ELEMENTS, CHAIRS, AND MONSTERS:

INDIGENIST CO-CREATED PERFORMANCE IN THE CLIMATE CRISIS

Peter Petkovšek

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University of Leeds

School of Performance and Cultural Studies

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I confirm that the work submitted is my own and that appropriate credit has been given where reference has been made to the work of others.

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Dedication

To my father, the most kind-hearted, astonishingly brilliant, and warmly caring role model in academia, life, and in relating to the more-than-human. We miss you.

Acknowledgments

Thank you to Prof. Jonathan Pitches and dr. Maria Kapsali for their unwavering support and generosity throughout this process. Without their patience and miraculous ability to make sense of all the projects, locations, pragmatic choices, tardy realisations, and suspensions that I brought to the table, this thesis would have never lifted off from the monster level. Thanks also to dr. Nicolas Salazar Sutil, who helped begin it all and set me down the indigenist path.

It takes a community – or several communities, in this case – to make theatre happen. I am immensely grateful to the partners, participants, performers, producers, and co-creators that brought to life the shows and projects that this thesis is made of. The sheer number and diversity of humans and more-than-humans involved in these projects is a wonderful thing. I've included as many as possible in the project background sections and the credits of the videos of the shows, and I beg forgiveness from anyone I might have accidentally left out. Thank you for being so generous and for letting me contribute to the shaping and telling of your stories.

The projects described in this thesis would not have happened without the funding from various bodies, including the School of Performance and Cultural Industries of the University of Leeds, Contested Territories Research Network, Dramatic Adventure Theatre, and Yesigong Project. Thank you for contributing to the discussions about the climate crisis.

My fellow doctoral travellers in Leeds – it has been a privilege and a pleasure. Ben (and Spencer and Finley), Lizzie, Tirna, Bennie, Tennae, and everyone else, thank you for the chats, pints, commiserations, lovely dog- and house-sittings, and celebrations.

Thank you to my mother, sisters, loved ones, and all those who supported the adventure and cheered on. In an indigenist spirit, I hope I can offer equal support and warmth in return.

Madeleine – you are the reason the final and hardest phase of this endeavour felt meaningful and (nearly) effortless. Thank you for being pure heart and for putting work into perspective with your incredible accomplishments.

Abstract

This thesis is a practical and theoretical investigation into the ethical, methodological, and ecological components of the co-creation of local, climate crisis-related performances. The narratives are created with communities of different cultures, including Indigenous, Global South, and Global North partners. Central to the study is the articulation of an indigenist value set, comprising permission, respect, reciprocity, interconnectedness, and gratitude. The set is developed in dialogue with Indigenous co-creators and applied in diverse cultural and environmental contexts as a methodology of storytelling with the goal of navigating the complexity of the climate crisis. The term 'indigenist' in this contexts designates any practice, including by non-Indigenous scholars or practitioners, that supports the Indigenous struggle and advocates for its core principles, including environmental protection, Indigenous and human rights, and a closer relationship between the human and the more-than-human.

Structured around two shorter pilot projects and three main practice cases consisting of community-based theatre shows, a digital artefact, and a workshop showcase, the research articulates a tripartite praxis of ethics and participation, storytelling, and movement practices. It builds on a relational ethics of co-creation and applies the indigenist value-based methodology to these overlapping domains. Thus, the thesis creates a pathway of employing performance as a vessel of ethical translation of the tenets of Indigenous cosmovision into Western-style theatre practice. This is done to investigate storytelling advocating a relational and co-constitutive approach to the relationship between the human and the more-than-human. The praxis is integrated through the theoretical lenses of James Thompson's and Dwight Conquergood's theories of ethics, Andreas Weber's reflections on animism, Ronald L. Grimes' theory of ritual, Karen Barad's agential realism, and Gregory Bateson's systems theory.

Transnational and local movement practices are employed in a selection of the practice cases, and the thesis argues that these practices can be used ecosomatically to explore the relationship between the community and its environment. Agential realist thinking works in syncretism with an animist approach to account for the realities of a contemporary materialistic context, while a systems theory approach can integrate performance practices as a functional memory of the system, coding and storing the interactions that lead to increasing integration of systems and the expression of a secular sacred.

The thesis shows how ethics steeped in relationality and embedded in local performance practices through an indigenist approach to storytelling can celebrate, strengthen, or reimagine the relationship between communities and their environments. This provides a scaffolding for an ecologically beneficial understanding of the more-than-human. The complexity of the 'monster' of the climate crisis and its local sociopolitical implications are thus navigated through a culturally sensitive and context-adaptable methodology. The research contributes to discussions in community-based theatre, ecological performance, and Indigenous – non-Indigenous research ethics, while emphasising the urgent need of such approaches within the global climate crisis.

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List of Video Links

Video links are embedded into the text of the chapters but also provided here as a backup and reference. Videos are hosted on YouTube and include link numbers, short descriptions, and credits.

Chapter 4

LINK01 (p.62) – *Nunkui Teaches the Anent* – a scene from the show *The Waterfall from San Luis,* in which the spirit of the Earth, Nunkui, teaches the Woman a traditional song or *anent*. Video recorded by Peter Petkovsek.

LINK02 (p.65) – *DocuHaiku 0* – the digital artefact resulting from dialogue with a Kichwa Indigenous partner from Ecuador. Video created and edited by Peter Petkovsek.

Chapter 5

LINK03 (p.74) – *Planting of the Araucarias* – a video record of a ceremonial planting of young Araucaria saplings on Aillaquillén Island in Chile. Video recorded and edited by Peter Petkovsek.

LINK04 (p.78) – *Nautüll and Lifkoyam Scene* – a scene from the show *Aillaquillén – The Island of Nine Moons*, in which a young couple crosses lake Mallolafken to give birth on the other side. Video recorded by Peter Petkovsek.

LINK05 (p.84) – *Dance of the Elements and Birth of the Baby* – a scene from the show *Aillaquillén – The Island of Nine Moons*, in which elements help the couple by creating an island as a safe haven for the birth. Video recorded by Peter Petkovsek.

Chapter 6

LINK06 (p.97) – *School of Fish* – a preparatory exercise from the *Asul Asul / Nick of Time* workshop, in which participants practice relating as a group. Video recorded by MJ Kim.

LINK07 (p.100) – *Promise* – a scene from the showcase of the *Asul Asul / Nick of Time* workshop, in which a woman enters into dialogue with Water. Video recorded by MJ Kim.

LINK08 (p.104) – *Scene With Chair* – an exercise from the *Asul Asul / Nick of Time* workshop, in which an actress relates with a Chair. Video recorded by MJ Kim.

LINK09 (p.109) – *Coexistence* – a scene from the showcase of the *Asul Asul / Nick of Time* workshop, in which actors coexist with more-than-human performing partners – Rocks. Video recorded by MJ Kim.

Chapter 7

LINK10 (p.123) – *Mother and Daughter Arrival* – a scene from the show *A Place to Call One's Own*, in which the Mother and Daughter arrive in a new place in search of a home. Video recorded and edited by Mónica Bravo Pedrosa.

LINK11 (p.127) – *Resistance* – a scene from the show *A Place to Call One's Own*, in which the community resists pressure to leave their home. Video recorded and edited by Mónica Bravo Pedrosa.

LINK12 (p.128) – *Duel* – a scene from the show *A Place to Call One's Own*, in which a man becomes the victim of street violence and reflects on the choice it presented him. Video recorded and edited by Mónica Bravo Pedrosa.

LINK13 (p.130) – *Monster* – a scene from the show *A Place to Call One's Own*, in which the community accepts the Monster of the Blue Lagoon as their own. Video recorded and edited by Mónica Bravo Pedrosa.

LINK14 (p.132) – *Keep Dancing* – a scene from the show *A Place to Call One's Own*, in which the community dances on as a sign of resilience. Video recorded and edited by Mónica Bravo Pedrosa.

The Practice Portfolio (p.144) contains links to the entire material of the practice submission, including videos of the full shows and selected scripts.

1 Introduction

Overview

This thesis is a practical and theoretical investigation into the ethical, methodological, and ecological components of the co-creation of local, climate crisis-related performances with communities of different cultures, including Indigenous, Global South, and Global North partners. The critical point of view presented is that of a non-Indigenous white European practice researcher and facilitator. The presented stories reflect on the relationships between the communities and their environments as well as between the human and more-than-human networks within. The practice consists of two shorter pilot projects (a digital artefact and a community-based theatre show in Ecuador) and three main practice research cases: two community-based theatre shows (in Chile and Colombia) and a showcase of a workshop (in South Korea). The written component presents the findings of the research as a) the construction of a relational ethics for intercultural co-creation, b) the articulation of an indigenist[1] value scaffolding that enables the ethical integration of Indigenous cosmovision on stage and an expression of a secular sacred[1] through the overlap of theatre and ritual, c) the mobilisation of movement practices as an entry into relationality and an animist sensibility in non-Indigenous contexts, and d) the holistic application of these components to co-created storytelling and performance that navigates the complexity of the climate crisis – the 'monster' from the title. The practice is investigated through the theoretical lenses of James Thompson's and Dwight Conquergood's theories of ethics, Andreas Weber's reflections on animism, Ronald L. Grimes' ritual theory, Karen Barad's agential realism, and Gregory Bateson's systems theory. The theoretical framework emerges from a synthesis of these ideas. The ethics theories provide a basis for an ethos of intercultural co-creation, while the theories of animism, ritual, agential realism, and systems theory work together to frame a relational methodology that situates performance as a site of emergent and co-constituted meaning between the human and the more-than-human. Although the stated theoretical structure draws primarily on scholars situated within a Global North academic discourse, it remains in constant and crucial dialogue with Indigenous knowledges that emerge from the co-creative practices of this thesis. These knowledges are not predetermined through emphasised theories or scholars but rather generously brought into the work by the Indigenous partners of individual pilot projects and practice cases, emerging

[1] The key terms are defined in a later subsection.

from the relational quality of the practice and its cultural contexts. The intention is not to appropriate Indigenous epistemologies by re-coding them using a Western[1] lens, but to explore how these different knowledge systems may meet in a negotiated ethical space of permission and reciprocity to support an intercultural approach, constitute an indigenist value scaffolding, and reaffirm or transform the relationship between the human and the more-than-human. The practical and theoretical frameworks are therefore developed as a contribution of performance to navigating the climate crisis and rethinking the societal relationship to the environment.

The praxis of this thesis is articulated through three main strands: participation/ethics, storytelling, and movement practices, addressed to various extents within individual chapters (Table 2, p. 16). The participation/ethics strand examines the co-creation process between a non-Indigenous European practice researcher and Indigenous or marginalised communities from the Global South. Central to this strand is the mitigation of ethical risks of appropriation and power imbalance. The practice research presented in the thesis received approval by the Research Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Cultures at the University of Leeds (FAHC 20-055, FAHC 21-105, FAHC 22-108). Within these parameters, a successful navigation of relationships with Indigenous and Global South co-creators is tested as one of the main research questions. The perceived ethical challenges of intercultural co-creation are addressed through the construction of a relational ethics of the practice researcher. The second strand of praxis investigates storytelling as ecological sense-making. As this thesis shows, for the Global South communities involved, storytelling represents cultural affirmation, symbolic resistance to hegemonic pressures, and a renewal of the relationship with the more-than-human. For the Global North participants, storytelling becomes a crucial method of ethical and ecological engagement, exploring indigenist values as performance dramaturgies and enabling expressions of a secular sacred. Each narrative is the result of the joining of a generally applicable value-based relational framework for performance practice with the specific cultural, historical, environmental, and sociopolitical local context. Finally, the movement practices strand explores movement as a shared performance language and an ecosomatic tactic of relating to the land and the more-than-human. Ranging from individual embodied explorations of the Other to communal expressions of relationality through shared technique, this thesis argues that a shared movement practice can open the possibility of an embodied methodology for performing relationality.

Table 1 Practice Research Cases Details

Case	Timeline	Location	Titles of Pieces	Format	Partners	Performers	My Role	Ch.
Two Pilot Projects	Apr 2021 - Sep 2021	Online	***DocuHaiku 0***	Digital Artefact	Manuel Guatemal	Manuel Guatemal; Peter Petkovsek	Director, Video Editor	4
	Jul 2022	Gualaquiza, Ecuador	***The Waterfall of San Luis***	Community-based theatre show	Dominga Antun; DAT Company	San Luis community; A group of US/EU actors	Co-Director, Writer	
Practice Case 1	Sep-Dec 2022	Pucon, Chile	***Aillaquillén – The Island of Nine Moons***	Community-based theatre show	Alejandra Aillapan Huiriqueo; Universidad de la Frontera	Local community artists; Alejandra and Lorenzo Aillapan	Director, Co-Writer, Video Editor	5
Practice Case 2	Jun-Jul 2023	Seoul, South Korea	***Asul Asul / Nick of Time***	Workshop showcase	Yesigong Project	Local actors	Director	6
Practice Case 3	Oct-Dec 2023	Cali, Colombia	***A Place to Call One's Own***	Community-based theatre show	Son de mi gente Foundation; Pontificia Universidad Javeriana; Angelly Alvarez	Son de mi gente dancers; Founders Nancy Torres, Jhon Murillo	Co-Director, Co-Writer	7

The practice research cases presented in this thesis engage with a variety of geographical, cultural, environmental, social, and creative contexts (Table 1). Both pilot projects in Ecuador and Practice Case 1 in Chile included co-creation with Indigenous partners. Three out of the four in-person projects happened in South America as community-based theatre shows, while the South Korean practice case was formatted as the showcase of a studio experimentation workshop. However, it shares a non-Indigenous urban context as well as an existing community movement skill with Practice Case 3 in Colombia. The narratives of all the practice cases were devised from scratch except for Practice Case 1 in Chile, where the story was a dramatised local Indigenous legend. The performances of shows in the pilot project in Ecuador and Practice Case 3 in Colombia happened in non-traditional performance spaces, while the shows in Chile and Korea were presented in official theatre venues. More-than-human participants such as elements and chairs were present in all practice cases; the monster, representing a multilayered image of the complexity of the climate crisis and injustice, is mentioned in Practice Case 2 in South Korea and appears as a character in Practice Case 3 in Colombia. I (co-)facilitated and (co-)directed the projects, often also (co-)writing the scripts. I co-created with various partners, from artivist individuals to theatre companies and universities. The performers ranged from community children and young adults in Ecuador and Colombia to local amateur or professional artists in Chile and Korea. The diversity of the contexts and components of the practice cases enriches both the process and outcomes of this research.

Statement of Positionality

The practice research in this thesis examines intercultural co-creation of climate crisis-related performance from the point of view of the facilitator who is therefore the focus of the research as well as the source and target audience of the research questions, critical reflections, and original contributions. To appropriately present and argue this approach, it is necessary to situate the facilitator-researcher in the thesis, that is myself, within cultural and experiential contexts that have shaped the facilitation process and the interpretation of the practice research. I am a white, Slovenian, cisgendered man currently residing between the United Kingdom and Slovenia. When using, studying, or critiquing Western methodologies, theories, and approaches to knowledge, I am therefore being self-reflective about my own culture and its epistemological structures. In the combined pilot projects and practice cases of this thesis, I worked with a significant variety of co-creators, communities, and participants, most of whom identify as members of a different culture from mine, often in a minority position. I cannot and do not speak for any of them; rather, my goal is to critically assess the process and components of intercultural co-creation around climate crisis-related topics from my own standpoint and background while rigorously examining and upholding the ethical space of engagement within which the practice happens.

My interest in theatre and performance and their potential for affecting our worldview started as an early passion for stories and literature. While studying Comparative Literature and French Language as an undergraduate student at the University of Ljubljana, I founded a small student theatre group, which quickly grew from hobby to serious interest. An intercultural aspect was added when I ventured abroad to study drama, first as part of my undergraduate Erasmus exchange year at Université Sorbonne Nouvelle in Paris, then at a graduate level at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art in London, and finally in the form of graduate directing training at Columbia University in New York City. These courses were designed to prepare for a professional career in mostly institutional theatre. However, already within the various contexts, differences of approaches emerged and cross-pollinated each other, paving the way to an understanding of theatre and performance that includes the belief in their unique power of combining real life, storytelling, and critical reflection in imaginative and artistic ways in any given setting, all through the transformative process of co-creation.

It wasn't until during my years of studying and working in New York that environmental consciousness entered into my theatre practice. Until then, I considered myself an enthusiast of connecting with nature – the love and respect for which was instilled in me by my parents during hikes in the stunning Julian Alps in Slovenia. As climate change became an increasingly present topic of public and scientific discussion, I

was, like many others, a somewhat concerned citizen. That changed when I had the opportunity to collaborate with the American theatre company Dramatic Adventure Theatre and travel to Ecuador in 2017 to meet and work with the Shuar community of San Luis – the same community DAT and I returned to in 2022 in order to co-create *The Waterfall of San Luis*, one of the pilot projects of this thesis. The 2017 project, a series of theatre workshops for and with the children of the community, was a formative experience, highlighting the complexity of real-life consequences of climate change and environmental destruction, opening ethical questions of co-creation and collaboration, and allowing a glimpse into a different, relational understanding of the world, one which nevertheless reminded me of my connections to Slovenian landscapes back home. Coming from an already existing belief in intercultural experiences, I saw a new potential in this type of storytelling, one that could contribute to the discussions of the climate crisis in practical and creative ways and benefit all involved sides.

It is from this position that I approach the practice research in this thesis, and although stemming from my individual experience and set of contexts, I hope to offer insights and contributions that will be of theoretical and practical use to those wanting to create similar type of work. As I mention in the introduction to the Methodology chapter, an unexpected but welcome consequence of this practice has been a palpable change and enrichment of my own work in institutional theatre – a shift that I argue is, urgent and increasingly necessary if theatre and performance are to contribute meaningfully to the ecological challenges of the present moment.

Research Questions

The urgency, complexity, and global scale of the climate crisis have by now been well documented (Abbass et al., 2022; van Bommel and Höffken, 2023; Cook et al., 2013; Fletcher et al., 2024; Friedlingstein et al., 2025; Gabric, 2023; IPCC, 2023; Mann et al., 1998; Oreskes, 2004; Otto, 2023; Steffen et al., 2018) as has its disproportionate effect on marginalised communities (Ayompe, 2025; Chancel, 2020; Deivanayagam et al., 2023; IPCC, 2023; Jones et al., 2020; Loots and Haysom, 2023; Otto, 2025; Parker, 2016; Singer, 2018). This research explores co-creative storytelling with communities and their environments as a way to navigate the complexity of the climate crisis. It does so in different contexts; the work with Indigenous and Global South partners focuses on the mechanics of ethical intercultural co-creation and the performance of Indigenous cosmovision on stage as a renewal of a commitment to the more-than-human. The work with Global North partners focuses on discovering animist sensibilities through performance

practices that lead to an ecologically beneficial worldview and a relational understanding of the positionality within the environmental networks of humans and more-than-humans.

The thesis asks the following research questions:

1. What are the intercultural and ethical challenges of working with Indigenous and non-Indigenous co-creators in the Global South and Global North?

    a. *What shift of consciousness in the researcher/facilitator is needed to work with Indigenous communities on local cultural and environmental stories?*

2. How can Indigenous cosmovision become ethically integrated with the performance practices of the non-Indigenous/Western practice researcher, and how can it be mobilised in performance?

    a. *How can Indigenous cosmovision become ethically integrated in and facilitate the work of Global North performers and their ability to engage with more-than-human others?*

    b. *How to mobilise the existing professional/performance skills of a community or group of participants?*

3. In what ways can the complexity of the climate crisis be navigated through interculturally co-created community-based stories and performances?

Table 2 Praxis Strands and Research Questions Highlighted per Practice Research Case

Practice Research Case		Location	Praxis Strands Highlighted	RQs Highlighted
Pilot	*DocuHaiku 0 ;* *The Waterfall of San Luis*	Online ; Ecuador	Participation/Ethics, Storytelling	RQ1, RQ1a
1	*Aillaquillén – The Island of Nine Moons*	Chile	Participation/Ethics, Storytelling	RQ2, RQ3
2	*Asul Asul / Nick of Time*	South Korea	Storytelling, Movement Practices	RQ2a, RQ2b, RQ3
3	*A Place to Call One's Own*	Colombia	Storytelling, Movement Practices	RQ2b, RQ3

Research Questions 1 and 2 and their sub questions are addressed progressively through the thesis; Research Question 3 is addressed by all practice cases. Table 2 presents the distribution of highlighted Research Questions and Praxis Strands.

Key Terms

Indigenous

This thesis employs the UN's definition of Indigenous peoples based on a 1994 report by Martinez Cobo as those who "have in common a historical continuity with a given region prior to colonialization and a strong link to their lands. They maintain, at least in part, distinct social, economic and political systems. They are determined to maintain and develop their identity and distinct institutions, and they form a non-dominant sector of society" (UN, n.d.) The term Indigenous (used in this thesis with a capital I when designating people and culture) itself is clearly not indigenous and has historically been used in pejorative ways by colonialist nations (Peters and Mika, 2017). Despite its inherent contentiousness, it has since been largely adopted into widespread usage and has been fused with the concept of human rights as a political strategy and tool for empowerment. The term (together with the term 'indigeneity') has in many ways been reclaimed and reinvented, thereby subverting the colonialist essentialist philosophy, and used as a political strategy in the fight for social justice (Borshay Lee, 2006; Merlan, 2009). Despite growing recognition of the term and its political and legal meaning, international and institutional reforms are still slow to enact any substantial changes (Niezen, 2005). There is a rich diversity of cultures identifying as Indigenous in the world with varying worldviews, mythologies, and spiritualities. When used in this thesis, the term Indigenous refers to the cultures and mythologies of the co-creation partners from the practice research cases presented, that is the Kichwa, Shuar, and Mapuche traditions. It is not intended to 'flatten' or group all Indigenous peoples into a label with singular characteristics but rather to point out underlying core similarities, especially in contrast to Western worldviews.

Indigenist

The term 'indigenist' is used when referring to methodology approaches and methods used by myself or other non-Indigenous participants and partners. The term was chosen for two reasons: a) to avoid cultural appropriation, extractivist approaches, and a slippage into a colonial mindset by claiming any practice co-created by non-Indigenous participants as Indigenous, and b) to continuously clearly mark the provenance of the values and animist sensibilities embedded in the term, acknowledging and crediting the Indigenous partners whose generous sharing and support enabled these co-creations. The use of the term in this thesis mirrors that of Shawn Wilson who understands it as a research paradigm employed "by anyone who chooses to follow its tenets" (2007, p.193). Even more significantly, it is a derivative of Eva Marie Garroute's phrase 'Radical Indigenism', which "dares to suggest, as its fundamental theoretical premise,

that American Indian peoples possess philosophies of knowledge that can be understood as rationalities – articulable, coherent logics for ordering and knowing the world" (Garroutte, 2006, p.170). It acknowledges that "the researcher work[s] within assumptions drawn from American Indian philosophies" (Garroutte, 2006, p.173). These come from original sources such as elders, are grounded within larger bodies of teaching, and are enacted within cultures and traditions. Garroutte (2006, p.195) states:

> If Radical Indigenism is to advance, and if it is to avoid exploiting Indian communities, it will require the participation of scholars who find ways to embed themselves in those communities as contributing members, who can look to traditional knowledge from a position of personal commitment, who can profoundly encounter the sacred stories and songs in the language that generated them, who contribute to conversations that the communities themselves understand to be important, and who make themselves answerable to the rules and conduct of inquiry that govern those communities.

The stories and performances co-created with Indigenous partners in this practice research have sought to fulfil these criteria, honour the cultures within which they were created, contribute to important community discussions, and be useful for the communities as a primary objective. It is in this context that the term indigenist is used in the thesis, and it is applied to values and practices that support the Indigenous struggle and advocate for the core principles it stands for. These include environmental protection, land guardianship, human rights, and a closer relationship between the human and the more-than-human. When respectfully applying animist ideas in work with Global North partners, care was taken to acknowledge, credit, and thank their sources, avoid spiritual and cultural appropriation, and seek an ethical translation into performance that can speak to Global North participants and audiences. Keeping this in mind and continuously working to uphold it, the practice research of this thesis constitutes an exploration of co-creative intercultural indigenist storytelling and performance.

Nonhuman and More-Than-Human

The term 'more-than-human', signifying the animistic understanding of everything that surrounds humans in a dynamic web of life, was popularised by David Abram in *The Spell of the Sensuous* "as a way to decenter the category of the human from its imagined apex and to re-awaken human perception to the magic of what he calls the landscape" (Riley, 2024, p.17) and is now used widely by (new) animist and posthumanist scholars. The term 'nonhuman' (or 'non-human') has also been widely used (Descola, 2014; Harvey, 2019; Viveiros De Castro, 1998; Yusoff, 2015). Some scholars use both terms interchangeably

(Panelli, 2010; Plumwood, 2007; Watson and Huntington, 2014). This thesis prefers the use of 'more-than-human' as it is a term that "highlights the primacy of relations over entities (including the 'human')" (O'Gorman and Gaynor, 2020, p.717). The only exception to this use of terminology is Chapter 7; at the time of the workshop in Seoul, I was (mostly influenced by Viveiros de Castro) using the term 'nonhuman'. It became an integral part of the workshop plan and Action prompts, and it is kept as such in the chapter. Additionally, the agential realist analytical lens of the exercises contested the inherent binary of the human-nonhuman, which resulted in switching to the term 'more-than-human' – one of the insights of the chapter.

Cosmovision

The term 'cosmovision' denotes the worldviews of particularly Amerindian or Latin American Indigenous cultures that are characterised by what Miguel Astor-Aguilera (2017) calls three key ontological foci:

> One, indigenous Latin American cosmovisions anchor on worldviews intertwined with cosmology; two, indigenous Latin American cosmovisions, pre-Columbian to the present, conceptualize persons, whether animal (human and non-human), plant, and inanimate objects in potential kin-like relationship to one another; three, local ecologies are interwoven within indigenous cosmovisions where each "interbeing person," animate and inanimate, organic and inorganic, participates in seen and unseen manner within relational communities composed of myriad entities.

Although each Latin American Indigenous culture differs in the particulars of its cosmovision, these ontological foci are shared by most; cosmovision as an overarching term is therefore an animist worldview intertwined with Indigenous cosmology and understanding of more-than-human entities, including what in Western theological terms would be called spirits, deities, or gods. Calling cosmovision a religion, however, is a Western categorisation (Astor-Aguilera, 2017); rather, cosmovision emphasises interconnected relations with the more-than-human not as belief in deities, but as lived reciprocity. The cosmovision aspects presented in this thesis are based specifically on the Kichwa, Shuar, and Mapuche Indigenous cultures.

Secular Sacred

This thesis uses the expression 'secular sacred' when articulating the translation of Indigenous cosmovision values into performance practices that evoke a relational approach to the more-than-human without appropriating spiritual forms. The expression therefore balances an ethical articulation

preventing an extractivist approach to Indigenous spirituality and the acknowledgment of what Bill Haney calls "a shift of consciousness that effects a blurring of boundaries between subject and object, self and other" (2007) as the incommensurable or sacred aspect of human–more-than-human relationships. It leans on Kim Knott's (2013) argument that the sacred is not an exclusively religious category, and that "those forging social identities in secular contexts /…/ mark as 'sacred' those occasions, persons, things, places, and principles that they value above all others, and that they see as set apart and inviolable" (Knott, 2013, p.160). The secular sacred suggested in this thesis is framed within indigenist values to avoid slipping into an unintentional sacralisation of what Sam Durrant (2022) designates the 'mythic nature of capitalism'. The expression is therefore a place-holder proposition for a way in which sacredness could be accepted within a Western performance context while discussions of how to reanimate (or 'counter-animate' (Durrant, 2022, p.50)) the world in Western theory are ongoing. The proposed expression of the secular sacred in the thesis builds up to Gregory Bateson's idea of the sacred as the overarching interconnected whole and as "that which can only be met with a sense of awe – and not tinkered with" (Charlton, 2008).

Western

The term 'Western', as it is used in this thesis, refers to the Eurocentric philosophical and ontological tradition, stemming from European Enlightenment, of a dualistic separation of mind and body. Based on Cartesian and Kantian points of view, this approach "separates our perceptions of the world (e.g. nature) from what constitutes it" (Smallwood, 2025, p.147). In the words of Andreas Weber, "Western thinking is based on the assumption that there is a sphere of reason – be it semiotic or mathematical – which is the only serious vantage point from which to sort the threads of the fabric of our cosmos" (2020, p.10). The primacy of the mind is accorded only to humans, who have agency and mastery over everything that is not human; the latter is therefore reduced to (dead) matter lacking thought, intelligence, and self-awareness. Val Plumwood argues that "reductive concepts that restrict even the vocabulary of mindfulness and moral sensibility to humans naturalize the treatment of non-humans as slaves or mere tools – making it seem natural that they are available for our unconstrained use and are reduced to that use (are 'resources')" (2014, p.445). It is therefore the separation of mind and body that leads to the separation of culture and nature and provides the theoretical basis for commoditisation and capitalism[2]

[2] This thesis also uses terms 'Global North' and 'Global South' to denote the uneven distribution of economic power, political influence, and historical privilege between wealthier industrialised countries and regions historically affected by colonialism, resource extraction, and continuing global inequalities. The term 'Western' is presented as a subset of the Global North.

as well as European colonialism and its extractivist and exploitative attitude, backed by the purely objective lens of a scientific approach. As Plumwood puts it, "the traditional scientific project of technological control is justified by continuing to think of humans as a special superior species, set apart and entitled to manipulate and commodify the earth and other species for their own exclusive benefit" (Plumwood, 2014, pp.446-447). A deeper critique and examination of Western thought lies beyond the scope of this thesis; rather, the use of the term is self-reflexive, as it presents the culture, upbringing, and education of the practice researcher as well as numerous scholars and theorists cited throughout the chapters. As such, the term is used to denote cultural and theoretical provenance. The thesis sets Western academic and research practices in contrast to Indigenous methodologies, and a Western worldview in contrast to that of animism. Rather than being "about material objects possessed by spirits," animism is "about constructing a culture on principles which enable reciprocity, and from a cosmology which integrates the experience of being part of a fecund collective" (Weber, 2020). The practice cases present an argument for an animist and relational approach to the more-than-human as a more environmentally and socially beneficial attitude, as well as the challenges and struggles accepting and understanding this proposition can present to a Western theatre-maker or facilitator. The thesis also acknowledges the developing Western version of animism, dubbed 'new animism', which remains somewhat unsure of "the animating possibilities of spirit or soul" (Braddock, 2017, p.8) and rather seeks an "animistic reformulation of our scientific understanding of the Earth" (Harding, 2014, p). In a similar attempt, underscored by the care to avoid appropriation, this thesis uses the term 'secular sacred', explained above.

