of this character as the engine for the play.

Ostermaier was interested in the character Julian.

Could Julian's art-production be a starting point?

Maybe the whole play could, on a meta-level, be one of his artworks?

Or maybe we, the audience, could be inside or a part of this artwork?

Or maybe the whole play could constitute a discussion of the various consequences such artworks as Julian makes, produces?

The thought was intriguing, but also worrying. The character Julian is a conceptual performance artist. With that comes strong aesthetics, and with those kind of aesthetics come a way of seeing art-production in society, and with that again a view on what role artistic production and audience involvement plays in the arts.

Would we manage to choose this path and still produce a polyvocal play? Was it possible to stay close to Julian, and at the same time include our different languages, writing styles, ethics, characters and scenes around the Julian characters artworks, or would he, or they, start to dominate, and influence the way every other perspective that was introduced into the mix played out?

The discussions were heated, complicated – even hostile at times, but also fun. Some of the members of the team fell silent, and at the end of this three-day period all was up in the air – what would the outcome be?

Other consequences of this idea that was discussed: Did we want to choose a white male as the main character? Was it in our interest to have a main character at all? If we were looking for a multitude of languages, voices and perspectives – introducing a strong main character could also introduce a kind of hierarchy in the text, were all the different voices was seen through or experienced by, and thereby already unified in one interpretation by the leading male of the play.

W R I T I N G T H E P O L Y V O C A L

For me as head writer, keeping the polyvocal quality of our work was of the essence.

Castagno writes: *Polyvocality resists the notion of a single or dominant point of view in a narrative, thereby supplanting the single or privileged authorial voice* (Routledge 2012). He also writes: *Multiple language strategies coexist in the play. Characters and narratives within the script may contain diverse interests or objectives, expressed in different speech forms.* It was especially this pull away from *the single or privileged authorial voice* that I was after.

I also wanted to keep a multitude of perspectives and different types of material flowing through the text, from dialogues, songs, found material, virtuoso monologues, jokes and games.

When each of the members of the team returned to their lives, and new material started to float in from the writers, I soon discovered that it was all as versatile and as rebellious as

before.

Ostermaier produced a virtuous monologue for Julian, a powerful piece of writing. And all though this monstrous and deeply beautiful text could have been a tipping point forcing the rest of the text to the periphery, as the work found its form, it found its place. To not work around this text, but to push through, accepting also the place of this language and this voice in the play has been demanding, but interesting. And today I think that in sum it adds both beauty and tension to the play (see the whole text [here](#)).

Through these discussions some new territory was gained, as we resumed to develop the play inside the structure of its geography with a deeper knowledge, both of what we were doing and what was at stake. And about the things and perspectives we agreed on, and where we disagreed. My main concern all through the process was how could we produce a strong hybrid play, a play where social perspectives and social views could clash and coexist within the same text.

The job of strengthening the female characters continued all through the process.

A DELIBERATION – THE SPATIAL TURN

We all inhabit the same space. This earth is where we sleep, eat, live and die – and although some very few prepare for a space-shuttle travel to Mars, the rest of us has to stay here, no matter what comes our way.

We live in Anthropocene times. This home of ours is shaped by human actions. Soon, not a corner of this planet remains untouched by man. Silent as it is, the world still has its voice. Its winds and droughts and earthquakes and floods.

Some say the earth has become heavy by our hands, but still it reacts at its own will, not really paying attention to whether it suits us or not.

In their book *Land/Scape/Theatre*, Elinor Fuchs and Una Chaudhuri writes about what they call the spatial turn in theatre. Theatre has been associated with culture, not nature, they state. By art entering the will of the landscape they state, one can offer a fresh framework for thinking on modern theatre.

As the theatre of the last century has challenged the Aristotelian hierarchy, it has been undermined by a flux of dramatic structures and a gallery of fractured subjectivities. A pervasive new spatiality, of which scenography is only the most obvious site, has turned the Aristotelian hierarchy on its head, now spectacle may be the *soul* of the dramatic enterprise (Elinor Fuchs and Una Chaudhuri, *Land/Scape/Theatre*, Ann Arbor, The University of Michigan Press 2002). This has been especially experienced through theatre makers like Robert Wilson, but it can also be seen in text. From Gertrude Stein's *SteinsCapes*, and Beckett's *Endgame*, central modernist writings for the stage, have taken steps towards giving dramatic form to the natural and built environment of the non-human order.

Although landscape has always played a part in classic theatre, King Lear's storm-lashed heath, Segismundo's desolate cave, something changed with modernism. Theatre begun to manifest a new spatial dimension. For the first time, landscape held itself apart from the character and became a character of its own.

