A production platform by Theater Rampe and Künstlerhaus Stuttgart

November 2016 – January 2018

téchne techne techne techne

Preface

Effort is central to how anthropologist and filmmaker Elizabeth A. Povinelli describes 'téchne'. The effort to make and to do, the effort which has not yet become mastery.

Techne is an ongoing effort, and a commitment to that which cannot be controlled. It is a production platform dedicated to unfolding and continuous working processes and collaborations – as a form of knowledge that articulates itself in making. 'Téchne' is the efforts of artistic making, and the productive force to carry on.

This is a book of four conversations reflecting on works that are not yet finished. *Nature Theatre of Oblivia* situates itself in a Finnish forest in search of the uncanny. The *Theatre of the Long Now* explores the performative and political potential of a contested wasteland near Stuttgart's 'Wagenhalle'. *Transpersonal* engages with communities and practices related to care, obligation and responsibility. Through a parapsychological practice, Remote Viewer loops back to questions of knowability, technology and power.

Differences in approach and formats of work form the conditions for an ecology of making between architects, anthropologists, curators, theatre-makers, visual and performative artists and collectives. In the work and its relationships, questions around responsibility return. Investigations that rub up against notions of co-existence, human, and non-human.

Eleven projects are being developed within *Techne* and will be presented in a festival and an exhibition from November 2017 until January 2018.

We are looking forward,

Marie Bues, Martina Grohmann, Fatima Hellberg, Johanna Markert, June 2017

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'Téchne' is About Effort – A Conversation with Elizabeth A. Povinelli

This exchange took place as part of *Transpersonal:* art and life directives, an international platform developed by Astrid Korporaal and Dr. Stephen Wilson that involves public lectures, education, exhibition making, design mediations and publishing in the field of contemporary art and theory. Gathered together in the Künstlerhaus office, this conversation is between Elizabeth A. Povinelli, Astrid Korporaal, Dr. Stephen Wilson, Fatima Hellberg, and Johanna Markert, and followed on from Povinelli's *Transpersonal* lecture at the Institute of Contemporary Arts, London, on 8 February 2017.

• 'Téchne' is described as the knowledge of how to do or make things – a negotiation between making and thinking. What are your thoughts on this definition?

ELIZABETH A. POVINELLI:

I never quite know what to say about this important distinction. Maybe because in English everytime your mother says "tech-" it ends up saying technology and you cannot say technology without thinking industry. But we know that 'téchne' was a far more creative concept in Ancient Greece. So we can put weight either on 'téchne' as a knowledge of how to keep something in place, or try to unplace something, which is a very twisty use of English. Here "doing and making things" is always more fundamentally about continuing to keep things, concepts, and practices in place or displacing them. Thus 'téchne' is the *effort* to keep in place, make a place, disturb a place, find a place – all of which requires effort.

Intellectual thoughts are like things in this way they take effort to emerge or stay put; they have a probing character; and all that is probing has the quality of making or unmaking. As you probe, something happens, and after some repetition you say. "This works." But as soon as I know how to do something, as soon as I have acquired the skill, the spirit is dead. This original form of 'téchne' is not yet technique. As soon as 'téchne' is limited to technology, it goes mute. Like things and thoughts, the effort to be a subject is also a kind of 'téchne'. It's always accompanied by deploying what you already think you might know while simultaneously remaining open, and that means making an effort to keep on doing. In this way it's antithetical to mastery. The effort, the 'téchne', this is what is behind the continual making of a world.

■ The politics of your work has a certain impurity: you insert question marks into terms of the Left such as 'solidarity', and their implied notions of generosity and inclusiveness. There appears to be an acknowledgment of a contradiction here, combined with a commitment to effort

ELIZABETH A. POVINELLI:

I want concepts that are as close as possible to the conditions in which I am drawing something into visibility. What worries me about solidarity is the same thing that worries me about antagonism, and is slightly different from my concerns with the precarious. To put it bluntly

precariousness has foregrounded 'life' and all the separations that come with the concept of life. Some might say that we can simply state that nonlife, say rocks and shell formations, are precarious. Then we could in principle extend precarity everywhere. But what worries me about that, as I say in my book *Geontologies – A Requiem to Late Liberalism*, is that the conditions of discursive governance are not being disrupted. Instead we are using the dominant framework as the path of inclusion into the dominant.