Western Theatre Practices

This thesis also uses the term Western when referring to 'Western theatre practices', denoting the mostly European theatrical tradition and approaches, in which the practice researcher was trained and brought up. Starting with the Ancient Greeks, the historical Western theatre narrative taught in academies normally seeks its roots in religious ritual and winds its way through the theatre of the Roman era, the Medieval Church-regulated plays, the Renaissance shift to secular, professional theatre, 17th and 18th century courtly drama, 19th century realism, naturalism, and symbolism, early 20th century avantgarde movements, and 20th century approaches including theatre of the absurd, theatre of cruelty, epic theatre, poor theatre, to contemporary genres – to name just a few of the most visible chapters along the way. As Erika Fischer-Lichte puts it, "the history of European drama can be described as a succession of texts in which the most recent offers a response to those preceding it" (2002, p.7), oscillating between the

religious and the secular, the hermetic and the accessible, the realistic and the imaginative, the (pre)scripted and the improvis(ual)ised, the artlike and the lifelike, the real and the absurd. Richard Schechner further emphasises the primacy of the text in Western theatre, especially in its modern form since the Renaissance on, even during the times when modern artists rebelled against it: "however strong the counter-emphasis on theater-performance, drama-script still dominates western performances, even in the avantgarde" (1988, p.70). Some of the main characteristics of the Western theatre tradition therefore include the importance of text and language (including a canon of major playwrights), conflict as a driving force, realism and representation, the separation between performers and audience, and increasingly in modern times, professional theatre institutions. Nevertheless, theatre and performance remain closely intertwined with ritual (Schechner, 1988) and relationality. It is therefore not to contrast, but rather to juxtapose or even (re-)connect, that this thesis examines encounters between Western theatre practices with Indigenous methodologies that emphasise an animist, ritualistic, and relational worldview, the connection to land and place, oral traditions and embodied knowledge, community-centred participation, and knowledge transmission. In Practice Case 2, for example, Jacques Lecoq's (Western) performer training pedagogy is evoked precisely because its processes of identification and transposition make it possible to result in a performed relationality. These connections reveal that Western theatre practices contain possibilities for relational and ecological modes of performance as well as a shift in terms of how identity is fashioned and understood. Indeed, it is around the idea of identity that the connection remains the strongest. As Fischer-Lichte points out, "if both the rite of transition *and* the theatre represent a genre of cultural performance concerned with the creation, self-fashioning and transformation of identity, then this opens a whole new perspective on the study of the history of theatre" (2002, p.4). This perspective, the thesis argues, is crucial for Western theatre and performance to contribute to rethinking and reanimating the relationship between the human and the more-than-human and with that, to the understanding and navigating the complexity of the climate crisis.

Thesis Structure: Practice and Theory Trajectory

Prior to delving into the pilot projects and main practice cases (Chapters 4-7), this thesis situates the articulated praxis within a landscape of practice research (Chapter 2) and outlines the methodological approaches adopted in the practice (Chapter 3). Theoretical research context is included in individual practice case chapters.

Chapter 2 – Practice Review reviews the three strands of praxis – participation/ethics, storytelling, and movement practices – and situates them in relation to practices of applied theatre, ecosomatics, and intercultural performance. The ethical challenges of working across Indigenous, Global South and Global North contexts are highlighted through experiences of practitioners and practice researchers working interculturally, questioning and learning from the pitfalls and emergent insights of such collaborations. Storytelling is explored as a form of ecological sense-making and community affirmation. Mapped examples combine local cultural, historical, and sociopolitical contexts with co-creative intercultural dramaturgy. They also address questions of representation of the Other in the form not only of a different human culture but also of the more-than-human. Movement practices are framed as ecosomatic pathways and situated within a network of practitioners relating to the environment. The thesis contribution of the indigenist value framework encompasses all three strands, enabling a relational ethics, storytelling that includes the more-than-human, and the unlocking of inherent relational qualities of existing movement practices.

Chapter 3 – Methodology lays out the methodological framework for the thesis. It acknowledges Indigenous methodologies present in co-creation with Indigenous partners, leading to the articulation of the indigenist value system. This serves as an ethical compass as well as a performance methodology for this practice research. The latter is presented as an iterative, non-linear process that resonates both with Indigenous epistemologies such as the Kichwa life spiral and Western hermeneutic spirals. Community-based theatre is given as the prevailing format of performance, specifically in its celebratory and dialogue-affirming aspects. Risks of appropriation and power imbalance are once more acknowledged, and improvisatory co-creation is emphasised as a responsive and adaptive methodology for avoiding pitfalls and narrating ecological and cultural resilience. Fundamentally, the methodology of this thesis foregrounds ethical co-creation and participation within an indigenist and relational framework that enables embodied ecological sense-making with communities and participants.

Chapter 4 – Constructing a Relational Ethics: *DocuHaiku 0* and *The Waterfall of San Luis* lays the necessary groundwork for investigating indigenist approaches to storytelling about communities and their environments. It establishes a personal ethos of co-creation for the European practice researcher working and co-creating with Indigenous and Global South partners. The chapter analyses two pilot projects that featured Indigenous partners in Ecuador: the digital artefact *DocuHaiku 0*, a result of online conversations with Kichwa partner Manuel Guatemal, and the community-based theatre show *The Waterfall of San Luis* (original title: *La cascada de San Luis*), co-created with the Shuar community of San Luis by the southern

city of Gualaquiza. Both projects are categorised as pilot due to the limitations in which they took place. *DocuHaiku 0* was a result of the constraints of travel and mobility due to the Covid-19 pandemic, which also partially impacted the production of the *The Waterfall of San Luis.* Additionally, the duration of the process of co-creating the latter was significantly restricted within the logistical and organisational parameters of the producing partner, Dramatic Adventure Theatre company. Drawing on the theories of dialogical performance and care ethics by Dwight Conquergood and James Thompson, respectively, the analysis reflects on the ethical pitfalls and challenges that occurred in the pilot projects. Expected issues and pre-prepared solutions were contested by the practical reality of the complex networks of local sociopolitical context, intentions and expectations of the parties involved, and the multifaceted effects of the climate crisis. The chapter builds on Conquergood's and Thompson's ethical models by proposing that only an experiential and embodied relationality can produce a fully adaptive and responsive framework for ethical co-creation. Addressing Research Questions 1 and 1a, this positions co-creation as an emergent, continuously balancing relational process grounded in reciprocity.

Chapter 5 – *Aillaquillén – The Island of Nine Moons*: Cosmovision and Ritual in Performance applies the relational ethics presented in Chapter 4 to address Research Question 2 and explore ethical ways to integrate animist sensibilities present in Indigenous cosmovision with Western performance practices. This is done to reimagine and perform the relationship between the human and the more-than-human. Work with Mapuche partner Alejandra Aillapan Huiriqueo in Chile led to the articulation of an indigenist set of values – permission, respect, interconnectedness, reciprocity, and gratitude – shared in cosmovision through ritual. The chapter proposes that the indigenist value set provides a framework, or *scaffolding,* for ethical co-creation and the integration of cosmovision into performance as well for relating to the more-than-human. Drawing on Ronald L. Grimes' theory of ritual as embodied, condensed and prescribed enactment, the analysis of the community-based theatre show *Aillaquillén – The Island of Nine Moons* (original title: *Aillaquillén – La isla de nueve lunas*) shows how the overlap of ritual and theatre becomes the vessel for an ethically accountable translation of the spiritual aspects of cosmovision into performance. The performance of *Aillaquillén*, based on a Mapuche legend, presented a relational approach to the more-than-human within an indigenist value scaffolding and employed storytelling as a symbolic act of contestation of imposed patterns of hegemonic culture. The chapter argues that in the hybrid space of performance and ritualising action cosmovision can be translated back again into an expression of a secular sacred within the context of animism, presented through the writings of Andreas Weber.

Chapter 6 – *Asul Asul / Nick of Time*: Indigenist Values, Movement Practices and Agential Realism investigates the application of the indigenist value-set articulated in Chapter 5 as a performance methodology in a non-Indigenous Global North context. The practice case is set in Seoul, South Korea, where studio experimentation with actors resulted in the showcase of a workshop entitled *Asul Asul / Nick of Time* (original title: *아슬아슬 / Nick of Time*). The chapter suggests movement practices as a shared performance language providing entry into relationality without the underlying support of a shared cosmovision. Drawing on movement practice inspired by the actor training pedagogy of Jacques Lecoq, animist sensibilities are explored by unlocking the inherent relational qualities of movement through embodied identification and transposition of the essence of the Other into performance. Adapting to the specific context of a globalised and manmade environment, the chapter proposes adding a new materialist inflection to animism by drawing on Karen Barad's theory of agential realism. A performative understanding of matter within the indigenist value framework enables a relational understanding of the manmade more-than-human that foregrounds ethical and ecological accountability. Addressing Research Questions 2a and 2b, the analysis proposes movement practices and a combined approach of animist / new materialist sensibilities as possibilities for expressing the secular sacred of the relationship between the human and the more-than-human on a Global North stage.

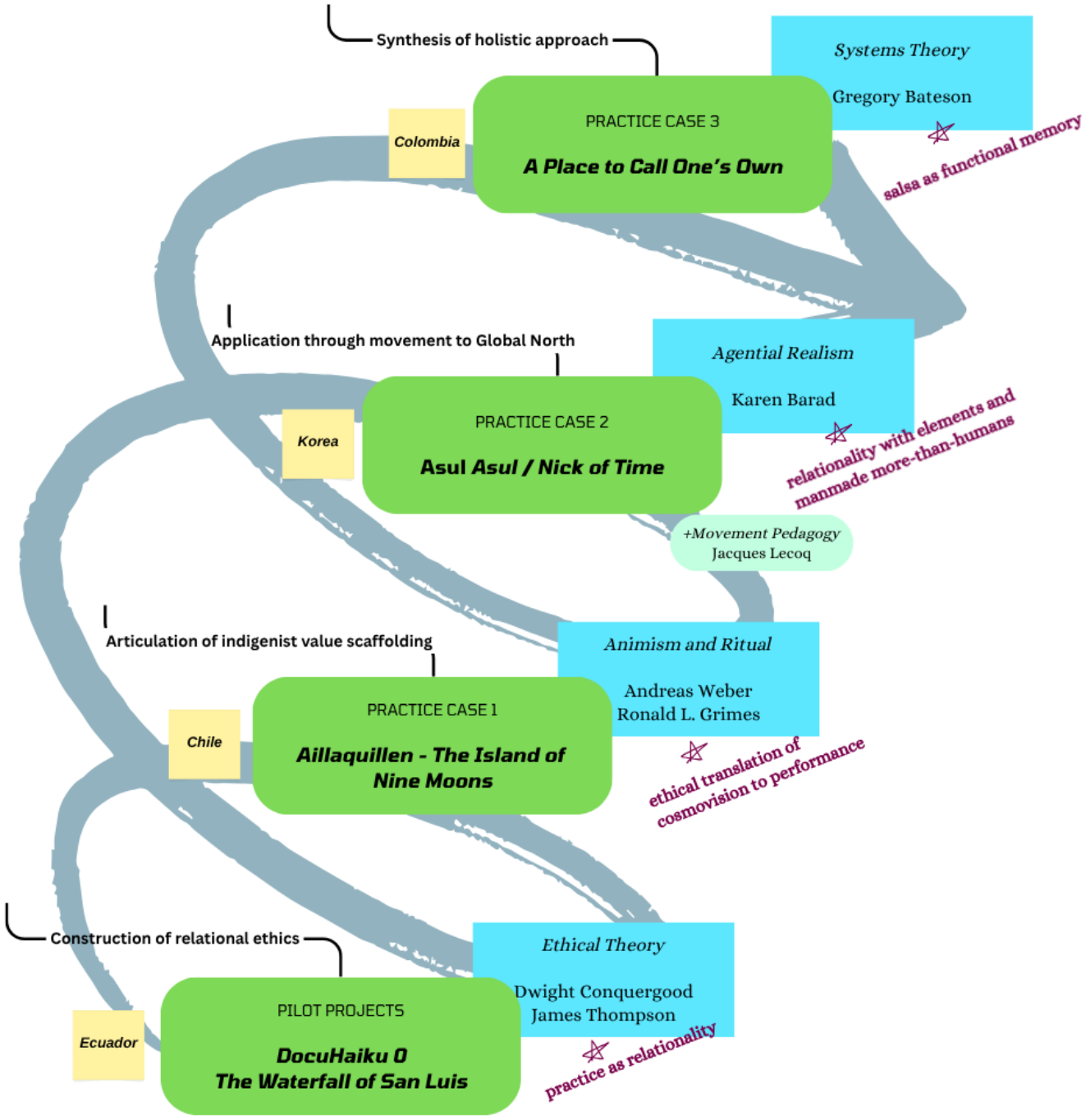
Chapter 7 – *A Place to Call One's Own*: Systems Theory as a Holistic Approach to Co-Creation presents the final practice case in Cali, Colombia, that encompasses elements from all previous cases. It further develops the Chapter 6 proposal of movement practice as an ecosomatic strategy of relating to the land and environment by mobilising salsa dancing skills of the performers from the district of Aguablanca, resulting in the community-based theatre show *A Place to Call One's Own* (original title: *Donde meter la cabeza*). The chapter brings together the insights gathered in Ecuador, Chile, and Korea, to suggest a holistic approach to intercultural co-creation of stories about the relationship between communities and their environments. To that effect it draws on Gregory Bateson's systems theory as a systemic approach to relationality that is complementary to the individual subjectivity of animism and agentive matter of new materialism. The analysis proposes salsa dancing as the functional memory of interacting systems as well as a grounding ecosomatic practice that embodies the performers' relation to the neighbourhood, land, history, and the more-than-human. Systemic learning of ascending levels is progressively unlocked as the community reaches beyond the self to the systems interacting with it, particularly the environment and its more-than-human networks. Addressing Research Question 3, the chapter suggests this type of co-creation and aesthetic engagement, rooted in an indigenist value scaffolding, opens pathways towards

integration of different human and more-than-human networks, thus fostering ecological sense-making and navigating the complexity of the climate crisis.

Chapter 8 – Conclusion reviews how co-created performance, guided by indigenist values and community participation, can articulate and reimagine stories about the human–more-than-human relationships in the context of the climate crisis. It suggests a list of key guiding processes for intercultural climate crisis-related community co-creation, gathered from the insights of this practice research. It highlights the synthesis of relational ethics and practice research methodology as well as the indigenist value framework enabling environmental performance grounded in relationality and reciprocity as the key contributions of this thesis. The term 'relational ethics' is used in this thesis in a distinct although fundamentally related way to its use in the subfields of the ethics of healthcare and nursing (Bergum and Dossetor, 2020; Noddings, 2013). This practice research therefore understands relational ethics as an approach that replaces the "detached model of the viewer observer /…/ with the model of the active and practical relation to the entity" (Coeckelbergh, 2018, p.98). Relational ethics is understood as an active, lived and embodied practice. Summarising the main articulations and developments within the three strands of praxis, Chapter 8 concludes with a recognition of performance's contribution to navigating the climate crisis and adds an appeal to the urgency of producing work that enables us to rethink the relationship between the human and the more-than-human.

Diagram 1 provides a visualisation of the main points of the practice and theory trajectory recounted above. The written component aims to interweave the story of the practice and the narrative of the research. Introductions, project backgrounds, and explorations of context for each of the practice cases are followed by reflections and analyses of the process, interlaced with research context and video excerpts from the practice, to be experienced (by clicking the link) in that particular place and moment before continuing reading.

Diagram 1 Practice and Theory Trajectory



2 Practice Review

Introduction

The practice in this thesis centres on the co-creation of theatre performances. This process is condensed into three strands of the research praxis: participation/ethics, storytelling, and movement practices. These situate the praxis amidst a varied and heterogeneous map of practice researchers and practitioners who have worked and reflected upon at least one of the three strands. Applied theatre practitioners pay close attention to the ethics of the work and the participation aspects as well as storytelling. Facilitators and playwrights working with communities or research/workshop groups explore diverse ways of co-creating their stories. Ecosomatic and movement practitioners look for physical ways to entangle with the environment and follow Indigenous approaches to kinship between the human and the more-than-human. To this varied and rich body of work, this thesis contributes an indigenist value-based framework that integrates the three praxis strands, foregrounding relational ethics and ecological engagement in diverse contexts.

Each praxis strand is briefly explained then mapped out through selected examples of related practices, situating the shared as well as the unique aspects of this practice research.

Participation/Ethics

The two pilot projects and Practice Case 1 (see Diagram 1) involved co-creation with Indigenous partners – Kichwa, Shuar and Mapuche, respectively. Practice Case 3 in Colombia happened in a socially marginalised district of the city of Cali, with most of the performers representing an Afro-Colombian minority. In Practice Case 2 in Korea, despite the flattening influences of globalism in the Global North, the work was nevertheless meaningfully intercultural. Managing these dynamics and mitigating the risks of cultural appropriation and power imbalance represents an important part of this praxis strand. Although present in all practice research cases, it is particularly highlighted in Chapter 4, which investigates how to avoid or process damaging or modern-colonialist models of relationships such as Dwight Conquergood's (2013) Enthusiast's Infatuation or Curator's Exhibition, or the harmful image of the 'Ecological Indian' (Däwes and Maufort, 2014). Through the learning, development, and application of a relational ethics and an indigenist value system, this praxis strand primarily addresses RQ1 and RQ1a. The

highlighted examples presented below map out a landscape of ethical co-creation, which increases in complexity, from working within one's own culture to co-creating interculturally in situations of potentially extreme power imbalances.

Facilitation is challenging, even if the facilitator belongs to the culture of the participants or of the place where the work is happening. Renowned applied theatre practitioner and scholar Peter O'Connor from the University of Auckland worked with children in Christchurch after a devastating earthquake in 2010, using theatre and storytelling to confront the consequences of a natural disaster that killed a number of people and caused billions of dollars in damage. Not seeking visible material change but the "ability to startle us back into feeling that wonderment of feeling alive, of creating beauty amidst the ugliness of the disaster" (2015, p.196), he co-created with the participating children a performance workshop called *Teaspoon of Light*. Although it became an internationally acclaimed example of the impact of applied theatre, he also received criticism for not being a local and not having shared in the traumatic experience: "I hadn't lived through the earthquakes. I did not know what had happened. My motivation for coming to Christchurch was suspected. The criticism stung very deeply, and at a personal level, because it challenged the intentionality of the work, and therefore my own integrity" (O'Connor, 2015, p.198). Absence of lived experience within the community's specific trauma and history presents a challenge for the facilitator joining a project.

The ethical challenges become even more complex when work and practice bridge diverse cultures, even if these are situated in the same country. Peruvian director and lecturer Rodrigo Benza Guerra researches and practices interculturality, applied theatre, and theatre of the Andes. As a white, upper middle class man from Lima, "part of the dominant culture in my country" (2015, p.150), Benza Guerra reflected honestly and openly about working with Peruvian Indigenous and mestizo students in 2006 and 2007, overcoming unconscious bias. He explored the unfinished nature of interculturality, which "produces changes in all involved, including the teacher artist or the team that is leading the experience" (2015, p.165). Having found the need to adapt his initial objectives, he came out of the experience importantly changed in ways he was not expecting:

> Why do I go back to work in the Amazon? I go back because I learn about it, about its people and with them (both native and mestizo), about its complexities and its contradictions. I learn about myself, about my complexities and my contradictions. I learn that I am the heir of a cultural tradition, that I'm part of the dominant society of my country. I learn that I'm a city boy. I learn about power relations, about poverty, about discrimination, about interculturality, about opportunities. /…/ I learn that the noble savage doesn't exist; that the indigenous is not good just

> for being indigenous, and white, my white, is not a colonizer just for being white. I learn that conflict is not bad, but is an important part of life. I learn about tolerance and intolerance. I learn to give, to receive, to shut my mouth. I learn to dialogue (Benza Guerra, 2015, p.168).

Practitioners and applied theatre scholars from the Global North often need to confront ethical challenges working in Global South communities. *Critical Ethnography* author and Professor at Northwestern University in Chicago D. Soyini Madison lived and worked in Ghana at the turn of the millennium. She examined topics of political economy with traditional Indigenous performance tactics for the purposes of "honor[ing] the work of indigenous human rights activists, /…/ represent[ing] the courage and intelligence of Ghanaians themselves, /…/ and clarify[ing] the impact of corporate globalization on poverty and development in the global South" (2006, p.400). She reflected on the facilitator-practitioner's challenge of bringing their own cultural (and potentially globalising) point of view to the work: "If I do this I risk the common charge of navel gazing, making myself the subject, telling my story at the expense of the Other. If I do not, I risk the charge of not making my own biases clear—of being unreflexive, of false objectivity" (Madison, 2006, p.402). Facilitating always represents a balancing act between ethical interculturality and imposition of own culture.

Additional challenges present themselves when working interculturally with young people. Melbourne performing arts company Snuff Puppets worked with Indigenous actor and playwright Tony Briggs and University of Melbourne researchers on a project entitled Risky Business (2002-2005) to bring performing arts to Indigenous students at Barak College. The team faced challenges in terms of agency, intercultural understanding, and motivation. "The puppeteers wanted the young people to take charge, to develop ideas and accept responsibility for making puppets. /…/ Instead, throughout the two weeks, they found it was 'a struggle to get anything'" (Donelan and O'Brien, 2006, p.11). Similar challenges arose in the pilot practice projects of this thesis, working with young performers in Ecuador, reflected upon in Chapter 4. The lesson learned for the Snuff Puppet team as well as this practice research was one of "letting go of our expectations of what the outcome might be" (2006, p.12). Despite the challenges, the outcome was considered a success, and the huge marionettes constructed and used in the performance "allowed the young participants to communicate the spirituality that is inherent in their Dreaming" (Donelan and O'Brien, 2006, p.12). With younger participants particularly, a facilitator often needs to be a motivator as well.

It is important to mention the widespread use of Augusto Boal's Forum Theatre technique. To name just a few intercultural examples: applied theatre scholar and practitioner James Thompson (2003) worked with companies using Forum Theatre in Burkina Faso. Practitioner and scholar aylwyn walsh (walsh et al.,

2023) implemented Forum Theatre in rural villages in Chiapas, Mexico, around the issues of conflict and power differences in eco-tourism development. A collaborative research partnership of Indigenous and Settler scholars in Canada by Julian Robbins et al. (2017) used Forum Theatre to study the impact of the arts on the wellbeing of Indigenous Youth. Another intercultural partnership between Angelo Miramonti et al. (2025) used Forum Theatre in Bolivia to explore socio-environmental issues, especially wildfires. As explained in more detail in the Methodology chapter, while acknowledging the strong influence of Boal particularly in Latin America, this practice research uses a celebratory approach to community-based theatre, employing a categorisation proposed by Prendergast and Saxon (2009). This project searches not to address conflict through 'spectactor' participation but to express celebratory cohesiveness through the relationship with the more-than-human.

This practice research situates itself among the examples given above: the experiences of an outsider working with Global South and/or Indigenous communities, a motivator with young performers or children, and a cultural gymnast balancing 'complexities, contradictions, and myself', are all part of the narrative of the practice case chapters. To this body of work this thesis contributes the development and application of a relational ethics and a clearly defined indigenist value-set methodology. This methodology expresses itself not only in performance and movement practices, but also in the very dynamics of the intercultural and international relationships embedded in this praxis. Research Questions 1 and 1a directly address the ethical challenges of working with intercultural Indigenous partners and are investigated through a deeper reflection and analysis of the pilot projects in Chapter 4.

Storytelling

Throughout the practice cases in this thesis, storytelling is used as a mode of ecological sense-making. Community-based theatre stories narrate the communities' relationships to their environments, histories, and struggles against hegemonic pressures or social and climate injustices. Most presented stories include a celebratory aspect that affirms the local culture, expresses resilience and resistance, and reminds the community as well as a wider audience of the importance of relating to the land and the more-than-human. In a more individualistic and globalised context in Practice Case 2 in South Korea, storytelling serves as a method of ecological end ethical engagement with the more-than-human. By including an indigenist methodology, this praxis strand addresses RQ2 and RQ3 and emphasises both the more widely applicable framework that enables relational narratives as well as the importance of specific localities and contexts for the ultimate goal of navigating the complexity of the climate crisis.

Facilitators-playwrights who work with communities draw on historical and contextual research as well as discussions, qualitative methods, and interviews. The proposed drafts can then be amended and edited further through a co-creation process with the community in the rehearsal room. Swedish theatre makers Lena Östergren and Eva Helleberg worked in 2003 with a South Samic community in the Björkevatn region of Sweden on *Vattufall,* a play about the intrusion of a major hydroelectric project into Indigenous land that heavily impacted the lives of the inhabitants there. Lena Östergren stepped into the role of the playwright for the project and "conducted detailed research. /…/ She read old local papers, held interviews and spoke at length with the local people" (Landvik, 2005, p.4). The result of research and discussions can then be developed further through live input from the participants themselves: "Then the scenes she wrote were workshopped, revised and developed in close collaboration with a local cast of 15 actors and musicians ranging in age from 12 to 72. Some of the adult and elderly participants remembered a lot of stories from the 1950s and 1960s" (Landvik, 2005, p.4). Community storytelling is an immersive experience that requires grounding each decision within the context of the community's needs and narrative.

A non-Indigenous playwright or facilitator working with Indigenous topics faces questions of how to ethically speak through the mouths of Indigenous characters or express themes avoiding (even unintentional) patterns of cultural appropriation, harmful stereotyping, or an extractivist approach. Non-Indigenous French-Canadian playwright Chantal Bilodeau uses a multi-layered approach to address these challenges. In her play *Sila* (2015), set on the Baffin Island in the territory of Nunavut in the Canadian Arctic, she includes Indigenous (Inuk) and non-Indigenous (Canadian and Quebecois) characters, as well as animals (polar bears), and even a spirit – Nuliajuk, the Inuk Goddess of the Ocean and the Underworld. Bilodeau emphasizes the importance of in-person and embodied experience:

> After doing research at home and setting up some meetings, I left on a three-week trip to Baffin Island. I came back with my views completely changed. I had set out with the idea of writing what we think of as the traditional play form: one narrative, one point of view, one issue being addressed. By the time I came back, I knew that structure wasn't adequate because what I encountered was so much more complex and interwoven than I expected (Oreskes et al., 2014, p.22).

The play "negotiates the detriments of climate change in the arctic community, documenting how ecological activists' plans and projects are stifled by clashing political and economic agendas" (Shazly Elshazly, 2024, pp.75-76). This is contrasted with the idea of *sila*, an Inuit concept meaning the spirit of the air, a mystic power that permeates all existence (Leduc, 2007, p.237). It implies an ancient connection

between all beings, “when strange powers were shared among animals, people, and the land, when all creatures spoke the same tongue and traded skins with ease” (Bilodeau, 2015, p.19) – a line spoken by the adult polar bear character named MAMA, making “relationality the bylaw of existence” (Shazly Elshazly, 2024, p.78). As this thesis shows, reality is often much more complex than expectations; acknowledging interconnectedness and adopting relational approaches are constructive ways of mitigating the risk of misrepresentation.

Taiwanese theatre director and researcher Wan-Jun Wang suggests that applied theatre praxes draw on local culture and context, raise awareness of environmental protection, present different voices and concerns of communities, include traditional aesthetics and ethics, and provide healing and community-building opportunities for areas affected by multiplying (natural) disasters (Wang, 2023, p.37). She reflects on the Filipino musical *Rak of Aegis*, written in 2014 by Liza Magtoto using songs of the popular eponymous rock group, based on interviews and fieldwork in the flood-affected communities in Manila (Wang, 2023, pp.21-22). Another example is the play *See You Again, Kobayashi Village*, written in 2015 by Wang herself, responding to the fallout of Typhoon Morakot in 2009 in Taiwan. Wang did ethnographic research with community members, gathering “stories from the villagers about their past daily life, exchanging work during harvest time to help each other, and their tribal female ritual in the middle of January in the Lunar calendar for women to drink and dance to their hearts’ content” (Wang, 2023, p.30). The show was performed by university students for the community, whose residents “shed tears together with the cast while watching the show, and they cooked two roundtables of delicious local food to thank the performing team” (Wang, 2023, p.33). Community-based storytelling requires a personal investment of the facilitators and storytellers; the practice research in this thesis operates within the context of a relational ethics that inevitably leads to strong bonds between co-creators.

Critic, scholar, and writer Shonni Enelow participated in The Ecocide Project (2010-2011), a venture employing the work process called Research Theatre, developed by Una Chaudhuri and Fritz Ertl. The project explored ecologically self-destructive impulses of human beings as a species, and asked the question “is it possible to rethink how we interact with the rest of the planet, and to re-direct our ecocidal ways towards another kind of engagement?” (Chaudhuri and Enelow, 2014, p.44). It explored forms of ‘a truly ecological theatre’ that would have to be “a non-human – or at least a non-anthropocentric – theatre” (2014, p.45). The creative result of the project was a one-act play titled *Carla and Lewis*, written by Enelow, whose first impulse was the idea that “it had to be the opposite of earthy, which to me meant irony, sharpness, even archness: anti-Nature” (2014, p.75). However, the workshops with actors

suggested “something else, something less human than irony /…/: a physical and psychic deterritorialization that we began to call ‘becoming-landscape’” (Chaudhuri and Enelow, 2014, p.75), based on the Deleuzean notion of becoming. Enelow tried to incorporate “the landscape, including both the here and now and the there and elsewhere, /…/ the conceptual challenge of representing climate change /…/, the aesthetic and ethic challenge of ‘can the (non-human and human) subaltern(s) speak?’ /…/, [and the] Evolutionary character” (2014, p.78). The practical demands of the production itself presented a challenge and Enelow was never “wholly satisfied with the way that the play narrativized our critical questions” (2014, p.78). The challenge of relating to and narrating the more-than-human on stage is a significant one. This thesis suggests the indigenist value framework as a scaffolding for these types of exchanges.