One can ask what Fuchs and Chaudhuri means by this, as they take on deliberating on landscape in the case of American drama, looking at writers like Arthur Miller, Sam Shepard and David Hancock as well as examples of sonic landscape and the idea of the de-colonization of the gaze that goes on among feminist and post-colonial writers of today. But one can feel the turn, not only in the work they relate to, but in the thoughts of young artists today.

When we started our collective work, Sigbjørn Skåden early stated that what he was interested in, was landscape as drama. He was interested in the language of landscape and its place in our lives. He was also interested in portraying the effect that loss of landscape has on us, and how it leads to loss of language. How it develops blank spaces in our minds. There is an ecological awareness in these thoughts, and a knowledge about what industrialisation and human colonization of nature has meant to all of us, but especially to people living with and close to nature. Like the Sami people, or the traditional fishing and farming communities of pre-industrial Norway.

As cultures moves away from their heritage and their way of life, landscape and language are forgotten. This constitutes a drama. And letting this drama play out, like Skåden does in his scenes with the hunters in Darkness – the Enemy Inside shows how space, self-understanding, knowledge and language are deeply interlinked.



THE NAME OF THE GAME

The Squirrels looks at the Badger who looks at the Crocodile

*The Squirrel:
The ground's shaking!*

*The Crocodile:
My belly is shaking!*

*The Squirrel:
My tail is shaking!*

*The Crocodile:
I don't like this anymore*

*Emil:
We better call somebody*

*Lina:
Who do we call?*

*And as rocks starts rolling down the steep
and as the rumbling grows higher
and as the river starts to spill its water onto the marshes
and the lake rips open like a ripe fruit
pouring its sweet water into the ocean as the hunters picks up their guns in that dark interior
far away from danger
as the rivers ripple –
as the Badger clings to the Crocodile
as the Squirrel clings to the Badger
and the Crocodile keeps slamming its tail in the mud shouting to see if her voice is bigger
than the rumble
– the peninsula starts tearing itself away from the mainland as if it had a will of its own*

(Darkness, the Enemy Inside, June 2018)



Language constitutes the text.

The text is a laboratory. In it, we do what we want. We change rules and we change perspective. In it, we can tear the world wide open. As long as the universe holds. As long as the game is sound. As long as the audience wants to “play”.

Language playwrights have been particularly effective in creating shifting scenes, usually in the form of landscape altered and formulated by language. The seemingly desultory relationship between scenes is mitigated because the language provides a structural linkage, Paul C. Castagno states (Routledge 2012).

Believing in this mitigation, in language being able to provide a structural linkage between the parts, *Darkness – the Enemy Inside* places itself in the school of language-based plays. Using psychology, plot points, poetic passages, commentary and readymades as bits and pieces, it combines; language and a common geography ties the elements together. The play constitutes an interactive system in which each element is in dialogue or dialogize with the other elements.

By language becoming the arbiter of character and mis-en-scene, a potential for dialogical processes and polyvocal texts arises, Castagno states. In this play, we have tried to create our own unique theatrical world. A world that contains contradictions, different voices or discourses, and thus can function as a place for clashes of perspectives and point of views.

In the hybrid form, the playwright is flexible to juxtapose, deconstruct, or reassemble space and time, and open for clashes and tensions inside the play itself: When language alters space and time, established moorings are loosened, as conventions are interrupted or replaced (Routledge 2012).

Darkness – the Enemy Inside is a playful text. It is a dark text. And it is still, in all its form, a bric-a-brac. Or maybe even an assemblage, as an equivalent to the hybrid. Seen in this perspective, collective playwriting can be experienced as a kind of machine assemblage, where the whole process functions as a generic feedbackloop – a text-producing *machine* both generating and transforming material in a constant polyvocal, dialogical process, moving in several directions at the same time.

Every time I look at this material, it continues to amaze me and entertain me. It is as obvious as it escapes me. This is the magic of play-making. For in the play, everything still goes on: The hunters are still hunting while Lina enjoys her guns. And the children, who knows where they are? Deep in the woods, at a filling station, ordering a pizza? Already grown-ups maybe – or skinny-dipping in an icy creek. Happy as ants, as a squirrel, as a baby bear finishing a mouthful of honey.

Darkness – the Enemy Inside is a part of the larger project EU Collective Plays!
<http://www.eucollectiveplays.eu/>

You can read more about the Norwegian/KHiO contribution to the project here:
<http://www.khio.no/artistic-research/kunstnerisk-utviklingsarbeid-og-forskning/eu-collective-plays>

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