Antagonisms and solidarity are related to the problem of life, in so far as it has the same epidermal imaginary. I think that whenever we use the word antagonism, we always look over there and ask, "Who am I in antagonism with?" But we all know that existence is entangled. And it is not entangled in a flat abstraction: it's entangled in a terrain in which certain regions have more power to affect than others. When the entanglement twists, it puts enormous strain on that formation with less power. So, if you are over here. and you really understand that your existence is entangled over there, you have to say, "OK, well over here I'm putting strain on that thing as much as I can, putting strain on that big tangle, which is really stressing these other formations." In this process you have to strive and attend to bringing relief.

Solidarity is the other side of antagonism. It's like saying, "We are the good people." The question is, who are 'we' who are always pulling ourselves into the system of the good, rather than saying that we are all locked up in here? How do I push on my side, without becoming what I'm pushing against? This is the antagonism in solidarity. And I think it's all really depending on an epidermal closing that has a very specific history, and genealogy, and territory. I think real politics is

not the politics of figuring things out or solving a problem. It's about finding the problematisation that you can't solve, but that lies at the core.

● How does this relationship with strain and effort relate to your own practice as part of The Karrabing Film Collective?¹

FLIZABETH A. POVINELLI:

The Karrabing is a corporation. We created the corporation so that we could receive certain funding. The rules of the corporation are that it has to be 90% indigenous, and from a certain region in north Australia. Any non-indigenous member has to bring some material into the group, and that includes me as a co-founder. So how does that relate to caring and affect and a politics that is impure at the origins? Simple. We love each other. There are truly what we call kinship relationships between us. They are my closest family in the world. But that doesn't mean that the world treats us the same way. This means I am already obligated even before I showed up there thirty-four years ago -I was already entangled in settler colonialism. In practice, it means that anything that costs money has to come from the outside, or from me. And we talk about that. But that doesn't solve the problem; it just puts the problem on the table. It just says that, in this world as it is structured: this form of kinship sociability, this form of affect, within the system of international racism etcetera, this has to be worked on. Which just makes it constantly a problem. It is the problematisation. This straining tells us how our system is working. I always feel that people are trying to find an answer to the problem; they don't want to sit in the problem. But, if we want to get anywhere, that's where we have to sit, and it's uncomfortable to dwell in the monstrosity, to be the monster with other things. I don't know what else politics is, do you?

About

Elizabeth A. Povinelli is Franz Boas Professor of Anthropology and Gender Studies at Columbia University, New York and the author of numerous books, most recently, *Geontologies: A Requiem to Late Liberalism* (2016), and *Economies of Abandonment* (2011). Her writing and film making has focused on developing a so called "anthropology of the otherwise." This potential theory has unfolded primarily from within a sustained relationship with Indigenous colleagues in north Australia and across five books, numerous essays, and three films with The Karrabing Film Collective including *Wutharr, The Saltwater* (2016).

Transpersonal: art and life directives is an international research project curated by Astrid Korporaal and Dr. Stephen Wilson. The project looks closely at the production of psychotechnologies, socio-political awareness and art & design practices in an automated field of reality. Transpersonal is realised as a series of performance exposures by contemporary artists within Techne at Künstlerhaus Stuttgart from November 2017–January 2018.

¹ The Karrabing Film Collective is a grassroots Indigenous based media group, that uses filmmaking as a means of self-organisation and social analysis.

Nature Theatre of Oblivia

Flyer mit der kostenlosen Arilyn-App scannen und den virtuellen Zauber des *Nature Theatre of Oblivia* erleben.

Scan this flyer with the free Arilyn-App and enjoy the virtual magic of *Nature Theatre of Oblivia*.



We Want to Be Trees – A Conversation with Oblivia

Oblivia is working on a new performance: *Nature Theatre of Oblivia*. Meri Ekola, Alice Ferl, Timo Fredriksson, Tua Helve, Anna-Maija Terävä and Annika Tudeer (Oblivia) were discussing questions by Martina Grohmann at the Eskus Performance Center in Helsinki on 25 April 2017.