There is a growing global list of playwrights and theatre-makers engaging with environmental and climate topics in the tradition of Western theatre formats. In the anglophone section, the list includes well-known theatre names such as Charles Mee and Stef Smith, Indigenous playwrights Marie Clements and Yvette Nolan, big productions such as *Kyoto* (2024)*, Greenland* (2011)*,* and *Hadestown* (2016), and a host of plays, musicals, operas, and puppet shows. As authored original plays destined for mostly institutional theatre circuits, the majority of these fall beyond the scope of this thesis. A review of this material also suggests that few plays (except those written by Indigenous playwrights) focus on engaging with the more-than-human in the ways presented in this practice research. The contribution of this thesis lies in the articulation of a form of relational ethics embedded in the co-creation process as well as the narrative itself, functioning within the scaffolding of indigenist values that allows for environmental storytelling grounded in relationality towards the more-than-human.

The storytelling praxis strand of this thesis shares elements with the highlighted examples but presents a novel synthesis of relational ethics and practice research methodologies leading to a rare combination of environmental, celebratory community-based, and indigenist co-creation. As in the work of Östergren and Helleberg, this research often centres on themes of water yet relates to it as a more-than-human being influencing human lives in more than just material ways. As in the work of Bilodeau, this research underlines the importance of the embodied experience to address ethical questions of representation but applies the insights locally to intercultural community-based performance. As in the work of Enelow and Chaudhuri, Practice Case 3 presents studio experimentation on how to interact with the more-than-human but approaches it with animist/new materialist sensibilities coupled with an episodic structure and Lecoq-inspired movement, to tackle the challenge of performing the complexity of the climate crisis.

Movement Practices

A key part of this practice research looks at how to mobilise existing performance skills within a community (RQ2b) to explore a relational approach to its relationship with the environment. This praxis strand investigates applying locally embedded movement practices – Western performer training and salsa dancing – in an ecosomatic way in order to relate to the land and the environment. Movement is presented as an entry into relationality and a possible means of coding systemic communal memory, becoming a methodological pathway for enacting indigenist values in performance.

With the indigenist value-set approach, this thesis maps itself onto a plane of related systems or lists of exercises, some of which, like Sto:lo scholar Jo-Ann Archibald's (2012) storytelling principles, the Honorable Harvest instructions of Potawatomi botanist Robin Wall Kimmerer (2013), or Lakota scholar and practitioner Tria Blu Wakpa's seven decolonizing possibilities (2024), are of direct Indigenous origin. Indigenous rituals and dances also include movement practices that by their nature "challenge settler-capitalist logics of anthropocentrism and Cartesian dualism by honoring firstly, more-than-human relatives, such as non-human animals, air, water, land, and the cosmos, and secondly, bodies and bodily movements as vital sources of knowledge" (Blu Wakpa, 2024, p.37). They can be reinterpreted in a contemporary way by Indigenous practitioners such as Daystar (Rosalie Jones), "recognized as the founder of the first Native contemporary dance company" (Blu Wakpa, 2024, p.43) on Turtle Island. From a Western perspective, they can be understood as "longstanding and dynamic 'ecosomatic' and decolonial practice[s]" (Blu Wakpa, 2024, p.47).

Non-Indigenous movement practitioners draw upon Indigenous cosmovision as well as the concepts of new animism and new materialism to bring attention to "one's position within settler colonialism /…/ [and] our place in the current geological epoch" (Riley, 2024). Movement practitioners and dancers are developing embodied and performative practices of relating to the more-than-human. The recent collection of essays *Geographies of Us* (2024) edited by Sondra Fraleigh and Shannon Rose Riley includes reflections on a variety of practices, such as Christine Bellerose's Seven Somadance Practices, Nathalie Guillaume's Visualising and Walking the Labyrinth grounding practices, the pluriversal practice approaches of Daniel Ìgbín'bí Coleman, butoh-inspired practices by Lani Weissbach, Fei Shi's storywork practice, Alison East's Skinbody, and Sondra Fraleigh's enworlding place dances, among others. Established movement practices engaging with the more-than-human, offered as workshops or performances, include Helen Poynor's (2021) Walk of Life, Simon Whitehead's (2021) locator scores, Thomas Goodwin and Katye Coe's Kinship Workshop (n.d.), Hayley Matthews' wild dances (Sanger, 2024),

Jamie McHugh's (2021) Somatic Expression, Sandra Reeve's (2024) Ecological Body workshop (part of her Move Into Life programme), Lindsay Gilmour's (2021) eco-application of Janet Adler's Discipline of Authentic Movement, Annette Arlander's meeting with trees (2022), and many more. Although not all the practitioners employ it, ecosomatics is often used as an umbrella term to emphasise the focus of these movement practices on relations with non-human or more-than-human others.

Interdisciplinary artist and scholar Shannon Rose Riley links ecosomatics to Indigenous knowledges as well as material feminisms of Jane Bennett and Karen Barad. She includes Western scientific or philosophical approaches to the wholesome ecologies of the human and more-than-human. One of her movement practices, Breathing with Trees, asks how to engage critically with "developing awareness of our intra-relation with the more-than-human and all of vibrant materiality; learning the histories of the land one is engaging with; and situating the work firmly within the context of the Anthropocene" (2024, p.22). Within the practice, Riley trades breath with trees and practices 'being-with' them, employing the concept from Michael Marder's 'philosophy of vegetal life'. Riley understands bringing attention to the more-than-human on a daily basis, developing critical awareness of the land one occupies, and "enacting ecosomatic practices toward healing and imagining alternative pasts, presents, and futures" (2024, p.25) as the three key components in developing ecosomatic awareness. This then results in "an invitation to shift one's worldview to something more horizontal, to something more entangled and intra-active" (Riley, 2024, p.27). Some practices are less directly movement-based: artist-scholar Polly Hudson (2024) has created a manifesto for gardening as an ecosomatic practice after having experienced a connection to the soil working on her allotment during the Covid pandemic. The first pilot project in this thesis, the digital artefact *DocuHaiku 0*, establishes a dialogue between a non-Indigenous and an Indigenous partner through the practice of land cultivation and gardening.

In contrast to the *in situ* nature of these practices, the movement practices used in this thesis happen within the framework of a theatrical stage. It is important to note that these practices employ technical vocabularies and codified movement that is not necessarily part of the transnationally available somatic practices and canon. There is a clear connection and some overlap with the work of the practitioners described in this section, particularly when the indigenist value set is employed as a performance and movement methodology. The performers in Practice Case 2 in South Korea individually explored movement and behavioural scores as workshop exercises that overlap with some of the somatic practices listed above. Additionally, the ecological sense-making potential of the Lecoq performer training pedagogy is articulated by Michael Pearce (2024) and tested in this thesis. Nevertheless, neither

performer training nor salsa dance training are practices that fall within an international ecosomatic framework. When using the term, this thesis suggests that the presented types of codified movement *may function ecosomatically* in the sense that they allow one to relate to place and the more-than-human, even when performed on a theatrical stage, by considering the embodied knowledge already embedded in communities and supporting it with a framework of indigenist values. This can open a productive space for dialogue between codified performance vocabularies and specific ecosomatic approaches. What is more, this thesis shares the idea of developing ecosomatic awareness but does so through the use of the indigenist value scaffolding.

Dancer and scholar Elise Nuding warns that any ecosomatic approach must be wary of "uncritically wield[ing] narratives around the inclusive and universal value of somatics because there is greater recognition of human diversity" (2021, p.35). Equally, according to Nuding, ecosomatics shouldn't "unquestioningly advocate for somatics' value related to eco-consciousness based on discursive potential towards entanglement, posthumanism and re-configured environmental ethics," since the field cannot "so easily extract itself from its modern-colonial contexts, nor should it attempt to do so" (2021, pp.36). For example, the legitimization of somatics by scientific discourse (also present in discourses on animism (Harding, 2014; Conty, 2021)) ties it to "epistemologies based on universal reason, certainty and authority – knowledge systems exemplifying the modern-colonial project" (Nuding, 2021, p.32). It can likewise stray into a universal experience of body, in which "otherness has no place and differentiation of embodied experience arising from ethnicity, racialization, biological sex, gender, sexuality and (dis)ability is flattened out" (Nuding, 2021, p.32). Nuding and other ecosomatic practitioners therefore adopt Donna Haraway's concept of 'staying with the trouble' as a guiding principle, in which "addressing trouble is not about clearing away past and present mess to create safe, clean futures" (Nuding, 2021, p.36). Instead, ecosomatics should "take seriously Anna Tsing's provocation to 'tell terrible stories'" (Riley, 2024, p.23) and stay with the trouble – open and attentive to "feral ecologies that have been encouraged by human-built infrastructures, but which have developed and spread beyond human control" (Tsing, 2021, cited in Riley, 2024, p.23).

The practice research in this thesis employs the practices of the co-creators and communities involved, employing them in a way that is ecosomatically oriented. This allows for a focus on working with *what is there*, therefore avoiding cultural appropriation. At the same time, it enables a refreshing or re-orientation of existing practices towards the relationality that is at the centre of cosmovision and an animist approach to the more-than-human.

Conclusion

This thesis' three-pronged praxis of participation/ethics, storytelling, and movement practices finds its position within or alongside the networks of selected practitioners shown above. It overlaps or shares similarities with each of them while adding its specificity and contribution through the indigenist value-based approach, the celebratory community-based format focusing on the more-than-human, and the mobilisation of local performance practices as ecosomatic pathways to relating to the environment on stage. Additionally, it is the heterogeneous combining of the Indigenous and non-Indigenous, Global North and Global South, rural and urban, (co-)writing and (co-)directing, community storytelling and performance practices, that creates a conducive assemblage for embracing the "messy ways responsibility, agency and action interact with, and complicate, research and practice with diverse communities" (Turner-King and Smith, 2024, p.239). It represents a way of staying with the trouble, of finding oneself in "unexpected collaborations and combinations, in hot compost piles" (Haraway, 2016, p.4), with the objective of navigating the complexity of environmental and climate issues, and rejecting what Haraway names two impatient responses to the horrors of the Anthropocene and the Capitalocene: the faith in technofixes on the one side, and the position that the game is over on the other (2016). Instead, this thesis exemplifies an approach that focuses on relational ethics and indigenist values, emphasising interconnectedness and reciprocity as the fundamental bases for environmentally beneficial attitudes. It mobilises embodied, community-based performance as a means of cultivating ecological awareness and resilience in the face of the climate crisis.

3 Methodology

Introduction

In pursuit of understanding the co-creation of climate crisis-related storytelling, I engaged my own practice as a theatre director. As a practitioner, I have so far tended to focus on staging contemporary plays or classics with professional theatres or ensembles in mostly institutional settings. The practice research of this thesis centres around applied theatre with non-professional communities; my professional experience and the community-based theatre context have informed and enriched each other. I brought my training and ways of working to the practice cases presented here, while the consequence of this work has been not only an improvement and development of those methods, but a shift of consciousness discussed in Chapter 4, which has also influenced the rest of my practice.

The three South American in-person practice cases in this thesis – the pilot project *The Waterfall of San Luis* in Ecuador, *Aillaquillén – The Island of Nine Moons* in Chile, and *A Place to Call One's Own* in Colombia – are community-based theatre performances. The practice case in South Korea, *Asul Asul / Nick of Time*, is a showcase presentation of a workshop (see Table 1 and Diagram 1). The co-creation and facilitation of the practice research cases constituted the articulation and employment of an indigenist value-set methodology alongside practice research methodologies of applied theatre, improvisatory co-creation, and studio experimentation. The pilot project *DocuHaiku 0* is a digital artefact developed and edited through online exchanges and basic filmmaking methods.

Indigenous and Indigenist Methodologies

Both pilot practice projects, *DocuHaiku 0* and *The Waterfall of San Luis* as well as Practice Case 1, *Aillaquillén – The Island of Nine Moons,* were co-created with Indigenous partners, in Ecuador (Kichwa and Shuar) and Chile (Mapuche), respectively. This work advanced the development of the practice research methodology through the articulation of an indigenist system of values: permission, respect, ritual, interconnectedness, reciprocity, and gratitude. Value-based methodology is one of the core approaches of this research and situates itself within comparable examples of epistemological fusions by non-Indigenous scholars (Weber, 2020; Plumwood, 2014). An application of this value-based system in the Global North was explored in Practice Case 2 in South Korea and was used as a basic foundation for

Practice Case 3 in Colombia. The ethical risks of employing Indigenous-inspired methodologies are the same as the ones underpinning intercultural co-creation, listed in the previous chapter. These risks have been mitigated throughout the practice by recognising, studying, and understanding the Indigenous struggle for rights and self-determination, and by attempting to decolonise the practice through indigenist values, entering into communities and partnerships with permission, respect, reciprocity, and gratitude. I am grateful to my partners for their generosity and openness, and for permitting me to share and develop the insights and reflections of our work together further, not only in the practice cases presented in this thesis, but also in work and life beyond this research.

It is important to acknowledge the influence of Māori scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith's seminal take on Indigenous methodologies, and the '25 Indigenous Projects' she names as types of Indigenous research: claiming, testimonies, story telling, celebrating survival, remembering, indigenizing, intervening, revitalizing and regenerating, connecting, reading, writing and theory making, representing, gendering, envisioning, reframing, restoring, returning, democratizing and indigenist governance, networking, naming, protecting, creating, negotiating, discovering the beauty of Indigenous knowledge, and sharing (Tuhiwai Smith, 2012, pp.144-162). Some of these are represented in the practice of this thesis through the presence and work of the Indigenous co-creators. They include claiming rights and dues of Mapuche communities, testimonies present in the preparation for the storytelling of the Kichwa, Shuar, and Mapuche narratives, celebrating cultural and community survival in *The Waterfall of San Luis*, remembering traditional culture and stories in *Aillaquillén – The island of Nine Moons*, (re)connecting with the culture, stories, and land, representing cultural and community voices, reframing colonial narratives (*Aillaquillén*), restoring traditional ways of understanding the world (*Waterfall*), protecting and sharing the environment, and most of all, storytelling. Often, these methods function in parallel or overlap with Western (practice) research methods such as ethnographic research, qualitative research, theatre games and exercises, dramaturgical approaches, and script writing. This synthesis is reflected upon more in the next subsection and in Chapters 5 and 6.

Practice Research

The validity and capacity for generating knowledge, often in alternative formats, through practice research has now been firmly established as a general research methodology (Barrett and Bolt, 2010; Nelson, 2006 and 2013) as well as more specifically in (applied) theatre and performance (Arlander et al., 2018; Chaudhuri and Enelow, 2014; Kershaw and Nicholson, 2011; Mackey, 2016). This thesis draws on

the unifying Bulley and Şahin report that recommends the umbrella term 'practice research' and defines it as a type of research where "practice is the significant method conveyed in a research output" and in which "intuitive, embodied, tacit, imaginative, affective and sensory ways of knowing can find their expression in a research output" (2021, p.4). Practice research is therefore "both practice and research narrative, as one output (not necessarily as two separate elements)" (Bulley and Şahin, 2021, p.27), or as Robin Nelson puts it, "theory imbricated within practice" (2013, p.33). As mentioned in the Introduction Chapter, the practice and research trajectory in this thesis is presented as an intertwined story: introductions and explorations of context for each of the practice cases are followed by reflections and analyses of the process and selected moments of performances.

This type of presentation necessarily imposes a certain linearity to the narrative. However, non-linear temporality is a crucial element of practice research. Nelson qualifies this iterative process as "doing-reflecting-reading-articulating-doing" (2013, p.32); Bulley and Şahin point out that during the process, "practice is constituted and reconstituted as an ongoing part of any inquiry, allowing for adaptive and insightful ways of knowing" (2021, p.7). Perhaps the most enduring schema is Melissa Trimingham's 'hermeneutic-interpretative spiral' where the process is represented by "a spiral which constantly returns us to our original point of entry but with renewed understanding" (2002, p.56). This includes revisiting the point of entry in each cycle, reviewing theory, formulating and articulating new aims and objectives (Trimingham, 2002, p.56). Much has been made in practice research of the hermeneutic spiral, yet there are similar and equally productive models in Indigenous contexts. One example is the Kichwa life spiral. As explained by co-creation partner Manuel Guatemal, the life spiral reaches up to the sky, always turning in one direction, going up and forward and yet always coming back, re-evaluating, pausing, breathing, until the spool of life is done and continuing even beyond that in a retracing of one's life's steps (Guatemal, 2021).

There are similar Indigenous alternatives for other Western methodologies: the many co-creation methods of applied theatre can be mapped onto the Indigenous projects as listed by Tuhiwai Smith; Western ideas of new animism are secular 'cousins' of the concepts of Indigenous cosmovision, explored in detail in Chapters 5 and 6; ecosomatic approaches to movement and relating to the environment, mentioned in the Practice Review, are related to Indigenous practices, rituals, and values (Bellerose, 2024; Kuppers, 2022; Riley, 2024). Ways of obtaining knowledge that are considered alternative to Western science are present not only in arts-based research but have a long tradition in what is known as Traditional Indigenous Knowledge. These approaches can be understood as two sides of the same coin,

and this thesis builds on the epistemological affinities between different practices and systems. It explores the 'inbetweenness' and connectedness of the Indigenous and non-Indigenous, human and more-than-human, as well as community and land. Acknowledging the interconnectedness and reciprocal enrichment of these methods as opposed to binary opposites leads to emergent relationality. I am not studying an object separate from me; I am a co-creator humbly and gratefully employing indigenist values as my methodology, acknowledging the subjectivity and agency of my human and more-than-human partners, and building kinship through the practice. Arguably, this stance can also lead to the creation of original knowledge. As Coombes et al. put it, "This is no simple matter of developing new or repackaging older methods. Rather, it constitutes a new relational ethics which unsettles any remaining binaries that survived the qualitative revolution in human geography: ethics becomes method; data become life; landscape becomes author; participants become family" (2014, pp.849-850).

Community-Based Theatre

The core format of most of the practice of this thesis is co-created applied theatre, more specifically, community-based theatre. Prentki and Preston note that applied theatre takes "participants and audiences beyond the scope of conventional, mainstream theatre" towards "a theatre that is responsive to ordinary people and their stories, local settings and priorities" (2009, p.9). It often takes place in informal or 'alternative' spaces and those involved are frequently "motivated by the belief that theatre experienced both as participant and as audience, might make some difference to the way in which people interact with each other and the wider world" (Prentki and Preston, 2009, p.9). This thesis reflects upon intercultural co-creation and performance with the aim of narrating stories that contribute to an ecologically beneficial shift in our understanding of the environment and our place in it as humans or societies. The performances of the described community-based shows took place in an open urban event space, a community cultural centre, and a street in the middle of the community's neighbourhood, respectively.

This research employs Prendergast and Saxton's definition of community-based theatre as theatre that "is created for, with and by community participants primarily for an integral audience. This process is usually facilitated by one or more outside applied theatre facilitators" (2009, p.9). They use the added qualifier '-based' to distinguish it from the frequently used term 'community theatre', which most often designates "a theatre presenting previously scripted plays performed by amateurs for accidental audiences" (2009, p.135). The immersion of the facilitator within the community is "akin to the fieldwork

of anthropologists" (Prendergast and Saxton, 2009, p.136). Indeed, each of the chapters analysing the practice cases of this thesis present the history, sociopolitical situation, and environmental context for given community and its culture. These inform and shape the ideas and content of the co-created stories resulting from an immersion within the communities. Community-driven engagements can also overlap with professional performance. The Colombian dancers in Practice Case 3 are community performers, but their salsa training potentially leads down professional pathways. The Korean actors in Practice Case 2 are professional performers but the showcase format of the project and the presentation audience that consisted mostly of friends embedded sensibilities of community-based engagement in the performance.

According to Prendergast and Saxton, community-based theatre tends to inhabit one of two distinct areas, either as an activist-driven approach often in the form of Theatre in Education or Theatre of the Oppressed, "with an intention to intervene within a community that is facing one of more challenges", or as a more celebratory form closer to Popular Theatre, "that allows for communities to come together to share and reflect upon their own histories and present circumstances" (2009, p.136). Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed and Forum Theatre techniques are widely spread and used in Latin America. The practice research of this thesis does not include Forum Theatre, rather it adopts a more celebratory take on community-based theatre, with lessons or messages for the communities and the audiences embedded in that format. It is also not participatory in the sense of audience 'spectactors' intervening with suggestions for various resolutions or responses to given contexts of oppression. Instead, it looks for resilience through expressing cohesiveness and reminding the participants and audiences of the importance of the human and more-than-human networks within a given environment. The celebratory rather than forum approach was chosen for several reasons: besides being more suited to the aims of this practice research of reaffirming and strengthening the relationships between communities and their environments, it was also the prevailing choice of the co-creating partners. Most importantly, the complex and multilayered internal sociopolitical situations of the communities, particularly in Ecuador and Colombia, blurred the lines between the roles of oppressor and oppressed and made the distinction less relevant. Without minimising the importance of the contribution to the mechanisms of conflict resolutions by formats such as Forum Theatre, this thesis suggests that a celebratory approach with the appropriate context provides a generative framework for affirming and extending identity, fostering resilience, and performing relationality between communities and their environments.

When representing communities on stage in different ways, Preston notes that there is "a responsibility towards ensuring that the representations that are made are produced through a climate of sensitivity,

dialogue, respect, and willingness for reciprocity" (2009, p.65), especially when the 'professional' artists "employ their artistic vision to develop a poetic that represents the stories of the community" (2009, p.67). In this practice research, the vision is developed through co-creation with the partners in each case and in relation of care for one another and the environment. Research Questions 1 and 1a investigate the ethical challenges of working with Indigenous and Global South partners, and Chapter 4 addresses these questions by analysing two smaller pilot practice projects with Indigenous Ecuadorean co-creators.

Co-Creation and Improvisation

'Community-based' is a label also used by interdisciplinary scholar and artist Rebecca Caines, whose work with communities has included Indigenous partners. Caines uses it as a framing term denoting the collaborative nature of her practice, partnering with "other professional artists, researchers, and scientists; and with community organizations, schools, welfare organizations, social workers, activists, people trying art for the first time, those working outside art industries, and/or people whose art has been forgotten, ignored or erased" (2021, p.326). Between the pilot projects and three main practice cases of this thesis, representatives of nearly all collaborators on Caines' list were present as partners, participants, or co-creators at some point. As a consequence, "this kind of dialogical co-created work challenges ideas of authorship" and requires not only a strong baseline of respect for the differences involved, but also "elements of improvisation, especially adaptability, flexibility, and co-creation" (Caines, 2021, p.326). While I am the author of these written reflections about the practice cases, the shows themselves are the result of a collaborative co-creation, in which all participants, facilitators, partners, and performers share authorship. The contribution of this research is therefore not only to provide new knowledge to academic discourse or new embodied forms of practice to the practitioners and facilitators interested in this type of work. The goal is also to produce practical outputs that serve the communities and co-creating partners in their struggles to preserve their cultures, raise awareness of their issues, and remind the internal and external societal networks of the importance of relational ethics towards the human and more-than-human. The show produced in Practice Case 3 in Colombia, for example, continues to be performed and developed further by the community, with new generations of young dancers coming in through each iteration.

As Caines suggests, an improvisatory approach is therefore not only a necessity, but a fundamental underlying methodology. It would be counterproductive and ethically problematic to arrive in a community with individual 'artist-led' preconceived ideas about the nature, structure, and dramaturgy of

the collaborative projects. A settler-colonial mind frame imposes its own narratives and culture upon others; a co-creative, respectful, and reciprocal approach involves "qualities of risk, active listening, collaborative response, and the reconfiguration of mistake into creativity" (Caines, 2021, p.325). The initial impulse of this practice research was the desire to co-create climate crisis-related stories with communities. The research questions as well as the structure, content and aims of the co-created shows themselves evolved from the initial inquiry by responding to partners and co-creators in an improvisatory way, through what Nisha Sajnani terms a 'disciplined empathy', "inviting researchers to engage in an iterative process of identifying emergent issues and to respond with a corresponding design that permits further exploration" (2012, p.83). Improvisatory models therefore coincide with the practice research spiral: "[they] suggest that to evaluate is actually to return to the start of the methodological cycle, once again making a commitment to active listening, and agreeing to continually 'strain for more' in order to understand what has happened and is happening" (Caines, 2021, p.335). Although the research questions remained at the forefront of this practice and the work with the communities, each cycle of co-creation was sensitive to the story that the community or partners wanted to tell. Only after a process of immersion in the communities and connection to the main partners could the story begin to emerge, and the co-creative process begin.

Critical reflections are offered within each practice cycle on the main aspects of the praxis and research questions: the ethics of (intercultural) co-creation and participation, integration of Indigenous cosmovision-inspired principles into storytelling and performance in different locales, and the use of existing local performance practices in the presentations of the stories. These elements are tested in order to holistically navigate the relationship between community and environment. Although selected responses from some of the co-creators, partners, participants, and audience members are included in the chapters, gathering data around response and impact was not a priority of this research. Rather, the written component focuses on developing and testing methodologies to answer the research questions from the critical point of view of a non-Indigenous European practice researcher, co-creator, and facilitator.

Methods

The methods employed in this thesis correspond to the methodologies of practice research, ethnographic research, community-building, applied community-based theatre, studio performance experimentation, and holistic storytelling. Table 3 shows which methods were used in individual practice cases.

Table 3 Methods per practice case

	Pilot	**PC 1**	**PC 2**	**PC 3**
	Ecuador	*Chile*	*Korea*	*Colombia*
Preparation				
Qualitative research (open discussion, interview)	x	x	x	x
Narrative reflection writing	x			
Immersion in community and cultural practices	x	x	x	x
Trust-building (warm-ups, games, shared experiences)	x	x	x	x
Process and Rehearsal				
Dramaturgical storybuilding	x	x	x	x
Script writing	x	x		x
Directing (scene-building, character development, spacing etc.)	x	x	x	x
Studio experimentation and workshop exercises			x	
Audiovisual recording	x	x		
Performance Presentation				
Video design	x	x		
Sound design	x	x		
Presentation facilitation (preparation of performance)	x	x	x	x

The methods are divided into preparation methods, process and rehearsal methods, and performance presentation methods. Preparation methods enabled a relational ethical approach in each case (RQ1, RQ1a) and illuminated the cultural, sociopolitical, geographical, historical, and environmental complexities of the co-creating communities or partners (RQ3) while leading to the articulation of the indigenist value scaffolding (RQ2). Process and rehearsal methods enabled exploring storytelling as ecological sense-making (RQ3) and allowed for embodied and movement explorations of relationality, animist and new materialist sensibilities, and systemic integration (RQ2a, RQ2b). Performance presentation methods enabled aesthetic engagement with the relational values explored through the process and a performative navigation of the complexity of the climate crisis (RQ3).

Conclusion

The methodology chapter outlines how this thesis combines practice research, applied theatre, and an indigenist value-based framework to co-create climate crisis-related performances with diverse communities. The central format is community-based theatre, enabling celebratory expressions of cultural affirmation, community resilience, and ecological relationality. Indigenous and indigenist epistemologies are aligned with or proposed as alternatives to Western-based methodologies. Practice research is presented as an iterative, non-linear process that corresponds to structures like the Kichwa life spiral and an adaptive improvisatory methodology. Studio experimentation with actors as well as professional-style training of community participants blur the division between community engagement and professional practice. An individualist Global North approach to performance and relating to the more-than-human is contrasted by communal practices and integrating networks of humans and more-than-humans. The various methodologies are enacted through methods of preparation, process and rehearsal, and performance presentation. The combined methodologies and methods provide ethical co-creative frameworks for ecological sense-making and enable a praxis that not only investigates but also actively performs relational responses to the complexity of the climate crisis.

4 Constructing a Relational Ethics: *DocuHaiku 0* and *The Waterfall of San Luis*

Introduction

Before investigating indigenist approaches to co-creating performances about communities and their environments, it is necessary to establish a personal ethos of co-creation with intercultural partners and to acknowledge and mitigate the imbalanced dynamics of a white, Western practice researcher affiliated with an institution from a historically colonial nation working with Indigenous co-creators. While reflecting on the construction of this ethos, this chapter addresses RQ1, 'What are the intercultural and ethical challenges of working with Indigenous and non-Indigenous creators in the Global South (and Global North)?' and RQ1a, 'What shift of consciousness in the researcher/facilitator is needed to work with Indigenous communities on their local cultural and environmental stories?'

The research draws on the ethics theories of Dwight Conquergood and James Thompson as a basis for managing dynamics between non-Indigenous and Indigenous co-creators. The thesis builds on this model and proposes positioning ethics as an emergent and continually balancing relational process grounded in Indigenous cosmovision-inspired values of respect, reciprocity, and gratitude. These values will be developed further and articulated into a formalised indigenist methodology in the next chapter. Although the theory of potential pitfalls and the dynamics of responding to the ethical call of the face of the Other provide a necessary starting foundation for managing an imbalanced intercultural relationship, this chapter shows that attempts to avoid the common pitfalls can also result in favouring the facilitator's voice. Additionally, while the expectation of direction of the power and privilege imbalance in favour of the non-Indigenous Western partner is the appropriate initial stance in intercultural collaboration, such an assumption can itself inadvertently reproduce the very logics of Western supremacy and modern-colonial power dynamics it seeks to resist. The thesis proposes that only an *experiential* and *embodied relationality* can produce a full ethical scaffolding that is adaptive and responsive. Theoretically presupposed challenges or well-meant solutions can be contested by the practical reality of co-creation, the intentions and expectations of the parties involved, the sociopolitical context and the effect of global polycrisis. These can only be solved or mitigated through practice itself: *the practice is the relationality*.

The insights are proposed through analysis of the challenges and questions that arose from two smaller projects with Indigenous Ecuadorean partners, designated as pilot projects due to the practical limitations

they faced. The first was shaped by the Covid-19 pandemic lockdowns. The practice research moved online and took the form of Whatsapp video conversations with an Indigenous Kichwa partner, Manuel Guatemal, who lives in the highland farming and eco-tourism community of San Clemente in northern Ecuador. The exchange resulted in the digital artefact *DocuHaiku 0*, exploring how to enter an intercultural dialogical relationship and tell a story of climate change through the lens of the cultivation of land. Excerpts from a longer narrativized reflection in diary form, kept throughout the process, are presented here as material for analysis and reflection. The chapter argues that the somewhat rigid underlying expectation of an imbalanced relationship and the effort to avoid ethical pitfalls were attenuated by Manuel's Indigenous relational values and mentorship role based on the ideas of cosmovision.