• How did you come up with the idea for Nature Theatre of Oblivia?

OBLIVIA:

We started by thinking about how to work with the theme of nature, what nature means to each of us and how we perceive nature, as well as the idea of nature and all its possible connotations.

We thought about how we could create fog, a sunset, a landscape, a forest. A month later we started to work on being trees, and on that road we remained. We ended up with the image of a Finnish forest. We made trips into the forest, or the small patches of green that are found in central Helsinki. We did nature in nature.

What is the forest in Nature Theatre of Oblivia like?

OBI IVIA:

It is an idealised forest that is largely untouched, a mythical forest where you can encounter mythical characters. Or rather, as is the case in forests, you catch a glimpse of something. The forest is always alive and changing, but you cannot really see the changes in action. It might also be a tiny patch of forest, like the forest in *Winnie the Pooh* – that one acre, which seems enormous to the characters, but in reality is very small.

How do you manage to be trees on stage?

OBLIVIA:

That is exactly the challenge. A state of being, non-human, and yet we are humans on stage playing trees. We work with rhythm and atmosphere. We flip between the non-human aspect and the performer, focusing on plants, minerals and animals. Solving questions and problems as they arise. It is disciplined. The rhythm of the forest is different from what we are used to. The essence of the forest manifests both as things that we are not accustomed to doing on stage and in thinking, in encountering a different intelligence and in using time differently – being there with the audience.

• 'Téchne' implies the combination of theoretical and practical knowledge. Which kind of knowledge does the forest provide?

OBLIVIA:

'Téchne' is the skill of doing the forest, to use the different techniques in order to pay attention and convey this. The trees, the birds. It is a translation. We are working with the idea of the forest and transmitting that. Nature is taxonomic – ordered – and we are recreating the very same idea of ordering nature. We are working with general ideas, not individual objects in nature.

In this project, nature or the forest are the basis of knowledge. It is a very physical, practical and sensual knowledge. You know, it is about simply being there. Nature is just there.

You are not only working on nature, but also using a smartphone app. Why is this?

OBLIVIA:

Annika met Otso Kähönen from the Arilyn company after a talk about augmented reality. He showed her different things they had done with the app, and it somehow resonated with Oblivia's work.

Arilyn is more of an addition, a way of getting the performance one more step removed from stage and placed in miniature size on your table top.

By using the Arilyn technology, the work can travel and exist without us. Time in the app is swift, in complete contrast to the eternal nature of the forest.

● What about the techniques or methods you use in your practice more generally? Open for anyone, like Kafka's Nature Theatre of Oklahoma? Does the idea of open source and free distribution of knowledge have a social or political impact on your work?

OBLIVIA:

The main principle of Oblivia's work is sourcing and sharing material. Several minds work better than one mind, 1+1=3. No sole geniuses here. I guess sole geniuses are passé anyway.

Genres mingle in the work, since we all come from different backgrounds, but create a common performance language. Heterogeneity has always been essential to the work. It is funny how your body becomes overlaid with all the different materials, ideas, and persons you have worked with. You become a rather special performer inhabiting loads of copies, prototypes, energies, people. It is about seeing the person, ecce homo. To be radical with minimal means.

You can see our history of Oblivia in the work, but also the history of the process. We started in 2000 with our "Manifesto", in which we talked about lightness, friendliness and equal pay. The many layers of the process inhabit the performances and you get the sense of a very crowded stage, although we have nothing but the performers, light and sound on stage. There is always a rationale, an intellect behind the material, and you can see and sense the underlying thinking.

● What about theatre itself – can it be an open source for everyone?

OBLIVIA:

We talk a lot about accessibility and art for everyone. But art is already a cultural technique of gathering knowledge, a very specific knowledge that you can only have through art. An aesthetic, sensual knowledge – which is sometimes dismissed or missing. A theatre is a mechanism for making selections, from artistic selections to audience selections. We cannot avoid that, and that's fine, but we can have different means of creating a sense of belonging.

About

Oblivia is a Finnish performance company founded in 2000 in Helsinki. Oblivia works across genres, with a group of core members who work towards a shared performance language and method. Recent performances include their long running project *Museum of Postmodern Art* (2011–2016) and the trilogy *Entertainment Island* (since 2008).

Nature Theatre of Oblivia will premiere on Thursday 22 June 2017 at Theater Rampe, with upcoming shows on 23–24 June, 27–28 June and 12–13 November 2017 as part of the *Techne* festival.

Remote Viewer – A Conversation with Tyler Coburn and Ian Hatcher

Remote Viewer focusses on Tyler Coburn and lan Hatcher's project of the same title. This new work, taking the form of a workshop series and an installation (designed with architects Bureau V), serves as the starting point for a conversation with Fatima Hellberg and Johanna Markert.

• 'Téchne' is the negotiation of making and doing, a form of knowledge that constantly re-institutes itself. What is remote viewing and how would you locate it within this framework?

TYLER COBURN, IAN HATCHER:

We think there's a connection to 'téchne' in terms of "knowledge that constantly re-institutes itself." How we interpret this is that a given form of knowledge does not just reassert itself. Rather, it must be de-instituted to be re-instituted. The claims it makes on the world, and the way it wears its authority, must be scrutinised, questioned – even deconstructed. The form of knowledge re-instituted at the end of this process is thus different from what began it. By making this process constant, we remain constantly critical of our systems of thought.

Our project, *Remote Viewer*, takes a similar approach to scrutinising, questioning and re-instituting knowledge. The primary reference points are the programmes run by the CIA and the Stanford Research Institute, from the early 1970s onwards, which trained 'psychic spies' to *mentally* travel to covert enemy sites and describe what they saw and experienced, using a pen, paper, and sometimes a mound of clay. In the 1990s, the CIA discredited the work done by these spies, for while a few of them generated uncannily accurate reports, the overall success rate was too low to justify continued funding.

One of our interests in this topic is precisely how remote viewing was made to perform as a 'science' through the implementation of protocols, laboratory tests, and experiments. There's something telling in the extensive work done to legitimise as a form of knowledge a practice that is primarily reliant upon the unknowable workings of the psyche. In our approach, we're reading the official claims of remote viewing against the grain – and also exploring the larger implications of this chapter of military history, when the recesses of the mind were bureaucratised and weaponised.

To re-institute remote viewing, we're putting the practice into conversation with the 'black boxes' of contemporary data capture, overseen by programmers who are sometimes referred to as 'wizards.' By considering the structural opacity of remote viewing – the 'black box' of the psyche – we hope to better understand how obfuscation and mystification render current mechanisms of power unintelligible to the average user.

One aspect that we find particularly interesting is how you describe the way "remote viewing was made to perform as a 'science'."

We would like to talk more about this performative element. The way you speak about the mystification and opacity of remote viewing touches on some very interesting questions about embodiment and intuition. Where do you think is the place or status of contingency in this practice?

TYLER COBURN. IAN HATCHER:

A remote viewer attempts to know the unknowable, gathering data out of the air like a tree gathering carbon, by psychical means that remain obscure.

The process is seeded with contingency. A viewer begins a session with a vague prompt, and the target is usually unknown: a place or object that the viewer has likely never encountered. Efforts are made to discourage connections to memories and preexisting associations; the viewer is supposed to describe the target, not identify or analyse it. Moreover, the method does not permit any way to know in advance which details, or types of details, might be accurate. Even the most renowned practitioners have high rates of inaccuracy in their viewings.

In the work done at the CIA and the Stanford Research Institute, there was a serious effort to isolate contingency within remote viewing. At the same time, many of the people who participated in sessions, like Uri Geller and Ingo Swann, brought a performative, personality-driven approach to the method. The tension between systematic protocols and performativity is one of our central interests in remote viewing.

Though still presented and discussed in scientific terms, remote viewing is now often taught anecdotally, within frameworks specific to each practitioner. A remote viewing session, you could say, is as much a portrait of its instructor as a lesson in a specific methodology. *Remote Viewer* focuses on these contingent elements of training – the fragments of biography, the narrative content shored up in a viewing – and assembles them into forms that speak to knowability, technology, and power.