The second pilot project was a time-limited co-creation with the San Luis Indigenous Shuar community in southern Ecuador, in collaboration with the American company Dramatic Adventure Theatre (DAT). It resulted in the community-based show *The Waterfall of San Luis*, a fable responding to the ongoing destruction of Shuar land by international mining corporations and the resulting complex community relationships. The narrative, performed by thirty children and some adult participants in the town of Gualaquiza, encouraged the revitalisation of Shuar culture and cosmovision. The initial expectations of the applied theatre company and its teaching artists aspired toward a balanced facilitation and co-creation process with the goal of showcasing the marginalised voice of a community united against environmental degradation and the corporate greed of mining companies. These aspirations were strongly challenged by the highly complicated social and political situation on the ground, tensions and disagreements within the community itself, different expectations of the process from the Indigenous partners, complications due to limited time, and outbreaks of Covid-19. Despite the facilitating group's awareness of (and preparation for) potential ethical issues via discussions and workshops, these challenges could only be discovered and addressed through the adaptive practice itself. Questions of unintentional cultural representation, Conquergood's ethical pitfalls of ethnographers, as well as a potentially complex perpetuation of the image of the 'Noble Savage' or 'Ecological Indian', arise in reflection of the work. Again, the Indigenous partners' value-based approach abated some of these issues and demonstrated how the image of an 'ideal Shuarness', when employed by the community itself, can serve as a powerful reminder of the importance of relationality and contest the 'sensible' spaces of hegemonic hierarchy.

By analysing the challenges and insights of the two pilot projects, the chapter proposes a necessary relational ethics of the practice researcher, modelled after the values of Indigenous cosmovision, and functioning as an embodied and experiential practice.

Projects Background

Trying to find ways to overcome the limitations of the Covid-19 pandemic in 2021, I reached out to friends in Ecuador who connected me to Indigenous and theatre partners willing to have an intercultural conversation that could potentially lead to a co-creative practice. In addition to Manuel Guatemal and elders from the San Luis Shuar community, I spoke to Manai Kowii, an exciting Kichwa visual artist from northern Ecuador, as well as two theatre makers from Chile, Tamara Colipan (Mapuche) and Jaime Silva (non-Indigenous), who were trying to build a theatre space in the middle of a forest in the Wallmapu (Mapuche territory). All were generous and willing interlocutors, sharing their lives and experiences with me. I developed the strongest connection with Manuel, bonding over the practice of working with soil. We intermittently spoke, texted, and shared photos and videos over Whatsapp for more than a year, between April of 2021 and August 2022. Parts of these conversations resulted in the written reflections cited in this chapter, as well as the first pilot piece of practice, *DocuHaiku 0*, that I edited using materials and calls shared with Manuel. I was able to visit San Clemente in person in September 2022 to spend some time with Manuel, continue our conversations over bowls of *locro de papa* (potato soup), and fortify a friendship hitherto limited to grainy video calls.

Work with the San Luis Shuar community and the co-creation of *The Waterfall of San Luis* happened in July 2022 with DAT as the main funder of the project and Artistic Director Jesse Baxter as the main organiser. DAT has a long history of creating theatre in Ecuador; their first venture there dates back to 2008, and they have kept ties and connections with various Indigenous and Afro-Ecuadorean communities ever since. The company includes an Ecuadorean member, Gustavo Redin, a nature-rights lawyer who is in charge of communications with the partner communities. For each project, DAT brings mostly American and European theatre makers to Ecuador, offers them master classes in theatre as well as local artistic workshops, and introduces them to a partner community. The travelling artists work in the communities, usually with children, to co-create showcases of shorter theatrical exercises or presentations based on a pedagogical performance model developed by Christen Madrazzo, DAT's Director of Creative Learning. The entire Action Expedition, as the summer project is called, lasts about a month; actual work within the community is limited to around two weeks for logistical and funding reasons. In the case of *The Waterfall*, additional challenges due to Covid-19 and the political situation in Ecuador meant that only about a week was spent rehearsing with the community participants. Although stemming from long-standing relationships and operating with the encouragement and permission of the communities, this model nevertheless raises ethical questions, discussed in this chapter.

Pitfalls and Surprises

Curator's Exhibitionism vs Grounding Relationality

> *It's our first official Whatsapp video call, and Manuel has courteously agreed to answer all my questions. I stammer out a speech that I'd worked on, desperately trying to convey to him that I'm aware of all the ethical issues surrounding our discussion, and that the plan is to work together, not for me to come and take information from him. He nods and smiles and tells me that being Indigenous for him means sharing without expecting anything in return. It also means being more connected to nature and the land and finding harmony in life. "Everyone just wants to have power and have everything go their own way", he says. "If people thought harmony, there would be no issues.* (Petkovsek, 2021, p.1)

This note on the initial contact with Manuel reveals the main preoccupation of the work with Indigenous partners: ensuring not to inadvertently replicate any type of settler-colonial, eurocentrist, extractivist or other imbalanced relationship. There was danger of encountering Conquergood's often cited ethical pitfalls of ethnographers and intercultural performers, particularly "The Custodian's Rip-off", "The Curator's Exhibitionism", and "The Enthusiast's Infatuation" (2013, p.71). The initial imperative was to avoid the Custodian's Rip-off, the pitfall that "results in acquisitiveness instead of genuine inquiry, plunder more than performance" (Conquergood, 2013, p.70). Even when backed up by seemingly good intentions, the Rip-off replicates a colonial and extractivist pattern of taking control of representation and meaning. It can mask appropriation as stewardship and valorise the voice of the ethnographer-researcher; a strong concern for research that asks the question, 'how to ethically integrate Indigenous cosmovision into the performance practice of the (non-Indigenous) practitioner researcher?'

As can be seen in the quote, Manuel's response to these worries was an immediate redirection to a connection with land and finding harmony. This would be an iterative motif in the conversations, fitting the image of San Clemente as a peaceful community on the volcano slopes above the town of Ibarra, living off the land as well as from ecotourism. However, when a non-Indigenous practitioner presents an image of a harmonious and spiritual life connected to the land, they risk slipping into another problematic mode of engagement: the Curator's Exhibitionism. This danger is a "fascination with the exotic, primitive, culturally remote", infused with "sentimentality and romantic notions about the 'Noble Savage'" (Conquergood, 2013, p.73). Perpetuated in the West since Rousseau and the Enlightenment, this image, also named the "'Ecological Indian', or the keeper of a planetary spirituality" has been a "powerful instrument of dispossession and displacement" (Däwes and Maufort, 2014, p.12), and difficult to

overcome. Yet, when unburdened from the eurocentric label of 'primitivity' (Bird-David, 1999), harmony in all aspects of life is a key part of Indigenous cosmovision:

> *He points the phone camera towards his garden, which is full of stone structures representing Andean cosmovision, the way of life of the Indigenous peoples scattered across the great mountain chain, emphasizing balance, harmony, and equality. The most prominent of the structures is a tall stone spiral: "That's the* espiral de la vida*, life spiral. It connects the three realms: the upper world, the living world, and the lower world." The spiral always turns to the left, just like a beanstalk climbing up a corn plant, always left. "We all have our time of life, our own spiral. When it starts to turn the other way, to the right, that's when one's life ends." Beside this vertical dimension, there is a horizontal one, made of waves going up and down while traveling on. "The zig-zag pattern is like going up and down a mountain. In life, when you find yourself on top, on a swell, you have stability, health, food. When you're at the bottom, you have problems, sickness, hunger. When you are down, you value the meaning of being up, and when you are up, you are aware of what it means to be down. That's how life goes. When you take a path, you take it slowly and you will achieve what you want."* (Petkovsek, 2021, p.2)

Just as harmony is achieved through the balance of always acknowledging the Other while traveling on the spiral of life, the same balancing acknowledgment creates ethical relationality while traveling on the spiral of practice research. The constant flow of the movement of life or of the practice, including the zig-zagging up and down, keeps the relationality within the *real* and *present*, away from potentially harmful romantic ideals. Indigenous connections to land are not 'noble' pursuits of a lofty and 'naive' ideal but a *practical* grounding of the relationality. As Rarámuri scholar Enrique Salmón explains, "The natural world, therefore, is not one of wonder but of *familiarity*. The human niche is only one of a myriad of united niches that work together" (2000, p.1329, my italics). When the community of San Clemente realised the non-native eucalyptus trees were draining the water from the land, they acted in a practical way:

> *Climate solutions are the result of respectful community work… The community relies on traditional knowledge, but they also adapt to the times and technologies. There is a crucial difference between a life lived through values and relating to the land, and the harmful notion of the Noble Indian, uncorrupted by civilisation. Manuel represents* what there is*, which is a connection to the land and environment that means respectfully caring for it. San Clemente learned from their mistakes, they stopped introducing non-native plants that were changing the conditions for the native ones. They reforested and adapted, and they have something to show for it.* (Petkovsek, 2021, p.3)

A necessary step towards constructing a personal ethos of the practice researcher is the realisation that the trope of the 'Noble Savage' or 'Ecological Indian' is a skewed version of a certain *practical* reality. Far from the colonialist romantic or positivist tool for the categorisation of humanity that it became, the idea

of connection to land and a relational ethical approach to the human and more-than-human has to be practiced and understood as a form of humility (a term that derives from the Latin *humilis,* 'lowly' or 'on the ground') and belonging. A relational practice that includes indigenist values can avoid the pitfalls of the Curator's Exhibitionism and the Custodian's Rip-off.

Curator's Exhibitionism vs Ideal Shuarness

An instance of the image of an 'ideal' Indigenous culture also occurred during work on *The Waterfall of San Luis* with the Indigenous Shuar partners of the small community of San Luis in southern Ecuador. The Western team of facilitators (comprised of DAT members, participating teaching artists, and myself) expected to co-create a story about climate injustice and resistance against hegemonic interest. However, it soon became clear not only that the Shuar partners were interested in restoration rather than accusation or provocation, but that the sociopolitical situation was much more complex and strained.

For the Western team of facilitators, the perceived issue to discuss in a community-based performance was the threat of mining corporations and extractivism from Shuar land. Despite the adoption of a progressive new constitution in Ecuador in 2008 that recognised rights of nature and plurinationality, Indigenous nations were not given the power of veto or legal consent in situations of resource extractions (Becker, 2011). A mining law passed in 2009 effectively cleared the way for multinational corporations to control extractivist endeavours and clearly contradicted the rights of Indigenous people and nature itself as defined in the new constitution (Goeury, 2021, p.216). While the Shuar have organised politically, gaining a degree of self-governance and resisting large-scale mining (Katz and Chumpi Nantip, 2014), they still "find themselves with fragmented and degraded land and shrinking options for generating income, locked in a poverty trap." (Rudel, 2018, p.730). Environmental and social injustice situations, combined with either wilful blindness or pressure to conform from the Ecuadorean state, have affected the Shuar in deeper ways as well: "The extractive industry not only has an economic impact, but also directly affects Shuar society by accelerating its acculturation and causing the disappearance of the way of life with which this people has guaranteed its survival over time in the Amazon rainforest" (Verdú Delgado, 2017, p.11). The connection to land, also visible in the conversations with Manuel, is a general and inseparable tenet of Indigenous cultures.

However, extractivist endeavours can also herald jobs and income, and many leaders espouse a more modern vision of Shuar life, embracing the importance of "access to resources and education in order to

generate infrastructure and development for the communities", which justifies "use [of] resources and riches that are in the forest to be able to progress" (Fernández-Salvador, 2017, p.154)[3]. This can include cooperation with (and even a welcoming attitude to) mining companies based on an expectation of local benefits. The complexity and variation of local responses to large-scale mining as well as the ideas of potential Shuar futures can be found at the macro level of state and political organisations as well as the micro levels of the communities themselves, as was the situation in this case. The principal partner in the project, the Tarimiat Association for Cultural and Territorial Preservation (*Asociación Tarimiat de preservación cultural y territorio*), consists of mostly one family run by the elder Dominga Antun and her two nephews, both named Arutam after the most important spirit in Shuar mythology, who have opposed a large mining project in the area. Their community of San Luis stands divided, and tensions run high. However, while clearly not reserving any amicable feelings for the mining corporations and their interests, Dominga and the Arutams revealed in preparatory conversations with the Western facilitators a preference for focusing on the idea of unity and preservation of Shuar cultural elements and language. It was a message of positive resistance, fortitude through agreement, or the acknowledgment of what Lisa Woynarski calls the "inseparability of ecological conditions and human well-being" (2020, p.113). In David Abram's words, Dominga employed a relational understanding that "any undue harm that befalls the land is readily felt within the awareness of all who dwell within that land" (1997, p.142). Rather than delving into the painful issues of the community, the Indigenous partners steered towards a celebratory approach, an expression of being "worthy of living and being valued for being alive" (Thompson, 2009, p.179).

Co-creating this celebratory story, a fable about a Shuar couple going on a spiritual journey of remembering and revitalising traditional culture as a response to the imbalance they perceive in the world and the land, presented the danger not only of cultural misrepresentation but also of the Curator's Exhibitionism for the group of Western facilitators. The desire to mitigate that danger by devising the narrative with Dominga at a 'writing retreat' was unfulfilled due to her fragile health as well as lack of time. This left the non-Indigenous facilitators 'co-creating' by themself in a jungle lodge far away from the partner community. Was the group now creating *for* the community instead of *with* them, making the work "vulnerable to misrepresentation or simplification" (Preston, 2009, p.67)? If the Western group was now by itself constructing a 'representative' Shuar couple and narrating Shuar rituals, was this not a direct stumble into the Curator's Exhibitionism pitfall, speaking about or for the "Other" and with that, despite

[3] Wherever the citations are from material without an English version, the translation is mine.

the group's best intentions, erasing the Other's voice? Was it ultimately saying, as bell hooks puts it, "No need to hear your voice. Only tell me about your pain. I want to know your story. And then I will tell it back to you in a new way. Tell it back to you in such a way that it has become mine, my own" (2009, p.84)? Additionally, the shortage of time, further exacerbated due to outbreaks of Covid-19, meant that devising scenes and dialogues with the participants needed to be replaced by the device of a narrator. Was not writing sentences such as:

> *Dancing as one with the Woman, the Man felt his ancestors' blood surging through his veins, felt the land under his feet, and the music vibrating through his body. He finally felt at home, he knew he could never again forget.* (Petkovsek, 2022, p.2)

just an exhibitionist simplification of "multiple and complex cosmologies and relationships into a reductive and convenient stereotype" (Woynarski, 2020, p.184)? Was it not romantically re-inscribing "the notion of that space of marginality where the oppressed live apart from their oppressors as 'pure'" (hooks, 2009, p.84), since it was imposed from the outside, from the side of the facilitators?

The difference between wandering into a pitfall and respecting the Other's culture is a focus on indigenist values and relationality. The Shuar partners were tapping into the "[ideal] rhetoric, the way in which the Shuar people of the communities and their leaders represent their sense of being Shuar as different" (Fernández-Salvador, 2017, p.155), focusing on human–more-than-human relationships rather than exacerbating community tensions around mining and extractivism. Through the narrative of an 'ideal Shuarness', they were hoping to influence "the [real and concrete] decisions that must be made daily in relation to the future of the community and the relationships that they decide to establish, or not, with certain actors such as the mining company" (Fernández-Salvador, 2017, p.155). They did this not by accusatory or inflammatory resistance tactics or controversial provocation, but by using Indigenous methodologies of storytelling, remembering, revitalising, connecting, and restoring (Tuhiwai Smith, 2012). The Western group was in need of acknowledging a way into practice and research identified by Woynarski as one that proceeds "not through claims of authority, but rather through suggestions of the way relational, complex and heterogeneous ecological knowledges, practices and activism offer ways of critiquing and disrupting the power structures and organisation of knowledge" (Woynarski, 2020). Additionally, the group had to realise that this was the narrative the Shuar partners *expected* us to create and facilitate; the proposal was internal but realised with the help of the facilitators. The suggestion in this case was the frame of a (children's) fable, into which the spectators, Indigenous or not, were left to project their own reasons for a crisis, be it the harmful presence of mining or general environmental change. For the group, despite the challenges and pitfalls, this was a crucial decolonising moment. We

had to remind ourselves that *we* were not the target of the narrative: it was aimed primarily at the Shuar community itself, as well as the local mixed Indigenous and *mestizo* population of the town Gualaquiza, all of whom are part of the underlying socio-political context of the narrative. The fear of romanticising or wrongly representing Shuar culture was, although well-founded, *also* a facet of a anglo-eurocentric view, foregrounding the points of view of the facilitators rather than the community itself.

Stó:lō scholar Dylan Robinson reminds "non-Indigenous and settler scholars to stop instrumentalizing Indigenous world views, language, or stories for what they help *you* say, and treat them as the incommensurable things that *they* are rather than things that might be easily applied to your work" (cited in Peter et al., 2022, pp.17-18, my italics) – a crucial instruction for this research while developing an indigenist methodology that retains the incommensurable dimension without spiritual appropriation. The purpose of *The Waterfall of San Luis* was not to co-create a story of portraying an Indigenous culture through Western eyes, but to narrate a Shuar story of 'incommensurable things' for which the group was privileged to be granted co-creating agency.

Enthusiast's Infatuation as the Initial Spark

While wrestling with the danger of the Curator's Exhibitionism and accepting Indigenous images of 'ideal' indigeneity, this research could undoubtedly slide into another danger, that of the Enthusiast's Infatuation. Defined by Conquergood as a "too facile identification with the other coupled with enthusiastic commitment" that produces "naïve and glib performances marked by superficiality" (2013, p.71), it marks the peril of an over-identification with the culture being studied and uncritical acceptance seeking belonging rather than understanding. The experience of awe and wonder is likely familiar to Western practice researchers communicating with Indigenous elders, leading to enthusiastic commitment – something certainly experienced in the communication with Manuel Guatemal as well as in San Luis. Was this crossing over into the extreme of blind belief? Without this attraction, how does one start a dialogical relationship, defined by Conquergood as situated "in the space between competing ideologies", bringing "self and other together even while it holds them apart" (2013, p.75)? Although Conquergood warns that "too easy affirming of identity not only banalizes the other, but seals off the self from any moral engagement" (2013, p.72), he also acknowledges that "the enthusiast /…/ may move beyond infatuation to love" (2013). Jodi Kanter, critical of Conquergood's tone of "a God who is reaching down to earth for the sole purpose of shaking an angry finger at unreflective performers" (2006, p.406), similarly suspects that "the Enthusiast's Infatuation may be a necessary step toward a dialogic performance, just

as surrender to the text is a necessary step toward responsible criticism" (2006, p.410). For the construction of a relational ethics, the initial spark is a necessary if most likely superficial start of developing the relationship further and avoiding the "impossibility and, really, the ultimate undesirability of a performance practice based entirely on difference" (Kanter, 2006, p.410). Particularly in the context of working with an Indigenous elder or co-creator, the practice researcher or performer should start with what JoAnn Archibald calls the four Rs of *respect*, *responsibility*, *reverence*, and *reciprocity*, which prepare the ground for what she names effective storywork. This "grows out of the actions of interrelatedness and synergy formed by the storyteller, the story, the listener, and the context in which the story is used" (2012). In the next chapter, this thesis builds on Archibald's set of storywork principles as well as on the work of the Indigenous Mapuche partner Alejandra Aillapan Huiriqueo to articulate an indigenist value scaffolding for ethical co-creation. Within these parameters, the initial spark of the Enthusiast's Infatuation can lead into what Judith Hamera calls an asymptotic relational approach, using the geometrical metaphor of the "line a curve approaches but does not cross" (2013, p.307). As the space between the two sides gets smaller and smaller, "we continually identify the material and representational gaps separating us from one another into infinity" (Hamera, 2013). Although using a different image, this model of achieving harmony is akin to that of a spiral, in which an (un)critical acceptance is tempered by iterative reminders of difference while seeking connection through indigenist values.

Face and Call to Political Action

Direction of Imbalance

A personal ethos of the practice researcher includes taking responsibility for the Other. This is the heart of the ethical position of applied theatre scholars: "Ethics in this sense is to respond, and this response demands that I take responsibility for the freedom, welfare, and equity of Otherness" (Madison, 2020, 119). The argument stems from Emmanuel Levinas' idea of 'face', explained by Thompson: "the face /…/ is the acute awareness of the body of the other as it impinges on our sense of self. It is the feelings that flow between people as they share space: sensations that exist in one body as a result of the care it feels for the other" (2014, p.126). This "unfathomable aspect of a person" (2014, p.126) generates an overwhelming responsibility towards them, and results in a demand for a response in the form of ethical responsibility and political action. The demand needs to be met with the approval of the self, facing the other.

Following Thompson's argument, the (digital) face-to-face encounter with Manuel resulted in an ethical demand that laid bare the "asymmetrical affect of the other" (2014, p.127). This put into focus the differences of struggle and privilege between the interlocutors and became "a motivating force: a force that is a major propellant for political action because it has this implicit universal assertion structured into it" (2014, p.127). In other words, Manuel's Indigenous otherness not only demanded an individual and personal ethical response from myself, but that demand should lead to a universal response of disruption of the dominant forms of representation. This could happen in the form of political action or a change of behaviour supporting Indigenous rights and causes. The approval of the self as an indigenist call is clear in the notes:

> *After two longer conversations, I can feel his connection to the land, the pride and care. Is that not a climate solution in its own right? If the connection is strong, caring for the land follows naturally. It is only when the ties are severed, when the feeling of belonging is gone, that human beings can start wielding such destructive forces over the environment without a second thought.* (Petkovsek, 2021, p.5)

Already early in the process, relationality was becoming the major ethical call presented by Manuel despite not being named directly. Widening the scope, a desire for a universal response in the shape of a shareable creative output was also present from the beginning and intensified emotionally after hearing news of San Clemente's crops failing due to too much rain and worse still, Manuel's wife passing away from cancer:

> *My Spanish is failing me as I try to express my condolences and sadness. I keep offering support from afar, perhaps hoping that he would agree to some financial help. It feels wrong to say it out loud, and he doesn't ask. Instead, we talk about my visit to the community. As I say goodbye, my decision to go is even stronger, as is the wish and desire to find a way to experience and tell Manuel's story and others like it, to find a way to share through dialogue and new ways of connecting, to continue the work started by the DocuHaiku and develop it further.* (Petkovsek, 2021, p.14)

Although the call of the face, its ethical demand, and a clear response were undoubtedly present, three potential objections can be raised at this point, two of which are already addressed by Thompson himself, and a third that is added by this thesis. They lead to the endorsements of artistic co-creation, celebratory community-based theatre, and relational ethics. The first concerns the question of whether the nature of the approval given to an ethical demand is automatic and inevitable. Thompson criticises this idea coming from Simon Critchley, noting that "there is little understanding as to how that approval will be generated" (2014, p.129). In this research, the face-to-face encounter was initiated with not only an already strong

desire for an ethical exchange and response (hence the danger of the Enthusiast's Infatuation), but with the hope of an action-based result. Therefore, the approval of the demand of the face was automatic because it was *already* present. Thompson is also sceptical about the process always being automatic for reasons of cultural and societal desensitisation: "We live in a time where a glance into the face of the other can lead to a mocking disregard quicker than deep appreciation. So while one might approve of the demand of the other, there needs to be a process for encouraging that approval" (2014, p.129). Importantly, he sees the 'affect' of artistic co-creation as a means of "moving people from an 'anaesthetised' reaction to the face of the other, to feeling the demands that those faces make upon them" (2014, p.129). This is a strong endorsement of co-created theatre as a means of developing ethical sensibilities and understanding that "our own humanity is diminished by designating some lives to be of less value than others, or less important than our own" (Thompson, 2014, p.130). The three main practice cases of this thesis support this endorsement through narratives that illuminate the co-creating and performing communities as well as the explorations of society's relationship with the land. They bring into focus the necessity of treating all persons, human and more-than-human, as equal presences within the networks of our environment, and of relating that to audiences of spectators.

The second objection lies in the daunting idea that an individual face-to-face encounter should result in *universal* political action. Thompson acknowledges this: "one of the problems from the intimate to the inordinate is that responsibility can overwhelm" (2014, p.130). How can a single doctoral researcher and theatre practitioner make any real dent or difference in the vast injustice of Indigenous rights, the environmental crisis, and humanity's relationship to the more-than-human? Acknowledging privilege, the notes of the conversation with Manuel express the concern:

> *How does this news affect me and my practice? From my comfortable armchair in a warm office in the middle of a city with all modern amenities, surrounded by products from all over the world, available to me at any time for a few pounds, here I was, confronted by real-life consequences of the very climate crisis that was the original cause for reaching out to Manuel. He is living the change: shifting weather patterns mean unpredictable harvests and lack of produce, on which the community depends. This is not something I can change just through storytelling. In fact, it is doubtful that I can change anything at all.* (Petkovsek, 2021, p.13)

Despite the idea that the "very tension between the specifics of the moment, and the universality of the claim that it makes" should spark "the motivation to continue to campaign for social justice", Thompson acknowledges that the 'crush' can be too much and offers a solution through "a particular understanding of beauty, and a sensory aesthetic engagement more broadly" (2014, pp.130-131). When dealing with

painful issues of oppression, "attention to delight, beauty or joy, as an integrated or preparatory aspect of the work can actually awaken individuals to each other's needs and perspectives", and in some cases, "a complete focus on pleasure might be protective" (2014, p.131). Thompson's argument is a rationale for the celebratory form of applied theatre mentioned in the Methodology chapter and present in a significant way in the practice cases of this thesis. It is confirmed by this research's insights: one of the ways to navigate the complexity of the climate crisis is to celebrate, express joy and communal connectedness, to tell stories of resistance – not in order to hide the issues, but to awaken to each other's perspectives. There is a hint of this insight in the conversation notes:

> *Yet, hearing about his loss made me want to tell his story more. There is value in spreading the word, and if the story being spread is one of dialogue, sharing, and new ways of communicating the consequences of climate change, perhaps it can ultimately add something to the discussion.* (Petkovsek, 2021, p.13)

Importantly, the story mentioned in the quote is one of *dialogue* (an expression of Conquergood's dialogical performance), not imbalance.

The third objection, posited by this research, is the implicit expectation of a directional imbalanced relationship, most often between a person of a dominant culture and a person characterised through oppression, minority, or suffering. Again analysing Critchley's argument, Thompson notes that the relationship between yourself and the Other "has to be unbalanced or asymmetrical as you feel the infinite demand of the other constraining you" and that "there is no equal and opposite claim" (2014, p.127) from you to the Other. Therefore, the asymmetry is what generates the motivating force for political action. Acknowledging that setting imbalance as the central motivator is a powerful reminder of one's privilege and positionality, this research nevertheless challenges the given assumption of the unchanging direction of the imbalance, in this case from the Western practice researcher toward the Indigenous partner, which carries the undertone of a colonial mindset. A positionality of white privilege and Global North access to human rights, wealth, and security, rightly sets the direction of the imbalance, and yet it does so from a point of view from *within* the same Western discourse and (materialist) mentality. In the conversations with Manuel, this seemed to be turned upside down. In the first exchange, Manuel noted that "being Indigenous for him means sharing without expecting anything in return" (Petkovsek, 2021, p.1). Despite the importance of reciprocity in Indigenous cosmovision, this was an offer of sharing without any expectations. It was in fact *the approval of the ethical call of the face* – the call *he* felt in a conversation with a Western practice researcher while not expecting an equal and opposite claim to be experienced by his interlocutor. The imbalance of privilege and access to Western materiality or

mobility was perhaps flowing one way, but the imbalance of ethics and worldview was understood by Manuel to be flowing the opposite way. The result of the call, *my* call, was Manuel's ethical action and responsibility of offering a relational understanding of life and the environment. This, in turn, engendered a desire for creative and political action. The resulting digital artefact, *DocuHaiku 0,* presented at the end of this chapter, is an expression of the search for balance between the two.

When constructing a personal ethos for practice research with Indigenous co-creators and mitigating dangers of the replications of a colonial mindset, the researcher should not assume that the imbalance of the relationship always keeps the same direction. A relational ethics creates what Cree scholar Willie Ermine calls the "ethical space of engagement", which "must be crafted in a way that creates caring investment from all participants, regardless of their worldview or positionality" (Peter et al., 2022, p.31), and which can be a space of discovery of (im)balance. Crafting an ethical space of engagement requires time and listening – a listening that manages to move beyond the fear of ethical pitfalls or imbalanced relationships.

Ethics and Politics in San Luis

Lack of time was one of the main reasons for the previously outlined ethical challenges while co-creating *The Waterfall of San Luis* with the Shuar community. Nevertheless, the face-to-face encounter engendered a call to ethical and political action, which was answered by the co-creation and performance of the show with the intent of engendering a similar call to the audience. *Was* performing a fable about Shuar culture with a group of hastily prepared children a political action of support and resistance? Further drawing on Thompson and on the concept of the 'sensible fabric', this section will argue that, although imperfectly and somewhat clumsily, the performance in the town of Gualaquiza ultimately did "redistribute the sensible in favour of those whose faces are excluded, denied or suppressed" (Thompson, 2014, p.133). It achieved this not only through contesting the sensible but also presenting a relational worldview that encompasses the more-than-human, charting, with ethical caveats, a walkable pathway for the main practice cases of this thesis.

Thompson borrows the term 'sensible fabric' from Jacques Ranciére "to suggest that patterns of association and practice are characterized by particular ways of organising who can speak, be visible, and participate in society" (cited in Thompson, 2014, p.132). Politics shapes the who, what and when of sensible fabric, while artistic activities can "intervene in the general distribution of ways of doing and

making" (2014, p.132). Thompson interprets this as an inseparability of the ethical and political: "on seeing the face of another we are at one and the same time engaged in the politics and the ethical implications of that encounter" and therefore "the whole of an applied theatre event, precisely because of the place of the participants in any distribution, is already engaged politically" (2014, pp.132-133). The inherent political facet of a group of Western facilitators co-creating a performance with Shuar partners in the midst of a charged and complex situation is difficult to deny. Yet, did the celebratory approach, insufficient rehearsal, fable context, and a narrative created and influenced by the Western facilitators devalue the ethical and political act?

The performance itself presented a 'messy' quality verging on public improvisation. The excerpt below presents a scene from the dream journey of the protagonists, in which the Woman attempts to harvest food from the garden. As shown in the work with Manuel, cultivation of the earth presents a crucial connection to the land. Interestingly, Manuel embodies a position typically held by women in Shuar culture[4]. For the Shuar, the garden is of great importance and is managed through the relation between women and the spirit of nature and fecundity, Nunkui. The Woman in the story has forgotten how to sing the traditional *anent,* "magical prayer[s] intended to secure the patronage of non-human entities, to invoke the benevolent help of the spirits of deceased relatives, or to call upon the souls of distant loved ones" (Bammer de Rodriguez, 2015, p.70). These are crucial for "protecting the cosmological equilibrium of the Shuar world" (Bammer de Rodriguez, 2015, p.70) and for communicating with Nunkui while working in the garden. In the dream, Nunkui herself appears to help, teaching the woman an *anent*: **LINKO1**.

At a first glance, the chaotic organisation of the performance[5] raises ethical challenges. In addition to questions of text authorship discussed previously, the Narrator in the show was one of the *mestizo* Ecuadorean members of the group, setting up a frame in which the supposedly deeply Shuar story was narrated by a non-Indigenous actor. Furthermore, the character of Rock (the boy in the white bulky costume), symbolising the land and its connection to the Shuar, was invented by the facilitating group as a Guide figure from Joseph Campbell's mythological hero's journey structure. While this provided dramaturgical structure to the narrative, it also raised questions of projecting "Anglo-Western storytelling and cultural values onto Indigenous mythic narratives, which in fact have very different storytelling norms and serve a very different purpose to the individualistic striving for self-fulfilment which [Campbell]

[4] Although men also help cultivate the land in Shuar tradition, the specific connection to the crops and plants grown, represented by their bond to Nunkui, is held by the women.

[5] The link to a video of the full show can be found in the Practice Portfolio section at the end of this thesis.

identified" (Hambly, 2021, p.135). Considering Thompson's argument, the performance could be understood as a "meaningful spectacle" leading to "awareness raising" (Thompson, 2014, p.133), something that Rancière and Thompson are sceptical of in terms of political action. Instead, political art should also offer a "sensible or perceptual shock caused, conversely, by the uncanny, by that which resists signification" (2014).

Nevertheless, there are many interventions into the 'sensible world' in the presented video, starting with contesting the politics of the space itself. Gualaquiza is the town-capital of the local region, surrounded by small Indigenous communities like San Luis. The town itself has a high majority *mestizo* population (Saquicela et al., 2021) and a Shuar-centred performance of this type was a rare event. In addition, it placed Shuar performers outside of the traditional and more common context of dancing groups, presenting them in an unconventional genre. The open format of the performance contested Western conventional theatre tropes as well, existing in a space between stage and street. The child performers were wrangled in real time by the facilitators, partially adhering to the rehearsed movements and partially wandering off or, as the little boy in white at 0:32 in the video, being captivated by the performance and switching to becoming on-stage spectators. The boy remains in the (possibly best) 'immersive seat' throughout the scene, briefly losing attention during the action-less moment of Nunkui's *anent* and noticing a shiny hanging streamer at 2:52, then settling down again when the Narrator continues (2:58). Another small boy in a red shirt, not part of the performers, wanders in at 0:58, captivated by the costume of Rock, and interacts spontaneously with one of the pieces Rock drops at 1:26 (symbolising the sacrifice of land and alluding to extractivism). He uses it as a hat and cape before finally ripping it in two and skipping off stage (2:01), adding through play an unintentionally intriguing image of the relationship to the land as both a search for protection and empowerment, and an exploitation. The blurring of performers and spectators and the combination of the open dynamics of the presentation with the intimacy of the story and community performers contested what Thompson names the "artificial boundaries" of the distribution of the sensible (2014, p.133), creating an ethical space of engagement that presented a call to the audience. It did so not by instructing the audience with "the story of suffering [the face] reveals", but by making an ethical demand of responsibility to the Shuar with, as Thompson describes it, "the story they [told], their smile on stage, their playing a game or through shared acts of resistance" (2014, p.134). Extending the expectations beyond neat action on stage and a disciplined spectator is also part of the shift of consciousness needed in this type of co-creation.

Furthermore, the publicly played recording of the *anent*, a sacred song normally kept secret, presented a significant moment. The song was sung by Dominga; 'donating' this *anent* for the benefit of the performance was a strong signal of the urgency of the cultural crisis she feels in the community. The Shuar members of the audience would immediately recognise the importance of this moment, while the *mestizo* public could at least sense the symbolism. Songs carry knowledge, confirming the power of language and words in many Indigenous cultures. Chickasaw scholar Linda Hogan posits that "there is no abyss between what is said and what it materially represents. Then too, in most of the world creation stories all things are brought into being by words, dreams, or songs." (2014, p.23). This is confirmed in the myth of Nunkui, in which she speaks into existence crops, fruits, and vegetables. A plant life-giving song intervened in the 'sensible world' of the cement urban venue and despite the general messiness of the performance, the moment feels sacred and solemn. The puppet representing Nunkui, crafted by the performers and the community themselves, additionally subverts the image of arts and crafts being sold by Indigenous communities to visitors as souvenirs. Here, craft has called and breathed life into a spiritual presence that is not for sale or for materialistic pleasure.

Ultimately, despite possible reproaches to the ethics of the co-creation of *The Waterfall of San Luis*, the event of the performance generated a certain level of "shock" or the "uncanny" (Thompson, 2014, p.133) just by happening at all. The arrival and performance of the Shuar children, many of whom had never set foot in town and most of whom had never performed, was a contestation of a hegemonic space and an act of resistance in itself. It succeeded to "challenge who speaks, where they dance, and at what time they play" and redistribute "the sensible in favour of those whose faces are excluded, denied or suppressed" (Thompson, 2014, p.133). It did this without ever mentioning the suppression and denial, rather using a celebratory approach and Indigenous methodologies of remembering, revitalising, and restoring. The two children mentioned in the video excerpt also made evident the modalities of spectatorship/participation that this kind of performance can make possible and showed a different set of values according to which the final product may be evaluated. Additionally, images of acknowledging and respecting the more-than-human such as the garden scene, presented a relational ethics that subverted societal hierarchy of the space where it was performed.

Conclusion with *DocuHaiku 0*

The pilot projects with Ecuadorean Indigenous partners revealed ethical challenges and issues (RQ1) that occur despite awareness of positionality, stem from the practical reality of sociopolitical and cultural

context and the expectations of the parties involved, and can only be resolved through the practice itself. Conquergood's ethical pitfalls should be avoided yet also put into practical context. Some Enthusiast's Infatuation is most likely needed as an initial spark in a co-creative relationship while avoiding Curator's Exhibitionism might ironically lead the practice researcher back into the pit of valorising their own voice over that of the co-creators. Artistic co-creation and applied theatre are effective frameworks for stimulating the acceptance of the ethical demand of the face of the Other, engendering a responsibility for them, and expressing wider political action through celebratory community-based performance. Nevertheless, the direction of the relationship imbalance should not be automatically assumed.

Most importantly, to achieve a dialogical relationship or "the means as much as the end of honest intercultural understanding" (Conquergood, 2013, p.77), the necessary personal ethos of the practice researcher argued by this chapter should include a relational ethics based on cosmovision-inspired indigenist values such as respect, interconnectedness, and gratitude. These values serve to open an ethical space of engagement in which both difference and identity are celebrated and the "deeply different can be deeply known without becoming any less different" (Geertz cited in Conquergood, 2013, p.77). Furthermore, relationality is not solely an aspect of the ethics of the relationship, but an embodied facet of the practice itself. The practice is the relationality, and it extends to the more-than-human, as shown by the practice of cosmovision by the Indigenous partners in the pilot projects. Manuel repeatedly invoked a connection to the land and the environment of San Clemente and suggested "connecting to the spaces around you" (cited in Petkovsek, 2021, p.11) as a practice of problem-solving with the help of the kinship of the more-than-other. The Shuar partners from San Luis contested the 'sensible fabric' of the hegemonic *mestizo* urban space by performing a reminder of a relational approach to the animals, plants, and land around them, and by challenging deeply held understandings of performance as a disciplining space. Integrating indigenist relationality into the practice is the shift of consciousness required of the researcher when working with Indigenous communities (RQ1a) or indeed in any co-creation context.

What, then, does a dialogical performance look like? *DocuHaiku 0* was an attempt at expressing intercultural dialogue through a digital artefact. The artefact juxtaposes experiences of land that is changing: the crop fields in San Clemente and a garden in Ljubljana, Slovenia. The title alludes to the non-fiction nature of the material as well as its 'snapshot' and *haiku*-like presentation of an environmental situation: LINKO2.

The simplistic presentation of the artefact reveals the complexity of climate change: while some plants are failing because of heat or changing cycles, others are thriving. Manuel's cherry tree produced more

cherries than before, and the maple tree in my garden was so lush that few plants survived in its shadow. Manuel translates this into a philosophy of life, echoing the Kichwa spiral, and into an awareness of the good and the bad: sometimes we are up and sometimes we are down. Yet this optimism (or perhaps pragmatism) is under question when it comes to the climate crisis: he predicts another dry spell on top of the already existing one, pushing the planting season later. Ultimately, the crops seen in the video failed due to drought followed by heavy rain.

Similarly, the simple exchange in the artefact is the result of a complex process of managing ethical challenges, avoiding expected pitfalls while learning to let go of rigidity caused by fear of transgression, approving the ethical demand of the face in both directions, answering the call by taking responsibility for the Other, creating an ethical space of engagement through a relational approach, learning about cosmovision by including the land and the more-than-human through indigenist values, and finding balance within the space of engagement through the idea of kinship.

Working with cosmovision-inspired relationality opens a new danger of appropriation: the practice researcher must be careful to acknowledge and respect the complexity of the spiritual aspect of cosmovision. Madison is aware of this: "If the cultures, communities, and the lives we strive to understand are in some way divinely connected, we must keep in mind that what we witness will always have deeper, more layered, and broader implications, consequences, and contexts than we could ever grasp or interpret in the space of our lifetime" (2020, p.105). Respecting the divine component in Indigenous partners' cultures, to which Western facilitators rightly do not have access nor should seek it, moves the discussion "from the secular to the possibility of the sacred" (Madison, 2020, p.105). Consequently, RQ2 states, 'How can Indigenous cosmovision become ethically integrated with the performance practices of the non-Indigenous/Western practitioner-researcher, and how can it be mobilised in performance?' and the next chapter investigates the possibilities of ethically 'translating' the spiritual aspect of Indigenous cosmovision into what the thesis calls a secular sacred through co-created performance.

5 *Aillaquillén – The Island of Nine Moons*: Cosmovision and Ritual in Performance

Introduction

Building on the first-hand experiences of ethical challenges within intercultural work and on the investigation of possible ways of establishing connection, this chapter presents the first main practice case in Chile and analyses co-creation between non-Indigenous and Indigenous partners. The research addresses RQ2: 'How can Indigenous cosmovision become ethically integrated with the performance practices of the non-Indigenous/Western practice researcher, and how can it be mobilised in performance?' Working with Indigenous Mapuche co-creator Alejandra Aillapan Huiriqueo and developing further the relational ethics proposed in Chapter 4, a set of five indigenist values – permission, respect, interconnectedness, reciprocity, and gratitude – is articulated based on the experience of ritual and Mapuche cosmovision as shared by Alejandra. The indigenist value set, present in the narrative and co-creation process of the resulting community-based theatre show *Aillaquillén – The Island of Nine Moons*, is proposed as a methodology for ethical integration of Indigenous cosmovision into non-Indigenous or mixed performance practice. Drawing on Ronald L. Grimes's theory of ritual as enactment and Andreas Weber's theory of animism, the overlap of ritual and theatre becomes the vessel of translation of the spiritual facets of cosmovision values into an expression of the secular sacred, avoiding cultural appropriation while sustaining relationality through performance on stage.

After a brief factual project background, the chapter starts with presenting the context and values as they operate within Mapuche cosmovision and ritual, enabling a relational approach to the more-than-human. Asking permission to enter a territory or ecosystem, presenting oneself as respectful, acknowledging the interconnectedness of all human and more-than-human persons, offering substance in return, and expressing gratitude for safe passage function as embodied spiritual and ethical gestures ritually performed within and *with* the environment, They establish a reciprocal relationship between person and land – the basis of Mapuche culture and cosmovision. This research suggests that as the values and actions get shared with non-Indigenous performers and co-creators through the practice of relating to the (is)land that is the protagonist of the story, they are then not merely referenced in the storytelling and rehearsal process but inhabit a hybrid space between being *performed* and *enacted*, guiding the dramaturgical structure and ensuring a relational dynamics in the performance. In the show *Aillaquillén – The Island of*

Nine Moons, a staging of a Mapuche legend of the creation of the island called Aillaquillén on the lake Mallolafken in southern Chile, the story was narrated through Western theatrical conventions shaped by Indigenous epistemologies. An ethical translation of cosmovision spirituality into ritual(ising) performance is possible due to the fluid, overlapping zone and dynamic interplay of ritual and theatre as formulated by Grimes, and the indigenist framing that allows relating to the environment and the sacred. The chapter reflects on excerpts from the show[6] in which non-Indigenous performers within this framing employ acting, movement, and song to create embodied expressions of relationality with the more-than-human. This enables a translation of the principles of Mapuche cosmovision into performative gestures while remaining accountable to the ethical ground established by the co-creation.

The Mapuche legend presents a cautionary tale – *epew* in the Mapudungun language – about the importance of a relational ethics that includes the land and the more-than-human. The presentation of the *epew* on a public stage in the town of Villarrica, which sits next to lake Mallolafken, contested an existing colonialist version of the story. It represented resistance against imposed patterns of hegemonic culture and a celebratory affirmation of Mapuche traditions and cosmovision. Like the Shuar partners in the Ecuador pilot project, the Mapuche "associate the struggle for reclaiming territory with the preservation of elements of Mapuche worldview" (Echeverría, 2018), and the *epew* confirms the ontological inseparability of *Mapu* (earth) and *Che* (people). Within this framework, mythological storytelling becomes a political and symbolic act of territorial reclamation and cultural continuity in the face of environmental degradation due to contemporary settler occupation. The latter is expressed in the form of development, tourism, and extractivism. By interweaving Indigenous and Western forms of expression, the practice case addresses RQ3, 'In what ways can the complexity of the climate crisis be navigated through interculturally co-created community-based stories and performances?', proposing an indigenist value framework that reminds audiences of their positionality within the human–more-than-human networks and of the importance of *practicing* relationality. Ritual in this case becomes not only the place for intercultural translation of Indigenous and Western epistemologies, but also the "name for sustained, value-laden practice", since "in ritualizing, human beings discover, then embody and cultivate their world views, attitudes, and ethics" (Grimes, 2003, pp.33).

The chapter articulates and proposes the indigenist value set expressed and translated through ritualising actions as a framework for performance and storytelling. The framework enables performance to narrate an indigenist relational approach to the environment and the more-than-human and to seek articulation

[6] The link to the video of the full show can be found in the Practice Portfolio section.

of a secular sacred that can speak to Western or mixed audiences. These insights are applied and further explored in different contexts in Chapters 6 and 7.

Project Background

The work in Chile was made possible by the Contested Territories research network, an "international and cross-sectoral network of organizations from Europe and Latin America united in a joint research programme that is oriented towards the generation of conceptual and empirical knowledge about territorial inequalities" (Contested Territories, n.d.). One of the central beliefs of this multi-year project, funded by the European Commission's Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions programme, is that "the alternative practices and knowledge promoted by communities are fundamental to understanding the transformations of space and society" (Contested Territories, n.d.). The research questions of this thesis therefore responded well to the interests of the network. Through its mobility programme, I received funding for a three-month-long visit at the Universidad de la Frontera in Pucon in the Araucania province, where professor Hugo Marcelo Zunino was my programme host. Through the Contested Territories team, including María Consuelo Sánchez and Javiera Cifuentes Padilla, I was introduced to local Mapuche lecturer and activist Alejandra Aillapan Huiriqueo. Realising that I was a theatre director, Alejandra saw an opportunity to bring to life a project she had been contemplating for a while – the performance of a regional Mapuche etiological myth emphasising cosmovision values. The three months I spent in Pucon provided time for building trust, friendship, and a reciprocal relationship that led to an ethical co-creation and the articulation of the indigenist value scaffolding As is reflected on in this chapter, Alejandra helped me explore the region and connect to the local more-than-human presences. We collaborated on a number of smaller projects, including workshops, presentations, lectures, and community meetings. In addition to becoming one of the main practice cases of this thesis, the show *Aillaquillén – The Island of Nine Moons*, performed at the Liquen Cultural Centre in Villarrica, is featured in the Contested Territories report *Deliverable 4.2, Documentation of workshops and performances* (2025).

Context

Mapuche and Land: From Historical Independence to Fracaso Constitucional

The Mapuche are the largest of all Indigenous nations living in what is now Chile, with a population of around 1.7 million, and another 200,000 living in Argentina (Ranjan et al., 2021). Although most reside in

the capital Santiago de Chile and other bigger cities, their ancestral land, the *Wallmapu*, is a slice of the continent between the Maipo river, south of Santiago, and the Chiloé island in southern Chile (Aldunate Del Solar, 1986). Today, the remnants of this territory that are still in, or have been returned to, Mapuche hands, are mostly concentrated in the Araucania region, which has the biggest Mapuche population outside of urban zones (Ranjan et al., 2021). The region also includes the towns Villarrica and Pucon, placed on opposite sides of lake Mallolafken under the volcano Rukapillan[7]. To Chileans, Pucon represents the 'adrenaline capital' of the country, and hordes of mostly domestic tourists flock there every summer for water sports followed by recuperation in the many thermal spas of the volcanic region.

For the Mapuche, the Indigenous value of connection to the land is particularly strong. The link is expressed in their name itself: *Mapu* means land or earth, *Che* means people. *Mapuche* are the people of the land, and the language they speak, *Mapudungun*, the language of the land or earth – "a language symbolically associated with nature: it is not only human language, but also the language of the 'earth, wind, natural sounds, and voices'." (Carcamo-Huechante and Paillan, 2012, cited in Echeverría, 2018, p.287). Similarly, the land for the Mapuche is not solely a designated territory or an arable resource, but "a set of dimensions, energies and types of lives" (Ranjan et al., 2021, p.4), in which their culture and traditions are deeply rooted. The world according to the Mapuche is divided vertically into the *wenü mapu* (land of above, place of good spirits and ancestors), *naq mapu* (land of all living beings), and the *minche mapu* (land below, place of bad spirits) (Ranjan et al., 2021, p.4) – a map similar to the Kichwa world realms, presented by Manuel Guatemal in Chapter 4. Mapuche land has been taken from them repeatedly by the Chilean state and is still being destroyed or changed by industry, agrarian use, development, and tourism. This type of destruction is "not just territorial but encompasses the destruction of an entire society in which human beings, territory, and more-than-human entities have been closely linked since ancient times" (Echeverría, 2018, p.283). The relational, kinship-based, and reciprocal relationship the Mapuche have with the land means that the suffering of one heavily influences the other.

Initially, the Mapuche successfully repelled first the Inca and then Spanish invaders; the latter signed a peace treaty with the Mapuche at the Parliament of Quilin in 1641, ending the Arauco War and recognising the complete autonomy of the Mapuche on their lands (Aldunate Del Solar, 1986, p.39). However, this freedom lasted only until the 19th century, when the now independent Chile decided to 'pacify' Araucania, initially with a mix of political means, settlement, and land redistribution in the early 1850s, then with a military occupation (Echeverría, 2018) that ended Mapuche independence. Starting in 1866, the Chilean

[7] These are Mapudungun names; both the volcano and the lake are called Villarrica in Spanish.

state began to divide the Indigenous territories it had annexed, seemingly protecting the Mapuche by granting 'titles of Mercy' (land ownership), prohibiting subdivision and sale of their lands (Echeverría, 2018, p.286). In actuality, this was a political tool that eventually wrested, through the first half of the 20th century, more than 90% of their traditional territory from the Mapuche (Bengoa, 1996). This land was given to *mestizo* settlers to cultivate or industrialize. The loss of land and autonomy prompted a politicisation effect within the Mapuche as new strategies were pursued to claim the land back. A brief respite occurred during the socialist Allende government in the early 1970s, when the Indigenous Law 17,729 was passed, recognizing Mapuche culture and tradition (Minority Rights Group, 2023), and the Mapuche were able to recoup around 130,000 hectares of territory (Ranjan et al., 2021, p.8). However, this was brutally reversed under the Pinochet dictatorship, during which big lumber corporations bought up huge tracts of land for forestry exploitation, owning 1.5 million hectares of land in the region by 2002 (Echeverría, 2018, p.287). Despite the attempts to silence their voices or brand them terrorists, Mapuche fought back and protested the seizure and exploitation of their lands, and violent clashes with the government or with police forces have occurred regularly since the 1980s (Crow, 2013).

The election of the young leftist Chilean president Gabriel Boric in 2022 suggested there could be a new approach to negotiations with the Mapuche and more understanding for their demands of the return of their lands. However, progress has been slow and the state of emergency in Araucania, declared by Boric's predecessor Sebastián Piñera and criticized by congressman Boric, is still in effect and had its 60th extension confirmed in August 2025 (Diario Concepción, 2025). Clashes continue and there is military presence in southern Chile. Likewise, the liberal government ultimately failed to push through the proposed new progressive constitution in 2022 (reflecting in parts the ground-breaking constitution of Ecuador adopted in 2008), which included articles about the rights of nature and suggested a plurinational state with Indigenous self-government (Convención Consitucional, 2022). By supporters of the new constitution, the referendum outcome is referred to as the *fracaso constitucional,* the constitutional failure. The practice research presented in this chapter happened in Chile in late 2022 soon after the referendum, as activists, progressives, many Indigenous people, and the government itself were reeling from the rejection.

Lake Mallolafken and the Aillaquillén epew

Lake Mallolafken ('White Clay Lake') and volcano Rukapillan ('House of the Spirits'), important and sacred sites for the Mapuche, are now popular with tourists. While most of the main area of the volcano is still

protected, the lake is subject to overdevelopment, industrial misuse, and contamination. Pollution comes from an oversaturation of nutrients from pisciculture, wastewater treatment plants in parallel with untreated sewage, urban and agricultural use (EJAtlas, 2022), as well as tourist and thermal spa activities (Simon and Ceballos Sáez, 2023, p.630). The population in the basin of the lake has grown significantly in just a few years, and the land is increasingly divided and privatised, ignoring Mapuche claims and historic rights. Consequently, Mallolafken is subject to eutrophication processes, leading to frequent algae blooms and a decreasing quality of water. It is generally considered a health risk to bathe in it, and there are periods of time when swimming is forbidden due to high levels of contaminants. In 2017, the Chilean Ministry of Environment declared the lake a 'saturated zone', representing a first step towards an often-criticised Decontamination Plan (Simon and Ceballos Sáez, 2023) that has yet to be implemented (Parra, 2025).

Somewhat dryly, Rodriguez-Lopez et al. concluded their 8-year study of the levels of Chlorophyll-a in the lake by observing that "the increasing occurrence of algal blooms poses a threat to the organisms and the scenery of the lake" (2023, p.16). For the Mapuche, the degradation of the Mallolafken basin, contamination of the water, and overdevelopment of the land are not solely an environmental issue, but a crisis of culture and identity: "To call oneself Mapuche means to invoke an essential tie to particular geographic and spiritual spaces [of the territory]" (Webb, 2014, p.222). Suffering of the local land therefore constitutes an "affront to the very balance and moral economy of Mapuche society" (Webb, 2014, p.222), since "Mapuche conceive their identities as influenced by the meanings they have given to their landscape over time and by the memories they have constructed in relation to it" (Echeverría, 2018, p.293). The narrative of *Aillaquillén – The Island of Nine Moons* represents one such memory of the land, in the form of an *epew* or a cautionary tale that not only emphasises the importance of the lake and the island in local more-than-human kinship, but serves as a reminder of the basic tenets of Mapuche cosmovision: a relational and reciprocal connection to the environment based on permission, respect and gratitude. The *epew* came from Alejandra's family archives and memories, and it fit well with her efforts towards the improvement of Indigenous rights, the protection and recuperation of the land, and the conservation and proliferation of Mapuche culture and language.

The *epew* includes a young Mapuche couple, Nautüll ('blue of the night') and Lifkoyam ('white oak'), expecting a child. While crossing lake Mallolafken to give birth in her family's community on the other side, they forget the habits of their ancestors of asking permission of the elements and the lake to enter their territory, and to pray for safe passage. As a result of this infringement, the *puelche*, a strong wind

that blows down from the mountains in the west, rises and leaves them stranded in the middle of the lake, just as the baby decides to enter this world. They realise their error, apologise, ask forgiveness and permission, and offer reciprocal assurances to the natural elements who heed their pleas and come to their aid. Fire from the volcano, water from the lake, the blowing wind, and the earth underneath join to create a small island, on which the young couple can land and give birth safely. The Mapudungun name for the island, *Aillaquillén*, translates to 'Nine Moons' in memory of this legendary event. Traditionally, Mapuche mothers would come and offer the placenta to the island after giving birth. The legend says the baby girl born on the island grew up to become a historical local leader or *lonko*, connecting story to Mapuche history. The connection is expressed as a spiral by Peruvian Quechua scholar Ana Mariella Bacigalupo: "as the cyclical intersects with the linear, Mapuche mythohistory /…/ can be seen as a sort of spiral along which people and events both repeat themselves and move through time" (2013, p.79). Just as the Kichwa life spiral and Trimingham's practice research spiral, the Mapuche mythohistory spiral supports the idea of constant flux and constant connection to what was and what will be. These are important aspects of cosmovision strengthened through ritual and ritualising actions, as well as a crucial aspect of the practice of relationality.

Ritual and Cosmovision

Relating With the Ngen

Each time Alejandra enters a new territory or ecosystem, she takes a moment to introduce herself and anyone with her, respectfully ask permission to enter, and offer a bit of food or drink in return. When leaving, another moment is dedicated to expressing gratitude for safe passage and gifts received. This ritual represents the core of Mapuche cosmovision, based on an animist and relational approach to the more-than-human, including spirits. "Mapuche believe that human beings must ask permission to enter the domain protected by the spirit masters" (Echeverría, 2018, p.289). The spirits are called the *ngen*, protectors of nature whose purpose is to preserve life, well-being, and continuity of various natural phenomena. As María Ester Grebe notes, respecting and relating to the *ngen* is a form of ecological behaviour, as it generates "principles of a native ethnoecology, contributing to the balance of the environment, avoiding both the excessive exploitation and predation of natural resources as well as their contamination" (1993, p.48). Each *ngen* is the protector of a certain part of the natural world, with the 'elemental' *ngen* holding prominent positions: *ngen-ko* protects water, *ngen-kürrüf* the wind, *ngen-kütral* fire, *ngen-mapu* the earth. The *ngen* give life or animating force: "Without the *ngen*, the water would dry

up, the wind wouldn't blow, the forest would dry up, the fire would go out, the mountain would crumble, the earth would even out, the rocks would be gone. And so, the earth would disappear" (Grebe, 1993, p.50). The *ngen* can be 'behind' bigger forces such the elements, all wild animals or forests, or they can be protectors of 'smaller units' such as trees, birds, and streams. What is important is the manner of interacting with them. A Mapuche person "first needs to ask permission to enter [their] dominion. To use any natural element protected by the *ngen*, she needs to justify why she requires it and how much of it she means to take to cover her immediate need. Once the announced quantity is obtained, she needs to express her gratitude to the *ngen*; /…/ It is necessary to give a small offering to comply with the traditional principle of reciprocity. This offering usually consists of some breadcrumbs or grains of wheat and/or corn, or a small coin" (Grebe, 1993, p.51). Grebe distinguishes four more 'subsystems' of Mapuche religiosity: gods, spirits of the ancestors, shamanism, and witchcraft. Communication with or manipulation of these are available to certain trained or important members of the Mapuche communities including different types of leaders (*caciques* and *lonkos*) and the *machi* or Mapuche healers/shamans, in contact with the spiritual world. Relating to the *ngen*, on the other hand, is "a private domain of beliefs put into practice in those natural environments habitually frequented by each individual and their family members" (1993, p.48). These individual rituals are the ones that Nautüll and Lifkoyam forget to enact when crossing lake Mallolafken in the *epew*, and these were the rituals that Alejandra shared with the co-creators.

The most notable sharing of ritual occurred in a visit to island Aillaquillén with the group of performers, consisting of mostly non-Indigenous local creatives. The purpose of the visit was an offering of a gift to the island as a reciprocal gesture for allowing the telling of its story. The offering consisted of seedlings of the Araucaria tree (*Araucaria araucana*), an ancient species that still grows in Araucania but has disappeared on the island itself. The Mapuche have a "strong socio-cultural, spiritual and practical connection" (Herrmann, 2005, p.121) to the Araucaria tree, collecting its seeds or *piñones* for nutrition. Slow-growing, long-lived, and threatened by logging industries and grazing practices (Zamorano-Elgueta et al., 2012), Araucaria trees represent resilience to the Mapuche, as they have withstood these threats for centuries. However, they are now additionally threatened by the effects of climate change and rising temperatures (Varas-Myrik et al., 2022). Visiting the island and presenting the offering represented an embodied practice of relationality that inspired the dramaturgy of the show and the stage presence of the performers. The ritual enacted by Alejandra at the planting was documented and presented through projection as part of the performance of *Aillaquillén – The Island of Nine Moons*: **LINKO3**.