● How do you imagine those different lines of thought, science and technology coming together in Remote Viewer – in which ways will you be using the remote viewing technique as material?

TYLER COBURN, IAN HATCHER:

We would make a distinction between 'science' and 'technology,' understanding the latter term, as per the dictionary definition, to be "the application of scientific knowledge for practical purposes." In the case of our project, this would mean that remote viewing sought to be a credible science, and the remote viewer was the technology of this field, directing abstract hypotheses about the human psyche to practical, actionable ends.

By defining the remote viewer as a technology, we discover resonances with technologies of our day, such as those employed in asymmetrical warfare and by the surveillance state. Indeed, the psychic spy could be seen as a flesh-and-blood precursor of the military drone, for both are imaging devices piloted by remote operators. Remote Viewer is thus an attempt to tell an alternative history of contemporary technologies of power, one that emphasises the role of human labour within our apparatuses.

In terms of how we will "be using the remote viewing technique as material," we plan to conduct training sessions for small groups at Theater Rampe, drawing on skills we've learned over the past year. The originators of remote viewing saw the practice as fundamentally democratic, contending that anyone who learned its protocols could perform within them and generate results. However, over decades of testing, it was found that people with artistic talent were demonstrably superior viewers. Perhaps this is part of why we were drawn to the method – and why we are looking forward to bringing it to an arts audience.

About

Tyler Coburn is an artist and writer based in New York. Coburn's writing has appeared in *frieze*, *e-flux journal*, *Mousse*, *Art-Agenda and Rhizome*, among others. His performances, sound works and installations have been presented at the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; South London Gallery; Kunstverein Munich; CCA, Glasgow; Objectif Exhibitions, Antwerp; CAC, Vilnius; LAXART, Los Angeles; and SculptureCenter, New York.

Ian Hatcher is a writer, sound artist, and programmer whose work explores cognition in the context of digital systems. Recent projects include a print book, *Prosthesis* (Poor Claudia, 2016), a record, *Drone Pilot* (cOsmOsmOse, 2017), and numerous animated/interactive works, including the iOS app *Abra*. His code-inflected vocal performances have been presented widely in North America and Europe.

Remote Viewer will be presented from November to January as part of the Techne festival and exhibition at Theater Rampe and Künstlerhaus Stuttgart.

A Walk with Sturmhard Brandt

On a sunny day in April, Sturmhard Brandt, founder of the *Theatre of the Long Now* joins the *Techne* team in a conversation about the beginnings of the theatre.



Photo: Sebastian Becker/Bureau Baubotanik

Some Energy?

Some Energy?

Antangsgefüge"

Antangsgefüge Antang

Sturmhard Brandt (*1953) is a gardener and landscape architect based in San Francisco and Stuttgart. In the many years of his practice, he initiated, cared for, and directed numerous landscapes, among them the *Theatre of the Long Now*, which he founded in 2014. Since 2016 he has been retired.

Brandt appears relaxed and takes a moment to inspect his surroundings. After finishing his walk through the theatre, they find a place to sit on a block of concrete in the shade of a young poplar. Glasses of birch spritzer are being served.

Now that you have seen the theatre, do you believe your ideas have been realised here?

STURMHARD BRANDT:

When I look around here, I already have the impression that the theatre meets my original vision, and I'm thrilled to see that it has developed in ways I could never have imagined. A lot of the things I initiated when the theatre was founded, but was unable to put into tangible form, have now been realised.

One of my ideas from back then was to create a place that would critically reflect communal everyday life. Such a place would have to remain malleable by continually responding to its own context. Hereby it does not only create facts but also promises. That is why I created the architectural preconditions for a continuous project. Though, strictly speaking, the idea didn't come out of a theatre context, but from landscape gardening. Perhaps I might say something about the theatre's technical structure?

Please do!

STURMHARD BRANDT:

I tried to think of the urban waste land as a space of opportunities. Usually it is what's left behind after buildings are demolished. Most people don't like those kinds of waste lands, because they can't cope with the sight of areas that serve no visible purpose. They consist of a specific layering of various 'beginnings' that have yet to unfold. Layers of gravel or stones, that are left behind from torn down buildings, lie atop different layers of earth that contain seeds. The first plants to colonise the area are always the pioneer trees and shrubs, as well as flowers. That's why I planted the theatre not only with pioneer trees, but also included seeds for a flower field which makes it very bee-friendly. You have to remember that back then the entire area in front of the 'Wagenhallen' was just one vast waste land and my design was an invisible artificial replica. But now time has caught up with me. Paradoxically, my theatre is now the only remaining undeveloped area in

the centre of a highly contested construction site. The 123.5 m^2 of artificially created fallow ground represents the 'Wagenhallen's' past as well as its future ... and I am very excited to see what will happen over the 10-100 seasons yet to come ...

You are talking about architectural and botanical relationships. What about performances in the Theatre of the Long Now?

STURMHARD BRANDT:

The waste land is about the size and shape of a small theatre. Even the layout is already theatrical: this apparently overgrown area in front of us displays all the essential characteristics of an urban waste land. It's representative of this location's past and a reality that is already absent, but at the same time it is constructed and artificial – a synthetic reality, in other words. In the meantime, a number of different interests are active in this place, by human and non-human actors, and the theatre demands that these interests be negotiated. Dramatic conflicts with tragic consequences might arise, or they might not. In this sense, it is a drama – but also an epic tale told very slowly.

 In our view, the theatre also holds a proper share of science fiction.

STURMHARD BRANDT:

Yes, the theatre addresses the tensions between past and present, since its incalculable processes each place the focus existent, momentary events that anticipate the future. For example, its future form is determined not only by predictable, external influences such as a particular position of the sun or a specific phase in the growth of an individual plant, but also by communal ideas and individual decisions of people. In the *Theatre of the Long Now*, aspects of the present and future are placed into a relationship with one another.

• Does this mean that the theatre is following some notion of progress? To what degree is the Theatre of the Long Now 'téchne'?

STURMHARD BRANDT:

Well, from the very beginning the *Theatre of the Long Now* was a technical experiment. After all, theatre

and architecture – both of them very old cultural techniques – merge together in a single space, a space which perhaps allows for a cultural technique of its own. The exact purpose that will arise from this artificially created waste land remains unsettled. I hope that the next performances will establish a "long now" for which, back then, I simply didn't have the funds or the actors to stage.

This is a true story. The interview is a part of the performance.

About

The *Theatre of the Long Now* was founded in 2014 and has been growing ever since. Ferl+Hertel and Bureau Baubotanik have been named artistic directors of the *Theatre of the Long Now* for the 2017 season, developing its programme through performative and botanical-architectural interventions. As part of *Techne*, the *Theatre of the Long Now* will host performances, festivities, and activities, in response to the evolution of the project.

The next performance at the *Theatre of the Long Now* will take place on 21 July 2017.

τέchnē festival 8 – 19 November 2017

As a final point the long term project *Techne* is presented to the audience with workshops, performances and a major exhibition. We are looking forward to the following pieces/performances:

- Appearances by Andrew Norman Wilson
- Die schrecklich gute Mutter by Ulrich Bernhardt
- Mohrle by Hendrik Quast & Maika Knoblich
- Nature Theatre of Oblivia by Oblivia
- Rehab Training by Geumhyung Jeong
- Remote Viewer by Tyler Coburn & Ian Hatcher
- Setting Sculpture by Annabella Spielmannleitner & Benjamin Köder
- The Thing An Automatic Workshop by Ant Hampton & Christophe Meierhans
- Theatre of the Long Now by Ferl+Hertel & Bureau Baubotanik
- Transpersonal: art and life directives by Astrid Korporaal & Dr. Stephen Wilson
- Zurück in die Zukunft by Neue Dringlichkeit

Outlook

8 November 2017 Festival opening at Theater Rampe

11 November 2017 Exhibition opening at Künstlerhaus Stuttgart (until January 2018)

19 November 2017
Festival finish with winter storage party at
Theatre of the Long Now

The complete festival program is availabe on techne-stuttgart.de in September 2017