Rowing across the lake, the group relived to a certain extent the journey of Nautüll and Lifkoyam, navigating the waters to arrive at the welcoming island "that embraces so much life" as Alejandra says in the video (2:43). The ritual of the planting starts at 1:05 with Alejandra robed in traditional Mapuche clothes and jewellery. The initial prayer immediately addresses the important more-than-human persons present – lake Mallolafken and volcano Rukapillan. Both are crucial to local Mapuche communities, and the volcano is considered "a mystic centre of the Mapuche world" that represents "the breathing of the earth" and "a house where the spirits of the *pillan*, or intermediary spirits between human beings and [celestial beings], live" (Skewes and Guerra, 2016, p.70). The four elements are invoked as witnesses of the offering and future guardians of the growing saplings, and important values of cosmovision are named: Alejandra *gives thanks* "for this life that we are sharing today" (1:56), announces that the group has come to the island "*with respect*, humility, and glad hearts" (2:12), and acknowledges *interconnectedness* by asking the elements to "be with us" (2:19-2:27). The prayer and the immediately following direct address to the Araucaria saplings (2:51-3:01) represent an animist understanding of the world inherent in cosmovision. This understanding is described by Andreas Weber: "Everything is first person. The cosmos as society of beings: Not only humans are persons, but spirits, animals, plants, rivers, mountains, and watersheds, too. These have individuality, agency, and can be accessed by communication" (2020. p.24). This communication is a form of relationality that has to be *practiced*: "It is important to stress that engaging in indigenous practices is not purely theoretic endeavour and is not possible by a theoretical approach alone. Indigenous practices have to be *enacted and embodied*. The spirits of rivers and mountains, which are entangled with our own lives, have to be invoked and asked for their participation" (Weber, 2020, p.32, my italics). Alejandra does just that, treating the more-than-humans as persons, offering the Araucaria saplings to the island, the earth and the elements, and offering nourishment to the seedlings themselves (3:37-4:50) as one would to their child. The framework is that of *kinship*, of relating to the more-than-human beings as kin. Weber notes that this type of connection "reconceive[s] our interaction with one another and with the living world as relational, and centred around a common interest, which is the flourishing of the life supporting our kin and through this, us" (2020, p.30). Relational ethics practiced with kin includes an attitude of care, which translates into ecological behaviour. At 4:41 Alejandra invokes "powerful Water" to help the group as "beings who want to work to protect the Earth", emphasising Weber's reflection that "ecological existence is enacted through the situated, concrete and collectively experienced forming of relations. Ecological transformation thus becomes relationship work" (2020, p.31) – a powerful rationale of animist sensibilities and a relational approach as ways of ecologically beneficial understandings of the

environment. Thanking the elemental *ngen* (4:56-5:21), Alejandra asks for protection of the seedlings, for the healing of the polluted lake Mallolafken, and "that we humans can understand, once and for all, that we are part of it" (5:54-5:57). This underlines another important aspect of cosmovision, local belonging, which is the basis for a directly practical and enacted approach in relating to the more-than-human. Weber posits, "Instead of applying abstract rules, people acting with an animistic mindset need to connect with the local actors and let a story of mutual exchange unfold. Ecological practices, in this perspective, can never be the application of general rules, but must always be *local, reciprocal, felt,* and *experiential*" (2020, p.28, my italics). Fittingly, Alejandra ends the ritual by *asking permission* to spread the story of the Araucarias and the island (6:10), invoking once more the protection of the elements (6:44-6:58), and offering a final thanks to the spirits, to Water, and to Earth (6:57).

Indigenist Value Set

Drawing from the practice of cosmovision as presented by Alejandra, this research therefore articulates, with her permission and support, a set of five indigenist values – *permission, respect, interconnectedness, reciprocity, and gratitude* – as the basic framework of a relational approach to the human and more-than-human networks connected by ties of kinship that form the environment. The set of values builds not only on Alejandra's practice but also on the related proposal of Jo-Ann Archibald's (2012) seven principles of Indigenous storywork, offered as a framework for researchers working with Indigenous elders and listening to their stories. Besides the four Rs (respect, responsibility, reverence, reciprocity) mentioned in the previous chapter in the context of the interaction with Manuel Guatemal, Archibald names *wholism*, *interrelatedness,* and *synergy* as the remaining three principles that "shape the quality of the learning process" (2012, p.373). While Archibald's purpose is to create an ethical space for qualitative research methods for anthropologists, this thesis proposes that by applying the set of indigenist values to performance, cosmovision can be ethically integrated into non-Indigenous performance practice. Instead of committing cultural appropriation, this is then "a humble act of decolonising western practices from their underlying [colonialist] assumptions" (Weber, 2020, p.22). It is also a way of navigating the climate crisis by focusing on the relationship between communities and their environments. The vessel used in cosmovision to confirm and enact these values is ritual. Applying indigenist values to performance is possible because of the nature of ritual, as related by Grimes: "understood performatively, ritual knowledge is not a commodity transferred by bodies in motion, but an enacted co-production mounted by people in sensory engagement with one another and with the places that ground this interaction"

(2012, p.87). The ritual of reciprocity by offering *Araucaria* saplings, asking for permission, respectfully relating to the *ngen* and the more-than-human, and expressing gratitude was enacted by Alejandra and the group in sensory engagement with one another and with the elements themselves (handling soil and seedlings, offering water and seeds, interacting with the water of the lake and the environment of the island). It happened in a very specific place that not only grounded the interaction but presented an important more-than-human character in the narrative that was being co-created. Weber and Grimes respectively state that Indigenous practices and rituals are *enacted*; this designation of meaningful performance is the key for the translation of cosmovision to theatrical stage.

How then does ethical integration and mobilisation of Indigenous cosmovision work through the application of the indigenist set of values to Western performance practice via the vessel of ritual? The next section analyses a 'direct' stage translation of the ritual of relating to the *ngen* in the performance of *Aillaquillén – The Island of Nine Moons*, co-created by Alejandra, myself, and the performers.

Ritual and Performance

Ritualisation

> *To undertake this journey, the young man prepared his* wampo *[boat], his food (honey and flour from* piñones*), his* makun *[coat], his* kultrün*, and other tools. At dawn, they began their journey, launching the* wampo *into the lake. Suddenly, a strong Puelche wind began to blow, preventing them from manoeuvring the* wampo *toward Villarrica. Then, in their agony, and because they didn't want to miss the opportunity to receive their baby, they began to pray. Nautüll remembered that they should seek and make offerings to the four elements: water, fire, air, and earth. /…/ Lifkoyam and Nautüll realized that they hadn't asked permission to make their journey. Lifkoyam only tried to please his companion and take her to visit her maternal family. So, realizing this, he spoke to the Mallolafken, asked for forgiveness, and implored the lake to have compassion for his* reñma *[family], committing himself forever to speak of what had happened and to pass on these teachings to his offspring.* (Aillapan Huiriqueo, 2022)

The core part of the *epew* presents a dense conglomeration of Mapuche cultural and cosmovision elements and more-than-human references, and includes the brief description of Nautüll and Lifkoyam's prayer. A dramatisation of the story for a Western-style stage therefore already presupposed a cosmovision-inspired content and encompassed a 'direct translation' of the described ritual into performance. The scaffolding of the indigenist value-set was used *twice*: once as a processual framework for the creation of the space of ethical engagement between the Indigenous and non-Indigenous

participants, and again for relating to the elements and the more-than-human within the narrative. The former is a necessary condition for a non-Indigenous group to perform an Indigenous legend on stage while the latter, this section will show, is not only a translation of Indigenous cosmovision into performance, but also a 're-translation' of that performance into an expression of the sacred element within it. The visit to the island Aillaquillén, including preparations of securing boats and bringing along provisions, and Alejandra's prayer to the *ngen* with the offering of the *Araucaria* seedlings served not only as an embodied practice of a relational approach to the more-than-human, but also as firsthand inspiration for the dramatisation of Nautüll and Lifkoyam's scene. The dramaturgy of the scene was therefore directly connected to the experience of lived practice: **LINKO4**.

Writing and directing the scene revealed several layers of ritual and performance. The whole of the couple's journey constitutes preparation for the ritual of giving birth, symbolising the beginning of a new cycle and a renewal of the human relationship to the more-than-human. The preparations themselves seem ritualistic, and the prayer to the elements and the lake is a ritual addressing of the *ngen* or the more-than-human, like the one Alejandra enacted on the island itself. All of these were now presented on a stage by non-Indigenous performers; what was ritual and what was 'just' performance? What was both? How does this overlapping space facilitate the integration of cosmovision into performance?

Grimes defines ritual as "embodied, condensed, and prescribed enactment" (2014, p.195). In other words, ritual is always manifested through "overt, bodily ways", represented by an "extraordinary ordinariness", led by instructions or "rubric-driven actions", and not performed as fiction, but rather enacted or "put into force and play" (2014, p.195). In the first part of the scene (0:25-4:02), the movements and text have a ritualistic quality. Lifkoyam continually paces across the stage, preparing the necessary supplies and objects for the journey across the lake by bringing one by one to the *wampo*. The back-and-forth is rhythmic; the body is involved in a practiced, stylised way. The selection of the objects has pragmatic but also symbolic and cultural meaning: *piñones* or food prepared with their flour and traditional Mapuche instruments are present at any Mapuche gathering, ceremony or ritual. Grimes notes that ritual objects present a "materialized spirituality" (2014, p.269), incarnating what they signify. Although the provisions in the scene serve the direct purposes of nutrition (*piñones* and honey), protection (coat), and entertainment (instruments), they also represent Mapuche culture and tradition, which nourishes, protects, and celebrates symbolically. The dialogue is a call-and-response: Nautüll iteratively enquires about the necessary preparations, and Lifkoyam responds and reassures. The action is therefore *embodied* and *condensed*, but it is not specifically *prescribed* in Mapuche culture. Preparation for a boat

voyage is not an 'official' ritual in itself. Rather, the scene presents what Grimes calls 'ritualisation': "activity that is not culturally framed as ritual and that someone, often an observer, interprets as if it were potential ritual" (2014, p.193). As the writer of the scene, I am the observer in this case, finding that ritualisation is a point of connection between ritual and theatre: "Just as everyday life is dramatic, enabling playwrights and actors to select, condense, and arrange performances we call plays, or dramas, so ordinary life is ritualized, enabling participants to select, condense, and arrange enactments we call rituals" (Grimes, 2014, p.193). The influence of domestic ritual can be seen in Nautüll's drinking of *mate* tea (1:52) – an unscripted ritualisation added into the scene by the performers that connects non-Indigenous and Indigenous populations alike in Chile as a ubiquitous cultural practice. Grimes notes that "all human activities are to some degree ritualized, just as they are to some extent dramatized. To ritualize is to embody and enact ways of knowing that enshrine determinative values" (2012, p.94). Similarly, performing on stage is embodying and acting specific ways of knowing that portray a certain reality of the character and narrative. The dramatisation of the couple's preparation overlaps with its ritualisation. Grimes lists ways in which actions can become ritualised, many of which could be read as instructions for actors: repetition, stylisation, having a special state of mind, prescription of details, a situating in special place/time etc. (2014, p.194). All of these are present in the scene, including singularisation: Lifkoyam's preparation for the boat voyage might be a repeating action, but this particular occurrence is a rare and singular event, leading toward the birth of their child, just as the performance of the show and the actors' portrayals of their characters is an ephemeral event in itself, hoping for the renewal of human commitment to the more-than-human. Ritualisation and dramatisation are both present in the scene as "distinct but related processes" (Grimes, 2012, p.94), the former grounding the action in symbolic and cultural significance, the latter shaping it into a performance that communicates this meaning to the audience.

Enacting, Performing, and Translating Ritual

The only element missing in the preparation scene is the actual ritual that was supposed to happen before the voyage: the embodied, condensed *and prescribed* enactment of the values of Mapuche cosmovision when addressing the more-than-humans guarding particular ecosystems and territories. As mentioned above, although relating to the *ngen* is part of the "private domain of beliefs put in practice" (Grebe, 1993, p.48) and therefore the details of it are left to the individual Mapuche, the format of the interaction is nevertheless prescribed by the basic instructions of asking permission, offering something in return, and

expressing gratitude. The *epew* shows that these are a non-negotiable requirement of a relational and cosmovision approach to the society of human and more-than-human persons. In the scene, Nautüll is the one reminding Lifkoyam of this error. Having checked all the necessary preparations, she asks, starting at 4:54, "Shouldn't we wait for the sun? Shouldn't we ask permission of the waters of lake Mallolafken before crossing? Shouldn't we ask permission of the wind, the waters, the fire from Rukapillan?" The lack of the ritual of asking permission and offering reciprocal gifts is presented as an omission due to care rather than negligence or conflict. All of Lifkoyam's efforts are directed toward the care for Nautüll, with the assumption that "the waters will understand" (1:18) the haste and preoccupation with the comfort and safety of his pregnant partner. The swift crisis that nevertheless follows is a lesson on the importance of embodied practice of relationality, or as Grimes puts it in terms of ritual: "If an action is purely mental, it is not ritual even though mental processes clearly underlie ritual action" (2014, p.195). Applying this to practice research, it is a reminder that being 'well-meaning' or relying solely on assumed theory is not a sufficient surrogate for the practice itself. What is needed is an adaptive and responsive relational ethics and a co-creation effected within the scaffolding of the indigenist value set.

Once the crisis happens in the form of the performer portraying the *puelche* wind (portrayals of elements are reflected upon in more detail in the next section), the couple realises and accepts the mistake. The prayer starting at 7:25, inspired by Alejandra's ritual on the island that the actors portraying Nautüll and Lifkoyam witnessed, asks for forgiveness and re-establishes the values of permission, reciprocity, respect, interconnectedness, and gratitude, addressing the lake Mallolafken and the four elements. The ritual is *embodied* by the couple taking specific 'contemplative' poses for the prayer and referencing their baby by touching Nautüll's pregnant belly. It is *condensed* through the stylised language employed in the prayer: "to the powerful sun that illuminates us / to the wind that moves us / to the water that nourishes us / and to the earth that sustains us" (7:57-8:04). It is *prescribed* by the rules of relating to the *ngen* through permission, reciprocity, and gratitude. But is it *enacted?* Grimes uses the term to "remind ourselves of [ritual action's] difference from ordinary action" (2014, p.196) as well as from stage acting. When ritual happens, Grimes posits it "can set things in motion. Its gestures and postures are designed to achieve something. Their aim is not merely to entertain but rather to effect" (2014, p.243). Grimes here draws on Richard Schechner's theory of efficacy and entertainment as two poles of the continuum on which performances are placed at certain ratios of distance. Schechner places performances on the continuum according to purpose: "If the performance's purpose is to effect change, /…/ the performance is ritual. But if the performances' purpose is mostly to give pleasure, to show off, to be beautiful, or to pass the time, then the performance is an entertainment" (2013, p.80). Pure ritual, according to Schechner

and Grimes, is enacted because its doing enforces something to happen – it is a "conflation of symbolic and actual events" (Schechner, 1988, p.113). When Alejandra enacted the ritual of offering the *Araucaria* seedlings to the island, it set something real and substantial in motion for her – a spiritual bond of kinship, or a renewal of one, with the island, the lake and volcano, the elements etc. For Alejandra, what was enacted was a spiritual or liturgical ritual as part of a way of life. The Indigenous struggle for preservation and recuperation of land, culture, language, and self-governance means that rituals hold a highly important position within Indigenous practices. It is not surprising that Grimes' list of ritual actions overlaps to a significant extent with Tuhiwai Smith's enumeration of Indigenous methodologies, including celebrating, remembering, (story)telling, creating/making, protecting, claiming/marking, etc (Grimes, 2014; Tuhiwai Smith, 2012). Ritual is a leading Indigenous methodology for preservation, resistance and survival. What about the non-Indigenous spectators/participants of that offering? Grimes acknowledges the term 'ritual performance' as "an evanescent social event" (2014, p.242) that emphasises the performing aspect of ritual and presupposes a witnessing by an audience – such as the group on the island. When the prayer is performed in Nautüll and Lifkoyam's scene by non-Mapuche and non-Indigenous actors on stage in front of an auditorium full of spectators, however, is it a *real* ritual? Is it enacted, or merely performed? Grimes assumes the latter: "Ritual is performed when participants act in front of spectating others or when they play roles in a subjunctive mode" (2014, p.243). The subjunctive mode is an 'as if' mode, leaning towards performance of actors rather than enactment of ritualists. Yet he concedes that "rituals are often dramatized, and dramas, often ritualized. Ritual can be nested in or braided with activities from other cultural domains" (2012, p.94). The image of the braid comes from Schechner, who concludes that purely ritual or aesthetic performance is rare, that all performances include degrees of both, and that the image of the tension within the binary of efficacy-entertainment is "a braid or helix, tightening and loosening over time and in specific cultural contexts" (2013, p.80). In other words, "no performance is pure efficacy or pure entertainment" (2013, p.80). Both are therefore present in Nautüll and Lifkoyam's prayer on stage.

It would be venturing into the territory of cultural appropriation or Conquergood's pitfalls of the Custodian's Rip-Off or Enthusiast's Infatuation to say that a *real* Mapuche ritual was enacted on stage by non-Indigenous actors performing the prayer, despite their performances being sanctioned by Alejandra as a Mapuche co-creator. Nevertheless, on the efficacy-entertainment braid, the show was far from any danger of being branded as a purely aesthetic performance. This thesis proposes that ritualising and ritual *did* happen on stage within a process of translation and integration first of Indigenous cosmovision into Western theatre practices, then *back* into an engendering of what this thesis calls a secular sacred. In

terms of Schechner's continuum, *two* simultaneous shifts happened. "The shift from ritual to aesthetic performance occurs when a participating community fragments into occasional, paying customers" (Schechner, 2013, p.81). While the show performed only once without charging for tickets, and a significant portion of the audience was integral, it was nevertheless a public event open to all, and cosmovision ritual was translated into aesthetic performance. However, Schechner allows movement in the opposite direction as well: "The move from aesthetic performance to ritual happens when an audience of individuals is transformed into a community" (2013, p.81). This research suggests that not only did the performing cast become a community through a shared preparation and practice of relationality, but that the indigenist value scaffolding enabled this move and opened an invitation towards the formation of a *new* community. This community consists of human and more-than-human persons and is accessible to all who practice indigenist values, Indigenous or non-Indigenous. Grimes notes a similar move from aesthetic to ritual performance in the Entrada pageant of the Santa Fe Fiesta in New Mexico. While the actors are aware that they are participating in a performance narrating the history of the town, "because they regard this history as *sacred*, they mythologize and ritualize it /…/ [and] declare the veracity of what they enact" (2012, p.90, my italics). While the co-creating group in *Aillaquillén – The Island of Nine Moons* could not appropriate Mapuche ritual, the indigenist values applied as ethical standards instead of spiritual connections still allowed it to approach the environment in a lived and relational way and re-translate the performance on stage into the expression of something *sacred.* The group could then participate in the braid of ritual and performance, celebrating and strengthening it. In the case of the show, these actions took place within the performance of a Mapuche *epew* sanctioned by the Indigenous co-creators. This intercultural translation is possible because of the indigenist value framework and the overlap or braided structure of ritual and performance, and because indigenist values, ritual, and performance are all practiced, relational, and embodied.

Part of the intercultural translation in *Aillaquillén – The Island of Nine Moons* was represented by the dancers embodying the elements on stage. The final section of this chapter reflects on their presence and movement; the next chapter develops these reflections further in the context of applying indigenist values in a Global North and non-Indigenous context.

Animism and Performance

From Cosmovision to Animism

What happens when Indigenous cosmovision is integrated into Western performance? As has been shown, an ethical translation is enabled within the scaffolding of indigenist values. These act as a framing device establishing an ethical space of engagement between Indigenous and non-Indigenous partners as well as a context for relating to the more-than-human on stage. Within the set of indigenist values, ritual performance moves towards aesthetic performance and back again via the braid of ritual and theatre, enabling non-Indigenous actors to seek expression of the sacred through performative gestures while remaining accountable to the ethical space of co-creation. Despite the fact that Alejandra co-created the show *Aillaquillén – The Island of Nine Moons* and that it portrayed a Mapuche *epew* emphasising the main tenets of Mapuche cosmovision, it would nevertheless be problematic to assert that this was a religious expression of Mapuche cosmovision *with* its spiritual dimensions. This research rather suggests that as the relational values are sustained through performance, instead of enacting spiritual rituals, they are understood as expressions of a sacred in the wider context of *animism*[8]. This is a translation that is not only semantic but steers away from cultural and religious appropriation. In the West, animist sensibilities and a relational approach to the more-than-human were historically victims of what Val Plumwood calls the "human/nature dualism", a "Western-based cultural formation going back thousands of years that sees the essentially human as part of a radically separate order of reason, or consciousness, set apart from the lower order that comprises the body, the woman, the animal, and the pre-human" (2014, p.444). Weber equally sees the separation of body and mind, nature and culture, and the human and more-than-human having led to "a world composed of dead things – nature –, and a human society, built upon a treaty to fight nature in order to pursue individual goods – to detach human lives from material reality" (2020, p.15). A re-embraced 'new' animism, drawing heavily from the ethical tenets of Indigenous cosmovision as well as attempting to situate itself within less positivist aspects in Western science (Harding, 2014), contests these subject/object dualisms that led to extractivist and colonialist mindsets as well as to ethnocentrism, androcentrism, and eurocentrism (Conty, 2021). Plumwood therefore defines the two main tasks of Western new animism: "the first is to re-situate the human in ecological terms, and the second is to re-situate the nonhuman in ethical terms" (cited in Harvey, 2019, p.82). This research

[8] Indigenous cosmovision is also a type of animism (Descola, 2014); this thesis uses the two terms separately in order to emphasise cosmovision as a cultural system of Indigenous religious spirituality and animism as the general worldview underlining the aliveness of human and more-than-human persons.

suggests both tasks can be achieved within the indigenist value-set, which allows for an ethical translation of cosmovision into a secular version of animism while maintaining respect for its divine components.

Animating the Sacred

In the show, the four elements respond to the prayers and invocations of Nautüll and Lifkoyam and come together to create the island Aillaquillén. The non-Indigenous dancers performing them are not only narrating a Mapuche legend but also portraying an experience of animism that Weber defines as an "emancipation from a cognitive agent to an embodied living individual, ecologically dependent on the web of life, and emotionally dependent on the exchange with other living beings" (2020, p.34). Portraying elements through human performers and movement highlights the interdependence and exchange between human and more-than-human persons. The scene of the formation of the island is an expression of the idea that "persons come about only through relationships in which the world is shared between all participants" (Weber, 2020, p.46): LINK05.

In the process of co-creation, the dancers choreographed their own moves based on their varied experience, influences, and training history, while being inspired by the indigenist values and the embodied and lived relationality experienced with Alejandra in preparation for the show. The result was a celebration of aliveness and the interconnectedness with the more-than-human, a portrayal of what Tim Ingold calls *astonishment*, or 'the other side of the coin to the very openness of the world that [is] fundamental to the animic way of being. It is the sense of wonder that comes from riding the crest of the world's continued birth" (2011, p.74). Fittingly, birth was the climax of the scene, a symbol not only of the ever-renewing emergence of life, but of a renewal of the reciprocal relationship between the human and the more-than-human. In the first solo presentation (0:08-1:07), Wind promises to mobilise *küme newen* or good energy for Nautüll to enable a "sweet birth" (0:13-0:19). The dancer's gestures and movements, seemingly threatening in the previous scene, now appear free and unbounded; the rotating arms (0:30) and repeated jumps add the sense of lightness and joy. In his writing, Weber challenges his reader to observe the wind and imagine that "every gust /…/ is from a world which does not differentiate between mind (us) and body (them), but is both always. And then maybe for a short moment you can perceive that the wind is the breath of someone, and that it meets you as another someone" (2020, p.87). As the couple now experiences, the ominous and overbearing *puelche* seen through an animist sensibility transforms into a strong but playful breeze, the breath of *someone* mixing with their own breath and that of the arriving newborn. A similar image happens in the solo of the dancer portraying Water (1:07-2:07), who

emphasises she is “the calm water that softens and sweetens life” (1:12-1:17) rather than the dark and potentially perilous lake Nautüll and Lifkoyam experience at the beginning of their crossing. Water’s movements are a series of different waves blending into one another: a gentler circular back-and-forth of the arms (1:10) reminiscent of tidal rhythms, a wider to-and-fro sway (1:19) like the waves rocking the couple’s *wampo*, a more delicate hand fluctuation (1:22) like the ripples on the shore, and a whole-body opening and closing (1:30) with an added verticality (1:38) and a rotation (1:45), reminding of the powerful depths and currents of the lake. The transformation of the wind and the lake from hostile forces to animated persons offering support and kinship portrays a key difference in how the ‘wild’ is constructed in Western imagination compared to an animist worldview. Weber compares the two: the former sees the wild as without rules, egoistic, threatening with death, opposed to humans, emotionally detached, opaque to human understanding, and better off without humanity, while the latter is based on rules, devoted to mutuality, is life-giving, includes humans, is nourishing, is like kin, and requires gratitude (2020, p.69). The imbalance caused by the couple’s infringement in the *epew* causes the wild to grow distant and become more like the Western detached Other, until the restoration of a relational understanding enables the return to a balanced interconnectedness and reciprocity.

The presentation of Fire (2:07-3:07) is expectedly the most dynamic in the range and magnitude of movement, arriving stealthily at first then combusting, together with warm stage illumination, into a series of jumps (2:20) and travelling steps (2:30-2:41) covering the dimensions of the stage. The trickster-like quality of the movement retains the duality of light and warmth reaching all parts of the world as well as the flames of destructive fire playfully yet warningly licking ever closer. It continues throughout the rest of the solo in the alternation of panther-like swaying (2:44) and outbursts of quick turns (2:48). The performances of Water and Fire were a reminder of the very real local presence of lake Mallolafken and volcano Rukapillan, both in the immediate vicinity of the cultural centre where the show was performed. The nightly visible orange glow of the active volcano summit included the promise of warm protection and threat of explosive danger in one. Fire’s promise to Nautüll and Lifkoyam, “I will give you my light and warmth” (2:11) most directly establishes the value of reciprocity, which Weber calls “the ecology of the gift”, based not on the idea of ‘earning’ a benefit, but of mutuality: “Everyone gives something to the others – and gets something back from someone else. The sun, water, food, the language in which one grows up, all this quenches existential desires. Neither in the natural world, nor in the indigenous cosmos, are those gifts something that must be earned. They are gifts given to anyone in need” (2020, p.81). Re-established balance and support of the more-than-human is therefore not a consequence of having earned the right to it, but of having re-inserted oneself into the ecology of mutual care and kinship that

supports life of all persons. The most important place in supporting life belongs to the Earth itself, and her solo (3:07-4:07) incorporates elements from all the others: Water's to-and-fro sway (3:32) that amplifies into Fire's jumps (3:36) and Wind's weightless rotations of arms (3:44) before bringing it all together in a literal grounding (3:50-4:00), out of which the Earth is solidified (4:01-4:07). It is Earth's unifying performance that leads into the transition of all elements dancing together (4:25-4:39) and joining their individualities to create an image of an interconnected network (4:40-5:25) representing the island Aillaquillén. The image layers the elements: the Earth is in front forming a strong lower base, with her head above the horizontal line created by Water and Wind, like the surface of the lake where water and air meet. Fire stands the highest, reminiscent of the volcanic cone of Rukapillan rising above lake Mallolafken. It is also an image of a shelter or cradle, into which the young couple can now step (5:42) and have their baby. The birth is positioned within the elements, and the birthing action is doubled through the wide stance of the Earth, symbolising the kinship between human and more-than-human, flesh and element. Weber recognises this connection: "Each of us is the end of a single, uninterrupted line reaching back to when life began /…/. Even the minerals are our kin, the earth's water and air, as we find all the substances in our bodies, making ourselves up. Water and stone and air, the elements, from this point are truly our flesh and blood" (2020, p.63). The baby arrives in this world singing to its mother – as much Nautüll as the Earth and the elements – asking for a lullaby, a resonance that will stay with it forever. The circle dance of the elements (6:47-7:02) is a final physical image of cyclical time and interconnectedness, renewed through birth and a (re)commitment to the sacred, expressed through indigenist values portraying the kinship of human and more-than-human, and the interlaced braid of theatre and ritual[9]. Ralph Yarrow notes that "the sacred of theatre may be its capacity to activate a particular quotient of energy, a form of active and holistic knowing, qualitatively different from 'normal' discrete subject/object cognition" (2007, pp.16-17). It is precisely this capacity of theatre, seen in the elements' scene, that enables the integration of Indigenous cosmovision into Western performance practice and allows for a lived and relational performance of secular sacred – the relationship between the human and more-than-human – within an indigenist scaffolding of animist sensibilities.

[9] How this is set up and summed up in Mapuche terms by Alejandra and her father Lorenzo Aillapan can be seen in the video of the full show.

Conclusion

The practice case in Chile enabled, through the co-creation with Alejandra Aillapan Huiriqueo, the articulation of the set of five indigenist values – permission, respect, interconnectedness, reciprocity, and gratitude – expressed through ritual. These represent the main ethical tenets of Indigenous cosmovision and need to be practiced and embodied. As Weber posits, "Indigenous worldviews /…/ are neither conceptual, nor only ethical, but always *performative*. They enact the world by being a part of it. In Indigenous thinking, you are a worldview, you represent cosmos, so you behave as such. You are kin to all beings, and all beings are persons" (2020, p.20, my italics). The indigenist values therefore serve not only to establish an ethical space of engagement and kinship, but also to construct a framework for the integration of Indigenous cosmovision into Western-style performance (RQ2). With the latter, they share the aspect of an emergent flux: "theatre /…/ is always a doing, a setting in motion, a mode of creation in which what is created identifies itself as and how it emerges, rather than reproducing already existing things" (Yarrow et al., 2007, p.17). Similarly, "enacting a ritual can set things in motion" (Grimes, 2014, p.243). Thus, this research argues that the hybrid space of ritual and theatre allows for an ethically accountable translation of cosmovision's spiritual and religious enactments into performance and then back again into an expression of a secular sacred within the context of animism. The sacred is therefore not a colonialist appropriation or misuse of Indigenous spirits – the Mapuche *ngen* in this case – but the moment when "human civilisation discovers itself as entangled with everything else in the earth system" and "discovers that there is no inside or outside, only a huge mutual network of reciprocal production" (Weber, 2020, p.21). On stage, this happens through ritualising actions as well as acting, embodied movement, and song. Theatre becomes a space of a cross-fertilising intercultural translation between cosmovision, ritual, performance, and animism, that is always emergent, lived and relational.

In *Aillaquillén – The Island of Nine Moons,* co-creation within the indigenist framework enabled preparation through embodied relationality and the staging of a narrative contesting the colonialist version of the story as well as the extractivist and environmentally degrading use of the land in the basin of lake Mallolafken. Storytelling served as an act of resistance and reclamation for the local Mapuche communities. For the non-Indigenous audience, storytelling became a generative methodology for reimagining human–more-than-human relations in a time of ecological and cultural crisis. Indigenous epistemologies shaped the dramaturgy and ethics of the narrative while Western performance practices communicated the meaning on stage. Together, they offered a model for navigating the complexity of the

climate crisis and, to repeat Plumwood's (2014) assertion, re-situated the human in ecological terms and the more-than-human in ethical terms.

Although the indigenist value scaffolding and the relational ethics of co-creation enabled the integration of Indigenous cosmovision into Western-style performance practice and the narration of a Mapuche *epew* on a theatre stage by non-Indigenous performers, the story itself *already* contained the basic ideas of cosmovision. It was, after all, an Indigenous story performed in the heart of the *Wallmapu* with the mentorship of an Mapuche co-creator. Although the performers were mostly of non-Indigenous *mestizo* ethnicity, they nevertheless already lived in a mixed intercultural space of Indigenous and non-Indigenous population and were aware of Mapuche cosmovision and a relational worldview. Could a similar intercultural translation happen in a non-Indigenous narrative context? To address this, RQ2a asks, 'How can Indigenous cosmovision become integrated in and facilitate the work of Global North performers and their ability to engage with more-than-human others?' Additionally, the movements of the dancers portraying the elements in *Aillaquillén – The Island of Nine Moons* opened the possibilities of Western-style performing techniques as vehicles of expression of animist sensibilities on stage. Therefore, RQ2b adds the question, 'How to mobilise the existing professional/performance skills of a community or group of participants?' The next chapter investigates the application of the indigenist value set and the movement-based expression of the relationship between the human and the more-than-human as well as the secular sacred in a highly urban Global North context.

6 *Asul Asul / Nick of Time:* Indigenist Values, Movement Practices, and Agential Realism

Introduction

The articulation of the indigenist value-set and its application as a co-creation and performance scaffolding allowed for an ethically accountable translation of Indigenous cosmovision into Western-style performance practice through the overlap of ritual and theatre, expressing animist sensibilities and exploring a relational approach to the more-than-human. The co-creation of the show *Aillaquillén – The Island of Nine Moons*, discussed in the previous chapter, happened largely within an Indigenous context and was able to draw directly on the ideas of Indigenous cosmovision as the basis for the devising and the telling of the story. This chapter investigates the application of indigenist values as a performance methodology in a non-Indigenous Global North context, present in Practice Case 2 in South Korea. By mobilising animist approaches in a secular and individualistic social context and grounding them in a transnational performer training practice rather than the spirituality of cosmovision, the research addresses RQ2a: 'How can Indigenous cosmovision become integrated in and facilitate the work of Global North performers and their ability to engage with more-than-human others?' and RQ2b: 'How to mobilise the existing professional/performance skills of a community or group of participants?'

Studio experimentation with the Korean theatre company Yesigong Project, structured within the indigenist value scaffolding and culminating in the showcase performance entitled *Asul Asul / Nick of Time*, revealed movement practice as a shared performance language providing an entry into animist sensibilities. This chapter suggests that inherent relational aspects of existing participant performance practices are mobilised when movement is engaged as an ecosomatic approach to environment and place. In this framing, movement practice allows for an embodied experience of relationality and participates in the ethical translation of the spirituality of Indigenous cosmovision through performance, developing further the insights of the previous chapter.

Engaging with the nonhuman[10] in the highly urban and constructed environment of a theatre space in Seoul showed the limitations of a nature-focused animist approach. Drawing on Karen Barad's theory of agential realism, this research suggests that a new materialist inflection within the practice of relationality allows for an engagement with the nonhuman that acknowledges not only spiritual and symbolic relations but also the material agencies and intra-actions that co-constitute human and nonhuman worlds. When employed within the relational ethics of an indigenist scaffolding, the alignment of animist and new materialist approaches prevents slipping back into a subject/object dichotomy in a manmade environment. Furthermore, the agential realist concept of the indeterminacy of matter not only allows for a relationality with manmade objects but also facilitates the expression, through ritualising performance, of a secular sacred. The latter functions as the acknowledgment of emergent co-existence of human and nonhuman within a relational epistemology.

After acknowledging the context and structure of the workshop, this chapter analyses three selected 'Actions' or workshop exercises serving as the basis for the co-creation of episodic scenes in the performance. Drawing on the performer training backgrounds of the participants and the movement pedagogy of Jacques Lecoq, Action 'Dialogue' builds on the portrayal of natural elements present in the island-formation scene in *Aillaquillén – The Island of Nine Moons* in Chile. The portrayal becomes a focused exploration of performative identification with the nonhuman leading into theatrical transposition. Lecoq's idea of ubiquitous motion (*tout bouge*) aligns with the animist view of a world in flux, continuously producing life (Weber, 2020), and leads into an embodied methodology for staging relationality. Action 'Relation' confronts the 'gaps' in nature-based animism and investigates establishing interconnectedness with manmade objects by acknowledging the performativity of matter itself. This chapter suggests that it is the agential cut of a performance scene that enables intra-actions between the human and the nonhuman to produce patterns of mattering, through which subjectivity of the Other can be expressed. A performative rather than representational understanding not only of human and nonhuman persons but of *matter itself* allows for "practices of engagement with, and as part of, the world in which we have our being" (Barad, 2007). Finally, Action 'Coexistence' returns to the braid of ritual and performance, reflected upon in the previous chapter, and employs ritualisation to create an expression of a secular sacred – the emergent meaning within the dynamic process of materialisation in which human and

[10] Influenced by the writings of Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, I was still using the term 'nonhuman' at the time of this practice case. Since the term was integrated into the Action prompts and co-creation process, I have kept it through the entirety of this chapter, starting here. Indeed, the insights emerging from the new materialist ideas of the indeterminacy of matter in this practice case were a major factor in the switch of terminology to the less dualistic 'more-than-human'. I briefly reflect on the switch in the chapter.

nonhuman scene partners participate. Understanding co-existence not as a representational state but an onto-epistemological condition, the Action leads to (ritualised) practices of ecological responsibility.

The chapter therefore presents movement practices (generating the possibility of embodying the Other), new materialist sensibilities (allowing for a relational approach to manmade objects), and the acknowledgment of coexistence (experienced as an emergent process) as constructive 'adaptations' when integrating Indigenous cosmovision into the work of Global North performers. Using these 'ingredients' within the indigenist value scaffolding to express a secular sacred is a way to rethink the relationship between the human and nonhuman in an individualistic, globalised, highly modernised society, and to reveal and navigate the complexities of the climate crisis (RQ3). A brief summary of audience reactions at the end of the chapter supports this insight.

Project Background

Yesigong Project were the main organisers of the workshop and showcase performance *Asul Asul / Nick of Time* with funding received through a grant from the Arts Council Korea's (ARKO) Performing Arts Creation Lab. I met the company's founders Eunyoung Bona Jung (Artistic Director) and MJ Kim (Producer) during my theatre studies in New York, and in the ten years we've known each other, we collaborated on various projects, including on a Zoom play called *Project, Hong Do* in 2020 during the Covid-19 pandemic. Since then, I have become a resident director for the company, and in the summer of 2023, I was able to go to South Korea to lead the workshop on climate crisis-related performance. My research questions and hopes to apply an indigenist approach to a non-Indigenous, highly modern urban setting aligned with Yesigong Project's interests of exploring relevant contemporary topics through works-in-progress (Yesigong Project, n.d.), and I spent a month rehearsing in Seoul with a group of five actors. As is reflected upon in this chapter, what was initially conceived as an experience in a very specific cultural context, different from both the Indigenous South American projects that preceded it as well as a potential Europe-based project that could conclude the practice and theory trajectory, developed into the 'representative' Global North project of this practice research, exhibiting globalised cultural components and including a more individualistic approach to confronting the climate crisis. The workshop and showcase performances happened at the Zoom Arts Center in downtown Seoul, run by Managing Director Eon Kim. The centre supports experimental, research-oriented, or otherwise underfunded art, including theatre workshops and productions (The Zoom Arts Center, n.d.). Of all the practice projects and cases in this thesis, this was

the only one produced and co-organised by a professional theatre company and venue, and performed by professional actors.

Context

South Korea – Between Globalised Modernity and Tradition

Contemporary South Korea presents a receptive context for an indigenist methodology exploring a relational approach to the environment. It frequently features in the lists of the world's most technologically advanced countries (Getzoff, 2023), largest global economies (Silver, 2025), and biggest manufacturing nations (Safeguard Global, 2025). In 2021, it produced 11.89 tonnes of carbon dioxide emissions per capita (Global Carbon Budget, 2024), making it one of the top emitting countries in the world. Its pledged, planned, or enacted climate policies (NDCs) since the 2015 Paris Climate Accords are judged 'highly insufficient' by Climate Action Tracker, despite the government's recent vows to lower emissions by 40% by 2030 (Climate Action Tracker, 2023). The former president Yoon Suk Yeol turned away from renewable energies to reinvest in nuclear power (Ramos, 2023). He had been criticised for "paying lip service to climate action" (Rashid, 2023) after a series of intensifying natural disasters hit the peninsula, including a historically catastrophic monsoon in the city of Daejoon in 2020, the heaviest recorded daily rainfall in Seoul in August 2022, and a fatal flooding of an underpass in western Cheongju a year later (Ramos, 2023).

Seoul is South Korea's capital and megacity with around 10 million inhabitants (up to 25 million within the metropolitan area – half the national population, producing 67% of the national GDP (We Build Value, 2020)) and one of the largest population densities per square kilometre in cities of comparable population. One of the reasons for this is the Seoul greenbelt, an open area of green and agricultural spaces encircling the city in a band of about 10km wide, consisting of more than 13% of the metropolitan area (Bengston and Youn, 2006), where urban development is banned. The greenbelt, an urban containment measure modelled on the one around London, was built in the 1970s during the explosive growth on the southern half of the peninsula. Besides limiting urban sprawl and preventing development inching too close to North Korea, one of the objectives of the Greenbelt was "to develop an environmental protection area by reserving regional open spaces such as national and regional parks, mountains and river banks, agricultural land" (Chang-Hee, 1998, pp.480-481). This has grown in importance in recent years, although it simultaneously highlights a symbolic separation of 'nature' (outside, in the ring) and culture' (inside, in

the city) alongside socio-economic critiques of the consequences of the greenbelt, such as longer and more expensive commuting from the 'outer cities', higher housing prices, and increased urban congestion (Bengston and Youn, 2006, p.2). Despite the size and conservation of the greenbelt, the percentage of green spaces within the urban area of Seoul ('inside') is low and raises environmental justice issues: "minority populations, such as foreigners, the poor, the old, the young, and the disabled, are generally increasing but the land area of parks and green spaces is gradually decreasing" (In Oh et al., 2020). An initiative called Garden City Seoul promises to address these issues but is still in the works (Seoul Metropolitan Government, 2025).

Alongside the high levels of living standards, technology, industry, and globalised individualism, Korean societal values and behaviour are still influenced by Confucianism, which spread to the country from China in the fourth century. It had a huge impact "on government and culture [during] the Joseon dynasty (1396-1910), [when it] became the state cult" (Rainey, 2010, p.155). Although by no means the only influence on the psyche of the nation, "Confucian values have deeply permeated and guided Korean people's daily lives" (Kang, 2016, p.221). Confucianism teaches "filial piety, dutifulness, honesty, sincerity, rightness, wisdom, moral courage, and understanding or compassion" (Rainey, 2010, p.45), and has left a legacy of an extensive and hierarchical civil service system. It has also been criticised for having a "view of the family [that] is inevitably patriarchal, patrilineal, and patrilocal" (Rainey, 2010, p.223), adding to a persistently high gender inequality in modern-day Korea (highest gender pay gap within OECD countries (Statista, 2025)). Women are still often excluded from the paternal line of relatives, transmission of social rights and inheritance, or any power within the family, and isolated from "the close-knit public relations among men" (Rainey, 2010, p.232). Inherent in a Confucianist worldview is a communitarian approach, interesting for this practice research due to its relational aspects: "In Confucianism /…/, one can hardly find a sense of individuality because the family as a group precedes an individual person" (Kang, 2016, p.226). The ideal is "not individual liberty or equality but order and harmony, not individual independence but selflessness and cooperation, not the freedom of individual conscience but conformity to orthodox truth" (Henkin, 1986, p.21). However, this ideal was enacted in a society that "was not egalitarian but hierarchical" (Henkin, 1986, p.21). As with all applications of systems of moral virtues, this has been exploited in practice: "one should also note that the Confucian concept of the person as a center of relationships, rather than merely an isolated individual, and its emphasis on family-centeredness and human-relatedness, have resulted in nepotism, favoritism, and provincialism in private and public sectors of Korea such as church, family, workplace, and politics" (Kang, 2016, pp.228-229). Additionally, the core cultural values have been overwhelmed by a (mostly American-influenced) globalised and individualised

contemporaneity. While traditional approaches still embedded in societal structure continue to create a complex and multi-layered society, in a metropolis like Seoul, the prevailing atmosphere is one of globalisation, consumerism, and hyper-modernisation.

Individualism and Workshop Structure

On an everyday basis, the workshop's participants, all of whom were professional actors with experience in Western performance training methods, exhibited characteristics of an individualised Global North society infused with relative comfort, privilege, and advanced technology. This practice case therefore focused less on the experience of a community's relationship to place and land, and more on individual perceptions of the immediate environment and confrontation with the climate crisis. Discounting the variety of snacks and the real-time language translation, the workshop could have been produced in the U.S., U.K., or Europe. This somewhat surprising reversal of my own (over-stereotypical) cultural expectations was nevertheless an important reminder of the characteristics of a globalised modernity. As such, it was a valid framework for the practice research, articulating a significant contrast to the South American work. Through their transnational training backgrounds, participants brought with them an inherent interculturality, finding Western-style performative solutions to the experimental exercises as well as associations to traditional Korean culture, mythology, and shamanism.

The theatrical aim of the workshop was to co-create six standalone but thematically connected scenes, to be performed in a showcase presentation together with six 'sister' scenes written by the theatre company's resident playwright Mimmy Baek. The title is a play on words: *asul asul* in Korean phonetic transcription means 'in the nick of time', alluding to the urgency of the climate crisis, but Asul and Nick were also characters that featured in one of the written scenes. This research focuses on the co-created scenes, each of which was based on a specific exercise or Action exploring relational approaches to the nonhuman. The indigenist value-set served as the underlying framework for the Actions; learning about their cosmovision and animism origins, then practicing and performing individual values (at times through ritualisation) featured as part of the experimental tasks. Table 4 lists the six different Actions and the scenes that developed from them. Actions were presented to the participants as exercises, sometimes including 'fieldwork' in form of the exploration of their immediate environments and relation to the nonhumans within them. Various writing, movement and acting exercises were used to devise the scenes from the Actions and exercises. While this chapter focuses on three of the Actions ('Dialogue', 'Relation',

and ‘Coexistence’), the video of the full show as well as the full workshop plan can be found in the Practice Portfolio section.

Table 4 Asul Asul / Nick of Time Workshop Actions and Corresponding Scenes

Action Title and Description	**Corresponding Scene Developed From the Action**
1- Relation: Exploring alternative ways of expressing knowledge and interconnectedness by presenting scientific facts about the climate crisis to nonhumans.	(Scene 3): “Graphs, science, facts” A scene in which performers react in an exaggerated way to the projection of climate crisis graphs and charts, then shift to performing gradually disappearing insect noises to the background of continuing climate crisis facts.
2- Dialogue: Exploring gratitude and respect through dialogue with an element performed through movement.	(Scene 4): Promise A scene in which a woman interacts with the element of water (performed by the rest of the group), directly and respectfully expressing gratitude, regret, and willingness to act.
3- Embodiment: Exploring interconnectedness and reciprocity by relating to a nonhuman, then embodying that nonhuman in performance.	(Scene 6): July 6th A scene in which a performer embodies a Starbucks chair through movement while a monologue written by the same performer about the chair is played over the speakers.
4- Timeline: Exploring interconnectedness from the perspective of time by embodying nonhumans and performing their timelines.	(Scene 8): I Am You A scene in which the timeline of an electrical power pole and its components is presented by performers portraying the various nonhumans involved in the timeline.
5- Coexistence: Exploring the whole indigenist value-set through ritualisation of the action of ‘being with’ or coexisting.	(Scene 10): Coexistence A scene in which performers ask permission, respectfully introduce to the audience, offer something back to, and express gratitude to nonhuman partners – rocks, while coexisting with them.
6- Spatial Web: Exploring interconnectedness of humans and nonhumans on a spatial scale, then embodying and performing those networks.	(Scene 2): “That Steadfast Figure” A scene in which interconnected networks of a single poison ivy plant on Namsan Mountain are performed by the actors embodying various humans and nonhumans, while one performer relates his reflection of the ivy itself before portraying it.

Dialogue

School of Fish

As presented in the previous chapter, the performances of the four dancers in *Aillaquillén – The Island of Nine Moons* portraying Wind, Water, Fire, and Earth, opened up movement as a possible performance language for integrating animist sensitivities into Western-style performance practice. Investigating that insight further, the *Asul Asul / Nick of Time* workshop incorporated ideas inspired by the performer training pedagogy of Jacques Lecoq, whose method, as argued by Michael Pearce, can "facilitate a deep engagement with nature" and "allows the actor to develop a more nuanced understanding of their embeddedness in nature and appreciation of its intrinsic value" (2024, p.376). The purpose was not to adhere directly to Lecoq's curriculum[11] but rather to juxtapose some of its principles with the indigenist methodology scaffolding. The work searched for cross-pollination and relational aspects inherent in a movement practice accessible to actors trained in Western performance techniques.

Action 2 entitled 'Dialogue' (Table 4) was therefore designed as a human-nonhuman interaction by expressing gratitude directly to one of the elements, performed by actors' movement. Preparation for the group performance of an element was a Lecoq 'legacy' exercise inherited from Complicité's alumna Lorna Marshall. The exercise is called 'School of Fish' and is an ensemble-building movement exploration that develops attention and synchronicity between a group of performers through repeated movements, gestures, and sounds, which can be proposed by any member of the 'school' and taken up by the rest until the next spontaneous proposal. Before introducing the exercise, the participants were invited to devise a movement or gesture and an accompanying sound for each of the four elements. Their Initial responses closely resembled those of the dancers in *Aillaquillén – The Island of Nine Moons*, suggesting both a shared embodied vocabulary and a universal orientation toward the element. This resonates with the animist understanding that humans not only coexist with elements but also carry them physically and symbolically within. Yet contrary to the *Nine Moons* dancers who prepared, rehearsed, and performed each element individually and only joined together in the scene when forming the island, the School of Fish exercise was designed for group work. Contesting the individualising aspect of a Global North mindset, the performers in *Asul Asul / Nick of Time* portrayed the element as an ensemble – a representation of a multitude or a network, and of interconnectedness. Once the element multitude would be put into dialogue with an individual performer, the image of the contrast between self-imposed human anthropocentric isolation and a

[11] The workshop participants had backgrounds of various Western performer training techniques (Stanislavsky, Grotovski, Meisner, Viewpoints etc.). In my own training, I have been acquainted with the principles of the Lecoq technique, but I have not attended the Lecoq school or been certified in the practice.

living more-than-human network or society would be that much starker. In the studio, experimentation started by introducing the basic structure of the exercise, then slowly adding movements representing elements: **LINK06**.

In the video, the first few minutes of the exercise are an easing into *play*, another key term for Lecoq. Play and playfulness are not about having a fun time; "an ability to play is more about openness, a readiness to explore the circumstances of the moment without intellectual 'editing', but within a set of rules or expectations germane to the style or form of theatre under investigation" (Murray, 2005, p.50). The initial movement-gesture in the exercise – the flick of both wrists initiated by the first movement leader – retains a somewhat frivolous attitude of an actor 'performing' play, and the group is still hesitant, checking in with each other to ensure they remain part of the ensemble or that the rest are following. In the first prompted change (0:45), the actress who takes on the position of the leader introduces a gesture that, without having been announced, seems to be from a core 'elemental' vocabulary, perhaps the undulation of waves of water. Slowly, play takes over: "The emphasis on play (*le jeu*) is important because playing through mime activates embodied imagination and allows identity to become slippery" (Pearce, 2024, p.383). *Mime* is Lecoq's key to understanding the other. It "is not a superficial representation or a subjective portrayal of another thing through the body" but "a means of embodied knowledge creation that is fundamental to human development" (Pearce, 2024, p.379). At 1:08 in the video, this becomes visible as the pre-prepared gesture of the current leader suddenly changes into what seems like a grounding moment before expanding again into a large circular movement engaging the whole body. A spontaneous transition from premeditated gesture to in-the-moment improvisation, from illustrating to miming marks the fluidity of a slippery identity. Lecoq sees this transition as the beginning of a true embodied understanding of the other: "If I mime the sea, it is not about drawing waves in space with my hands to make it understood that it is the sea, but about grasping the various movements into my own body: feeling the most secret rhythms to make the sea come to life in me and little by little, to become the sea" (Lecoq, 2006, p.69). In indigenist terms, miming reveals interconnectedness as the performers explore the qualities and essences of a nonhuman and accept them into their own bodies. When a new movement happens at 1:29 in the video, the group already seems more attuned, moving as an ensemble, discovering that "those rhythms emotionally belong to [them]: sensations, sentiments, and ideas appear" (Lecoq, 2006, p.69). As identity becomes slippery, new forms emerge from reaching out to the Other. Miming as Lecoq understood it is an embodied practice of relationality, a way to enter into an emergent and lived relationship with the nonhuman. What is achieved in Indigenous cosmovision through relating to the spirits, can happen in a Western version of animism through movement practice.

At 3:52 in the video, I prompt the group to use the next movement change to transition to a pre-prepared 'wind' gesture. This happens when one of the actresses breaks out (4:29), twirling and producing a whooshing sound. Despite no direct connection between the two, her movements look similar to those of the actor dancing the element of Wind in *Aillaquillén – The Island of Nine Moons*. Lecoq agrees with this first shared impulse: "Air is found through flight. Running across the room, arms outstretched like a glider, we can sense the possibility of getting leverage on the air, which is not a vacuum, but an element that can give support" (2006, p.88). The group immediately transforms its movement, producing a feeling of being supported by lightness and nimbleness; even the movement of the camera following them becomes airy. Ellie Nixon reflects similarly about the devising process of a show called *Arquitectura del aire:* "The material imagination invoked by the element of air generated its own unique transformative atmosphere, an intermediary dwelling space in which sensations of weightlessness, of the transformative and the mutable, increasingly shifted the actor-devisors from weighted and grounded beings to vaporous and mercurial presences. (2024, p.67). The qualities, textures, and feelings of air are being explored in this moment. An important process in Lecoq terms is happening here: *movement analysis,* an exploration of the movement of "various non-human animals, other living entities and 'things' from the natural world" (Pearce, 2024, p.378) through observation, memory, and improvisation. This way, "the human actor encounters and learns about the non-human world first and foremost through movement and not socially assigned categories or classifications" (Pearce, 2024, p.381). In other words, although the workshop was applying an indigenist methodology based on animist sensibilities, the participants were able to research it *through movement* first, instead of directly intellectually accepting the philosophical idea of animism of everything being alive. Life is movement – *tout bouge* – and movement is embodied, lived, practiced. The prepared 'core' gesture starts the process; improvisation led by movement analysis adds deeper layers of understanding.

The initial 'flight' of the group announces further exploration of levels when the ensemble briefly ducks down while moving (4:48), then changes into a different type of movement (4:59): a slower, almost earthly breathing that adds a ritualistic-sounding rhythm and shape (5:28). Then breath becomes light air again (6:12) and lifts itself back up into a higher, breezier dimension. Alongside movement analysis, this is a process of *identification*, which "encourages a deeper sense of connection with non-human others. In the process, the potential for empathy emerges" (Pearce, 2024, p.383). So does a potential for reciprocity: air "affects human beings, pushing and pulling them", but "humans can also affect the air" (Lecoq, 2006, p.88). In other words, "the understanding that 'everything moves' has its opposite in 'everything is moved' and emphasises that even inanimate substances and materials have a dynamic impact on their environment, influencing how others move in space"

(Pearce, 2024, p.381). In this final part of the exercise, the performers explore different qualities of air (light, heavy, breathy, wispy, rising, falling) while already relating to it and creating empathy towards it. When the group spontaneously and without being prompted finds an ending to the exercise, something important has changed: besides "yield[ing] to difference and reach[ing] beyond what [they] know towards an emergent dramaturgy of something co-constituted coming to light" (Nixon, 2024, p.39), the relationship to the nonhuman has been significantly altered and enriched. Despite the exercise taking place within a studio, this research suggests that the movement practice becomes ecosomatic, relating to the nonhuman and the environment. In this initial preparation for Action 'Dialogue', an awareness of the nonhuman and an exploration of identification was established purely through movement and sound. Interconnectedness and reciprocity, two of the five indigenist values of the methodological set, were explored. The next step of the Action was to add the values of gratitude and respect.

Water: Gratitude, Apology, and Promise

Lecoq-based "identification exercises require the human actor to try to understand the other from their position and to identify the human in the non-human" (Pearce, 2024, p.383). This in itself is an indigenist approach that was 'doubled' in the second part of Action 'Dialogue' as the performers used identification to embody an element while a single actor directly addressed it. The situation resembled the direct addresses in the rituals Alejandra Aillapan shared with the *Nine Moons* performing group. Preparation for the second part of the Action consisted of thinking of a memory, event, or time of life, when one particular element was important for the participants, then writing sentences starting with 'Thank you, [element], for…', filling in the rest with their propositions. Gratitude was the initial focus of the exercise; in later stages it was developed by adding sentences of apology and commitment starting with 'I'm sorry for…' and 'I promise I will …, will that help?' The prompt for studio improvisation went as follows:

> *One actor steps out of the group.*
> *The rest of the group becomes the chosen element.*
> *The element establishes itself through group movement and sound.*
> *When the element is present, the actor approaches it.*
> *The actor speaks to the element her sentences of gratitude, apology, and promise.*
> *The element responds, or not. It is unpredictable, alive, ancient.*
> *The actor and the element continue interacting.*
> (Petkovsek, 2023, p.8)

The basic form of the School of Fish exercise connected the whole group as an ensemble to a nonhuman element through identification, creating an "embodied dialogue with what surrounds us" leading to being "sensitised to 'otherness'" (Nixon, 2024, p.37). While the embodied dialogue of the group continued to develop through improvised mime and play, one actor now stepped out of the chorus to perform the dialogue between the human and the nonhuman by adding language and a dramatic situation. Through iterations and rehearsals, a version of the exercise including the element of Water was developed into one of the final scenes, entitled *Promise*: **LINK07**.

The scene retained an improvisatory element but gained structure through its development. It grew from the initial direct repetition of gestures and movements of the original exercise into a more free-flowing form. In this development, the push and pull of water's movements have more creative independence yet the connection of the ensemble is at the same time stronger than at the beginning of exploring the Action. At the start of the scene, when water 'presents itself', the difference with the previous video is that of theatrical *transposition*, an "essentialis[ing of] the rhythms, patterns, and textures" (Murray, 2005, p.75) of the nonhuman embodied by the actors. Transposition is a reinsertion of the work done on identifications into the dramatic dimension (Lecoq, 2006, p.45), an internalising of the essential qualities of the nonhuman to be presented through the tool of the human actor. Despite having an undulating quality, the movement of water in the scene is no longer an illustration or an improvised movement analysis, but an internalisation of a certain type of essence of the element. Water and human are both on stage, combined in play and a push and pull of identification. Lecoq's concept of transposition seems to point towards a type of anthropomorphising; further reflection on the challenges and benefits connected to the latter can be found in the next section. When the actress starts to speak at 0:56, the scene is anchored through the practice of indigenist values: Water is approached with permission, respect, and gratitude, immediately constructing a relationship. The framing foregrounds interconnectedness while simultaneously showing an image of an individual facing a 'multitude' – the actor performing the individual can only join the multitude at the end of the scene, when a relational reciprocity is established. Similar to the video of Alejandra addressing the elements at the planting of the *Araucaria* seedlings in the previous chapter, here is a person speaking to the element of water and acknowledging its importance. The crucial difference lies in the presence of the 'incommensurable' spiritual dimension. There, Alejandra is effectively addressing the water's guardian spirit or *ngen-ko.* Here, in this secular version, the address becomes an act of relational recognition, situating the encounter within a frame of what Arianne Conty (summarising to an extent Weber's writing on subjectivity, aliveness, and kinship) names the four basic interrelated ideas of animism: personhood, relationality, location, and ontological boundary crossing (2021). Having the embodied version of water on stage invites the idea of personhood: "All entities,

not just humans, have purposive agency and express themselves and, through enunciating, assemble and dissemble subjectivities and collectivities" (Conty, 2021, p.134). Assembling and dissembling subjectivities and collectivities is a fitting description of the movement of Water in the scene. The progression from the gentle ripple at the beginning of the actress's speech through the strengthening resonance of the waves of varying rhythms slowly reaching out to her and nearly touching her feet (1:29), offers an image of the "negotiation between the anthropocentric and ecocentric binaries" (Pearce, 2024, p.385) and their coming together. A relationship is established, grounded in indigenist values, and embodied on stage, reminding that "persons exist only through their relations, because they are all independent upon a shared ecosystem" (Conty, 2021, p.136). The locality of the shared ecosystem is important: remembering a lived moment or experience in the actress's life grounds the memory in a practical reality and consequently imbues the relation happening on stage *here and now* with significance. Autobiographical story elements here substitute the shared tale, which was the basis of the show in the previous chapter. The emergent quality of relational mattering is addressed further in the next section through the lens of Karen Barad's agential realism. The relating between the actress and water as well as the performance of the group itself "initiate and reanimate our embodied connection to the imagination and the sensuous world" (Nixon, 2024, p.40). The group's movements invite us to imagine different manifestations of water, from what could be a calm pond (0:53) to wavelets and waves (1:15), the changing tide (1:49), playful splashes (2:06), an ocean in a storm (2:35), a frozen or perhaps contaminated glacier (2:58), drops of rain or shower (3:28), and finally the water within our bodies (4:20) – none of which were planned but emerged as essential qualities of the movement within the relation. Additionally, reciprocity is established when the actress lists her promises of (hopefully) helpful actions (3:05). The line between movement choices and ethical commitments is blurred within a relational framing of the connection.

Finally, an *actual* ontological boundary crossing is, sadly, out of reach at least in a 'secular' animist sensibility. Here, performance offers the ability "to think itself beyond the boundary of the unitary and enclosed self of the Western tradition into a shared world" (Conty, 2021, p.135). Lecoq also realised that "any attempt at full identification would be concerning" (Pearce, 2024, p.384) and found the answer in the mentioned concept of play. This "ensures a distance remains between the actor and the other [and] allows the human actor to see the world not from the self (I am the goldfish), but from the other (I am playing at being a goldfish)" (Pearce, 2024, p.384). Movement practice is the generator of this possibility, as the actors were able to explore through the Action 'Dialogue'. Coupled with an indigenist value set methodology, the result can be a powerful experience of a relational worldview of an environment shared with nonhumans. The indigenist values act as a framing device *and also*

become embodied through the gestures, words, and presence on stage, making the performance a lived practice and the expression of a secular sacred.

Relation

Challenge of Manmade Materiality

The Actions of the workshop investigated applying the set of indigenist values to a Global North context in varying ways. Some, like 'Embodiment', 'Spatial Web', and 'Timeline' (Table 4) included preparation that led participants outside and instructed them to find nonhumans in their immediate environment to observe, ask permission, relate to, offer something in return, and thank, before embodying them in the studio. The results were explorations of performing a pond, a dog, a park, water, an ivy plant. Besides performing movement analysis, these preparations can be situated within Western ecosomatic approaches – embodied practices that allow one to relate to the land –, representing secular ways of applying animist sensibilities to "ecological interrelatedness of place" (Ìgbín'bí Coleman, 2024, p.64) as mentioned in the Practice Review. In Action 'Coexistence', reflected upon further in the next section, participants brought nonhuman partners – rocks – into the studio and practiced indigenist values as a form of coexisting in order to enter into a dialogic and relational connection with a nonhuman on stage.

However, a challenge presented itself whenever the chosen nonhuman partner was a manmade object. Often stemming from Indigenous worldviews, new animist scholars and ecosomatic practitioners reflect on the aliveness or intrinsic intelligence of animals, plants, rocks, rivers, elements etc. (Arlander, 2022; Conty, 2021; Fraleigh and Riley, 2024; Gilmour, 2021; Harding, 2014; Harvey, 2019; Ingold, 2011; Kubiak, 2012; McHugh, 2021; Naveh and Bird-David, 2014; Olsen, 2002; Panelli, 2010; Plumwood, 2007 and 2014; Weber, 2020). Accordingly, the workshop participants had little issue understanding the inherent subjectivity of a pond, a tree, or a particular rock. Yet the reality in Seoul was quite different: the group was surrounded by cement and steel, buildings, bus stops, cars. And in the studio, there were chairs, microphones, and air conditioners. Were they also included in our exploration of aliveness and intrinsic intelligence? Can an animist approach be extended to the material staples of theatre practice? Shunning them as products of an anthropocentric and extractivist society would be contra-productive to contesting the binary of nature and culture. It would also ignore the markers of Global North culture and dismiss the very things that allow us to make performance in a secular world. Would relating to them through anthropomorphising or other methods mean legitimising what Plumwood calls 'reductive materialism' (2007) – the very worldview this research is trying to contest? In feedback sessions after studio exercises, the participants noted it was more

difficult to attribute subjectivity to manmade objects than to 'nature-made' persons: when relating to the former, it seemed to the observers that these nonhuman partners often stayed silent in return.

This research suggests that a new materialist perspective can act in a syncretic approach together with indigenist methodology to include all nonhumans within a given environment in the network of persons that fundamentally influence each other in an interconnected and reciprocal manner. This happens not as a legitimisation of a consumer-based materialist society, but as productive entanglements with matter that can, in conjunction with indigenist values, lead to engagement with the nonhuman, the understanding of one's position within one's environment, and the respect, responsibility, and reciprocity that this entails. To the idea of all beings co-creating "a world that is continuously producing life" (Weber, 2020, p.18), new materialism adds that "matter is fundamentally multiple, self-organising, dynamic and inventive, moving between nature and culture, the animated and the automated, bodies and environments" (Nixon, 2024, p.19). This implies an emergent quality, which is a fundamental aspect of Barad's agential realism: "The world is a dynamic process of intra-activity and materialization in the enactment of determinate causal structures" (Barad, 2007, p.140). The world as a dynamic process is also the focal point of animist sensibilities, and it implies a performative aspect of meaning or *mattering*, which is equally at home in theatre phenomenology and the production of meaning in performance (Fischer-Lichte, 2008). This section makes a case for how these variants of emergent relationality function together in a performance of relating to a nonhuman through the analysis of an example from Action 'Relation'.

Agential Cut of the Chair

In Action 'Relation' (Table 4), the participants studied and responded to scientific facts about the climate crisis and explored alternative ways of presenting them – through movement, sound, and performance as opposed to text and graphs. They were then instructed to choose a nonhuman in the studio and present the facts to them through a human-nonhuman relation. A shortened version of the Action prompt read as follows:

> *Present your 'fact' performance to your chosen nonhuman. Incorporate the elements of asking for permission, respect, and gratitude into your performance, and think about interconnectedness.*
>
> *The main challenge is how to imagine your nonhuman partner as an active participant in this dialogue, not just a passive audience.*
>
> *This is the first time we are truly 'reaching out' to the nonhuman, so it will undoubtedly feel a bit strange. Embrace the 'strangeness' of the exercise and see what comes out!* (Petkovsek, 2023, p.6)

The prompt asked for a direct, almost naïvely 'human' conversation with a nonhuman, which in turn, invited an anthropomorphising effect. Anthropomorphism can be critiqued as another form of anthropocentrism (Watson and Huntington, 2008) or (mis)used intentionally as the "policeman for reductive materialism" (Plumwood, 2014, p.451). However, animist scholars have defended it: Viveiros de Castro (1998) posits anthropomorphism as a key concept of Amerindian cosmovision, in which all beings share a subject-based humanity – a symbolic view of the world that eliminates ontological hierarchies. Plumwood (2007, p.33) similarly sees it as useful and necessary: "If anthropomorphism means writing an active, intentional, ecological world, and expanding our range of sensitivity to non-human actors and elements, it would be highly rational, especially in the current dire ecological situation, to have more of it!" Jane Bennett, whose theory of vital materialism overlaps to an extent with Barad's agential realism, includes anthropomorphism as a possible entrance into what she calls a human-nonhuman 'assemblage'[12]: "An anthropomorphic element in perception can uncover a whole world of resonances and resemblances. /…/ We may at first see only a world in our own image, but what appears next is a swarm of 'talented' and vibrant materialities (including the seeing self)" (Bennett, 2010, p.99). As mentioned in the previous section on the Action 'Dialogue', Lecoq's concept of transposition also seems to acknowledge anthropomorphism as the final stage of a human understanding of the nonhuman; an inevitable result of the inability of genuine ontological boundary crossing by human actors.

In the workshop, anthropomorphising happened in exercises and scenes, but the effect varied depending on the type of interaction and the nonhuman. In Action 'Relation', one of the participants chose a chair in the studio as her nonhuman stage partner, to which she related a climate crisis fact through gesture and sound: **LINK08**.

In feedback response to the presentation, some participants mentioned the initial expression of respect and gentleness from the performer, making them imagine the chair as an old person or perhaps a baby, thus creating an anthropomorphising effect. Others felt that the chair was not responding or revealing any inherent subjectivity. For the former, ideas of age or human equivalents could be 'projected' onto the chair, while for the latter, the 'chairness' of it seemed to stay inert and mute – an object with a single function that serves humans in a specific way, which wasn't used in the performance (does the chair *want* to be sat on?). Once the performance was done, the chair was returned back to the many others, seen in the background of the video, with the exact same shape and form – no one would be able to pick it out from its identical brethren ever again. Similar reactions

[12] Defining it as an "interactive interference of many bodies and forces" (Bennett, 2010, p.21), she borrows the term from Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari (1987)

also happened in other examples of relating to manmade objects: although the performances seemingly animated the nonhumans, when the 'levels' of anthropomorphism were lowered, the nonhumans were harder to think of as more than passive objects or tools. While it was a challenge to accept an inherent pre-existing aliveness or personhood of the chair, a *performative* understanding of how the chair matters, as opposed to a *representational* one, can fill that gap. Agential realism offers a relational approach to matter, in which "ontology and epistemology are inherently co-implicated and mutually constituting", and in which that mutual constitution "neither requires nor is in any sense restricted to humans" (Gamble et al., 2019, p.122).

Barad bases agential realism on the ideas of indeterminacy and complementarity of physicist Niels Bohr and posits that the "primary ontological unit is not independent objects with independently determinate boundaries and properties," but *phenomena*, "the ontological inseparability of agentially intra-acting components" (2007, p.33). She presents 'intra-actions' as alternatives to 'interactions': "in contrast to the usual 'interaction', which assumes that there are separate individual agencies that precede their interaction, the notion of intra-action recognizes that distinct agencies do not precede, but rather emerge through, their intra-action" (2007, p.33). This goes hand in hand with an indeterminacy of matter: agential realism "does not take separateness to be an inherent feature of how the world is" (Barad, 2007, p.136). The 'usual' interactions between separate pre-existing components lead to a representationalist view of the world, in which their separateness brings about a "dilemma of their linkage such that knowledge is possible" (Barad, 2007, p.137). The dilemma of linkage is the already mentioned impossibility of ontological boundary crossing, present in the participants' reaction to the scene with the chair. Can we *truly* know what the chair wants? Or if it wants at all? Or how it is reacting to the proposition by the actress? Does that even matter?

Instead, "a performative account insists on understanding thinking, observing, and theorizing as practices of engagement with, and as part of, the world in which we have our being" (Barad, 2007, p.133). The emphasis switches from being to *engaging or performing as being*, from ontology to an 'onto-epistemology' familiar to performers all over the world working with material props or indeed with non-material tools such as characters that spring to life in given situations on stage. The actress performing the same scene without the chair would be pantomime, and the chair without the actress would be just a chair on the stage. When the actress gently lays her hands and forehead on the chair starting at 0:59, onto-epistemology is acknowledged and respected; in the indigenist set of values, this is the asking of permission.

This is possible, according to Bohr and Barad, if matter does not have "inherently determinate boundaries or properties" (Barad, 2007, p.138), in other words, "matter is neither fixed and given nor

the mere end result of different processes. Matter is produced and productive, generated and generative. Matter is agentive, not a fixed essence or property of things" (2007, p.137). The basic ontological units are not bits of material but phenomena, and the world is "a dynamic process of intra-activity and materialization" (Barad, 2007, p.140). In a theatrical sense, this can be understood as the emergent meaning from a shifting relation between performers or presences on stage, or between performer and audience. Understanding the actress and the chair in the video as intra-acting components producing emergent phenomena of always shifting relations means that it is the *performance of* (or between) the pair on stage that produces agency in all matter involved. Relationality seen in Alejandra's practice of cosmovision or the Korean performers' movement identification with the elements is now extended to a manmade object. When the actress starts her gestures at 1:36, in the ongoing dynamic entanglement of performer and chair, the dynamism is the agency itself. When understood from this point of view, the binary human vs. nonhuman becomes not only redundant but even obstructive in the widening of the scope to all matter. Although the term 'more-than-human' does not quite shake off the implied difference, it avoids the axiomatic dichotomy.

Crucially, the dynamic elements creating a world that remakes itself in each instant are never outside of it exerting influence on the inside, but always also a part of it. "No property of any discernible thing /…/ – whether its physical features, agency, or even its speech or thought – entirely precedes or remains unchanged by its actions or encounters with other things" (Gamble et al., 2019, p.123). As will be the case with Bateson's mind-systems in the next chapter, we can imagine this happening on an increasing scale. If we zoom out from the basic unit of chair and actress, we find the audience not just as an observer, separate from the performance, but also within it, shaping it and influencing it – again, a familiar notion to theatre phenomenologists. A further zooming out can include the immediate environment, the building, the city etc. This type of decentring mirrors that of animism: "humans (like everything else) always partly constitute and are partly constituted by that which they observe" (Gamble et al., 2019, p.123).

And yet, we clearly understand the chair as a chair and the human as a human, not as indiscrete 'blobs' of matter mixing with each other – how does that fit within the notion of indeterminacy? Besides physics and biology telling us that at a certain micro-level, there is nothing that can be understood as a clear boundary, Barad does acknowledge the forming of limits and situations within a given performed relation. Instead of Bennett's assemblage, she uses the term 'apparatus' (again as a development of Bohr's theory of physics) to define specific groupings in reality. Just as everything else, apparatuses are not outside of what they delineate or separate; rather, they are "specific material reconfigurings of the world that do not merely emerge in time but iteratively reconfigure

spacetimematter as part of the ongoing dynamism of becoming" (Barad, 2007, p.142). They are therefore themselves phenomena and open-ended practices. Perhaps most importantly, "apparatuses produce differences that matter – they are boundary-making practices that are formative of matter and meaning, productive of, and part of, the phenomena produced"(2007, p.146). They do this by enacting "agential cuts that produce determinate boundaries and properties of 'entities' within phenomena" (Barad, 2007, p.148). The agential cut functions like the flash of a camera taking a photo in darkness: the flash produces a focused image of dynamic 'mattering' in a certain composition. That is not to say that the image even when lit up is static, but the 'slice' that is presented exhibits certain relations, determinacies, and boundaries that *matter for that moment*. If one then imagines the camera flash as an iterative strobe light of very high frequency, the still image becomes a process always in the making: "phenomena in their ongoing materialization" (Barad, 2007, p.151).

Through this lens, establishing a relation with a chair or other manmade nonhumans appears in a new light. The apparatus in this case is the context of the theatrical studio, which constitutes itself through its intended function and creates the "material conditions of possibility and impossibility of mattering." (Barad, 2007, p.148). The agential cut is the scene itself, which differentially enacts certain boundaries, properties, and meanings (Barad, 2007, p.139). In that moment, the agential intra-actions between the human and the chair produce differential patterns of mattering. These are the moments we can see, such as the introduction onto the stage at the beginning of the scene, the gentle touch of the actress, the silent witnessing of the pantomime etc. Mattering happens within the apparatus and boundaries are formed through the agential cut; in other words, it is the *performance* itself that makes the chair and the human *matter.* As a character, the chair is not necessarily granted immanent subjectivity that is always present, but the apparatus and agential cut give it the possibility of expressing that subjectivity (Bennet would say, 'vitality') within a specific configuration. In Complicité's *Mnemonic*, Simon McBurney introduces the chair on stage as one belonging to his ancestors and used in different shows. When the chair collapses, an audience member reacts with sympathetic concern: "for her, the chair was no longer just a 'prop' chair – it had been 'animated' with personal significance, emotional meaning by McBurney's words" (Margolies, 2016, p.7). When the performer in Action 'Relation' speaks to the chair, she 'animates' it, yet the mattering itself comes not only from human focus on a specific object, but from the agential intra-actions *between* them. This possibility of mattering is what can offer a way through the subject-object dichotomy when relating to manmade objects[13]. And yet, how to avoid the danger of applying the agential cut indeterminately

[13] This is perhaps not dissimilar to Don Ihde's three types of I – Technology – World relationships, specifically the 'alterity relationship', in which "the artefact is experienced as a quasi-other" (Kapsali, 2020, p.106) and exhibits a 'technological intentionality', which "neither anthropomorphise[s] nor attribute[s] to [the artefact] some kind of 'consciousness'" (Kapsali, 2020, p.106).

and understanding it as a general way of validating *any* relationship, including that of an anthropocentric or reductive materialist point of view? Here, indigenist values act as a bulwark against the potential pitfall: relating through permission, respect, interconnectedness, reciprocity, ritual, and gratitude leads to a network of kinship and care, not one of (mutual) destruction.

Coexistence

Rock Ritualisation

How does mattering within a specific configuration apply to an animist worldview, in which everything being alive and having subjectivity is the core underlying principle? One way is by decentring the human: the specific configurations giving rise to dynamic intra-actions can and do continuously *happen between nonhumans themselves*. The decentring of the human element also avoids the anthropocentric gaze as the only legitimising point of view. Humans become just one type of persons within constantly reconfiguring patterns of mattering. Fittingly, Viveiros de Castro also observed that "perspectivism[14] does not usually involve all animal species; the emphasis seems to be on those species which perform a key symbolic and practical role" (1998, 471). This is therefore not to be understood as a selective anthropocentric or even extractivist agenda of choosing certain 'useful' specimens, but merely as a sign that individual relation is important within any given configuration. Nurit Bird-David observed a similar tendency with the Nayaka communities in India: "trees as such may be animated, not animated, or regarded as objects, depending on what actually happens between them and their Nayaka interlocutors" (Naveh & Bird-David, 29). Engaging with other persons is *local, personal,* and *individual*: "Their 'relational epistemology' model is concerned with engaging particular beings, which particular Nayaka meet, at a particular time and place, in the forest, or near their homes" (Naveh and Bird-David, 2014, p.35). The shared practice of cosmovision with Alejandra in Chile functioned in the same way: in the hills and forests around Pucon, she would not engage with every single local nonhuman person chanced upon. But when she did engage, a clear relationality with the personhood of whomever she was relating with (or their guardian *ngen*) was established through indigenist values. The feeling of a general 'potential' was always present, always in flux until a certain relation – an agential cut – was constructed in the moment of relating.

Action 'Coexistence' (Table 4) was developed into the final co-created scene of the showcase performance and provided an example of a synthesis of the individual configuration of dynamic intra-

[14] Viveiros de Castro's (1998) term denoting the shared subjectivity of personhood common to all persons, human or nonhuman.

acting between human and nonhuman, and the expression of the secular sacred through a ritualisation of the indigenist value-set. The scene partners were the 'least animate' nature-made nonhumans – rocks. In the Action, coexistence was offered as an onto-epistemological condition that needs no additional dynamics of relating, because it is *already* a constant flux of mattering within the indigenist scaffolding. This is a way of decentring the human even when the human performer is 'leading' the scene. Coexisting or 'being with' is a dialogue in itself, one that sits within indigenist values and does not attempt to impose human-centred modes of communication.

The participants were instructed to search for an example of a technologically based solution to any aspect of the climate crisis. The solutions could be seemingly beneficial, well-meaning or dubious. The participants were then invited to find a rock in their local environment, ask its permission and if they thought it was granted, bring it to the studio. The score for the Action (here slightly edited for clarity) was as follows:

> *Come on stage with your rock in a bag or a box.*
>
> *Face the audience.*
>
> *Speak the geographical location of the rock.*
>
> *Ask its permission to engage.*
>
> *Take it out of its bag or box gently, present it to us.*
>
> *Examine it in as many ways as possible and tell the audience what you find through adjectives (for example round, rough, heavy, chunky etc.) Keep the adjectives physical but add one non-physical one.*
>
> *Set your rock down next to you.*
>
> *Tell the audience about the tech climate 'solution' you found.*
>
> *Coexist with it for a while.*
>
> *Thank it and pour a bit of water on it (as a reciprocal gift).*
>
> *At the end, ask your rock, 'What do you think?'*
>
> (Petkovsek, 2023, p.16)

The indigenist values of permission, respect, interconnectedness, reciprocity, and gratitude were all embedded into the score, as was the contrast of proposed technological solutions and a dialogical relationship with the nonhuman through the acknowledgment of coexistence. Each performer and their rock partner created their own dynamic process of materialisation. Additionally, actors performing the same score simultaneously had a ritualisation effect: **LINK09**.

As with the chair in the previous section, or the varying relationship between the Nayaka and trees, the rocks *in this scene* were animated, or mattered, because of the relationship with the performers.

In animism, all rock is alive and deserves respect, but these specific rocks mattered in the scene because of the emergent relationality with their performing partners. That is not to say, anthropocentrically, that the 'human gaze' imbued them with particular status, but rather that the status emerged out of an interconnectedness and a reciprocal relationship with another person, be it human or nonhuman. The rocks and human performers created an agential cut of Barad's dynamic process of intra-acting and materialisation at the same time as a local, personal, and individual animist relationship.

The performers' synchronous preparing for the scene (putting down of scripts), speaking the rock's locations following a 'zooming out from smaller to larger spatial contexts' blueprint (0:18-0:27), asking permission and presenting the rocks (0:28-0:43), describing the rocks (0:45-1:13), coexisting with them and offering them water as a reciprocal gift (1:57-3:35), and directly addressing them (3:37), created actions that became ritualised by repetition, stylisation, prescription, and elevation of meaning (Grimes, 2014). This was not a direct translation of an Indigenous ritual into performance as in the previous chapter, but rather a respectful indigenist-framed performance of ritualisation – the concept that according to Grimes designates "the basic, ordinary stuff out of which special rites emerge" (2014, p.193). On the Schechnerian braid of efficacy and entertainment, the scene oscillated from one to the other, within a double translation from cosmovision-inspired ritualistic gestures to performance and back to an animist expression of a secular sacred. The performers were not addressing the rocks' spirit protectors or *ngen*, as Alejandra would have done in Chile, neither were they trying to appropriate Indigenous spirituality. Nevertheless, through the scaffolding of indigenist values, present in the co-creation process as well as the content of the studio experimentation, the ritualising actions performed in the scene expressed a certain secular sacred: the dynamic mattering emerging from the agential cut of the scene and the onto-epistemological condition of coexistence. That is to say, an acknowledgment of coexistence not as a mere (hierarchical) co-presence in the same environment, but a joint mattering, a sharing of life through which each person constitutes the other and is in turn constituted by her. The technical 'solutions' presented by the performers, even when seemingly positive, are therefore seen as unilateral and often anthropocentric actions in contrast with a true acknowledgment of coexistence. What do the rocks think about them?

In this sense, the actions on stage could be argued to be not only embodied (through the acting and movement), condensed (through the carefully selected script and stylisation), and prescribed (by the score of the Action), but also to a certain degree presented as an *enactment* of joint mattering. The scene is a performance of ritualisation, but one that could present a model for humans on how to "learn, or re-learn, ritual ways of becoming attuned to their environments" (Grimes, 2003, p.31). In

other words, through presenting the simple act of coexistence the scene promotes a ritualising model of practice to the audience. As cited, Grimes posits that "in ritualizing, human beings discover, then embody and cultivate their world views, attitudes, and ethics" (2003, p.34). It is the practice and codified repetition of a behaviour – ritual or performance – that can ultimately ground a worldview or attitude.

This research investigates how to co-create performance that integrates animist sensibilities and navigates the complexity of the climate crisis. Therefore, it focuses on the process of co-creation and the performers themselves. What about the audience on the other side? In the practice case of *Asul Asul / Nick of Time*, the question of how much the indigenist 'message' was received by the Global North spectators was pertinent. Brief responses gathered at the end of the showcase performance and presented in the next and final subsection of this chapter confirm that there is impact present in this type of practice.

Relationality Reflections

The workshop aimed to explore animist sensibilities of engaging with the environment through movement, performance, and ritualisation, and find ways of communicating these reflections on stage. A survey at the end of the presentation[15], organised by Yesigong Project, captured audience reactions and revealed that the show had an impact on the spectators. Some reflected on having their awareness raised: "I had never thought about the climate crisis closely, but now that I can see it in a play, I feel like I want to care more about the climate and the environment" (Kim, 2023). "I thought I should be alert to things I had thought of loosely, and I felt anew that the destruction of nature has a greater impact on us than I thought. I think I came to understand the situation in a variety of ways by expressing the climate crisis through body and situation" (Seo, 2023). Coexistence as an idea resonated with the audience: "I must do what I can to coexist with each other" (Joo, 2023); "It reminded me of myself just using things, throwing them away and breaking them. I felt that coexisting with things is healing the wounds of the Earth. So, I felt that it would be good for me to practice first and heal the wounds of the Earth" and "Through this reading, we felt the form of coexistence with objects, and we felt the preciousness of what we touch, see, and drink, and we realized that we should

[15] The questions in the survey were, 1. Have you seen a theatre performance about the climate crisis or natural environment?; 2. What was the most memorable scene from Nick of Time, and why?; 3. Did any new thoughts or questions about the climate crisis arise after the performance?; 4. Do you think shifting perspectives is a good way to explore coexistence with natural/artificial environments?; 4-1. What are some good ways for our society to coexist with the environment beyond a human-centred view?; and 5. If Nick of Time became a full production, what would you hope for as an audience member? (Kim and Jung, 2023)

not do it carelessly" (Kim, 2023); "I have come to realise that nature is always with us and that we are objects of coexistence, giving and receiving each other more intimately" (Seo, 2023).

The importance of a shift towards a more relational approach to the nonhuman was also acknowledged: "I think the more I try to communicate with things like telephone poles, rocks, and wind, the more I will be able to listen to nature's stories" (Lee, 2023); "Eventually, I think I was able to feel sorry even for a single rock rolling on the side of the road" (Alice, 2023). The focus on the immediate environment including manmade objects and 'ordinary' nonhumans also made a mark: "As the stories continued, I felt that the environment was nothing more than the common things around us, but at the same time, it could be something I love" (Alice, 2023). On the other hand, the 'strangeness' of the nonhuman elicited, in at least one audience member, a desire for *more* anthropomorphising:

> The stories about the surrounding environment could have evoked more empathy and awareness, but viewing humans from the perspective of artefacts, stones, and other natural objects felt unfamiliar. I wonder if a more kind or detailed explanation would have helped. Or perhaps—what if the stones and utility poles didn't reflect their own characteristics, but instead embodied traits of us humans? (Chasia, 2023)

In a post workshop discussion, one of the participants herself acknowledged the initial feeling of strangeness of the indigenist approach, but she was then able to connect it to Korean culture, underlining the importance of the local in ecological practices: "In Korea we had not exactly the same thing, but similar rituals, so at the end I felt more comfortable with it, and personally I want to try more in my life, not only for theatre production, but as a person in this society" (Park, 2023).

These brief reactions of the audience and participants show a high level of engagement and reflection about indigenist values, a relational approach to the environment, the idea of ethical coexistence, and a raised awareness of the urgency and complexity of the climate crisis. They are included in the chapter to support the necessity of this type of work: performance and storytelling that responds dynamically to local context while presenting environmental narratives within an indigenist scaffolding, articulating, reimagining, and advocating for a reciprocal relationality between the human and nonhuman, between communities and their environments.

Conclusion

The studio experimentation and workshop performance of *Asul Asul / Nick of Time* investigated the application of the indigenist value-set scaffolding and relational approach to performance and co-creation within a non-Indigenous, individualistic and globalised Global North context. Instead of

drawing from an underlying cosmovision spirituality for performance or ritual material, as was the case in Chile in the previous chapter, this chapter suggested that animist sensibilities in a non-Indigenous context can be integrated into performers' work through transnational movement practice. Inspired by Lecoq's performer training pedagogy, the research addressed RQ2a and RQ2b by finding inherent relationality within movement analysis, identification, and transposition into the embodied performance of the essence of the Other. The idea of constant flux, *tout bouge*, connects movement to aliveness and can "foster an embodied eco-consciousness and enhanced sense of connectedness with nature" (Pearce, 2024, p.376). This connection was present in Action 'Dialogue' and its resulting scene *Promise*, in which the slippery identity of the performers embodying Water interacted with the individual actress, only letting her into the 'multitude' after an indigenist framing had been constituted. The collective body of Water contested an individualistic approach that both included and exceeded the human, emphasising interconnectedness and reciprocity.

While integrating animist sensibilities into performance expressions, the challenge of relating to manmade objects arose in the practice. The chapter proposed that a new materialist approach can redress this omission in animism theory. Drawing on the tenets of Karen Barad's agential realism, the indeterminacy of matter that dynamically intra-acts and materialises within determinate causal structures illuminated through the agential cut of the scene within the apparatus of the stage, enables it to acquire subjectivity and agency in specific configurations. As seen in Action 'Relation', a relational approach to objects is therefore possible and necessary in the reality of Western performance practice. A performative understanding of matter leads to a relational epistemology that effectively decentres the human by presupposing *any possible* configuration of intra-action. Although objects or props on stage seem to become animate through the relating to them by the human performers, an agential realist view understands this as merely one of many possibilities of agential cuts of material entanglements. While this successfully decentres the human, the chapter suggested that an agential realist approach therefore requires an indigenist value framework to make it ethically and ecologically relevant rather than a purely formal description of *all* matter(ings).

Humans are therefore re-situated ecologically within a network of matterings of equal importance, leading to coexistence as an onto-epistemological condition that is dynamic and emergent in itself. Situated within the indigenist value framework and a relational epistemology creating specific nonhuman-human connections, coexistence becomes a ritualised dialogue with the nonhuman. As seen in Action 'Coexistence', it oscillates on the efficacy-entertainment continuum and provides a model of practice that can open a path to animist sensibilities, and to the navigation of the complexity of the climate crisis.

In one of the *Asul Asul* scenes written by playwright Mimmy Baek, this complexity was symbolically represented as a Korean mythological monster called Pulgasari. Sporting a bear's body, an elephant's trunk, tiger's paws, a bull's tail, and the eyes of a rhinoceros, Pulgasari (the 'invincible') was created from steamed rice by a Buddhist monk hiding from persecution during the Joseon period (Nair, n.d.). As it grew, it consumed metal, including the weapons of its enemies, and integrated it into its own body, becoming more or less undefeatable. "If raised well, it can become an invincible ally" (Baek, 2023) while on the other hand, it can turn into an impregnable enemy. "Pulgasari can grow into any shape you want. The thing is, we must have balance if we want hope" (Baek, 2023). In the final practice case of this thesis, presented in the next chapter, a similar monster of local lore – the Monster of the Blue Lagoon – appeared in the narrative of the show in Cali, Colombia, and also grew to symbolise the community's search for a balance in the relationship with its environment. Returning to South America and building on the insight of a community's existing movement practice as a relational ecosomatic approach in a non-Indigenous context, the next chapter further develops the investigation of RQ2b. It also focuses on RQ3, exploring how a community learns, using movement and performance, to reach beyond the communal self and navigate the climate crisis through a recognition of interconnectedness of all systems within a cosmic whole.

7 *A Place to Call One's Own*: Systems Theory as a Holistic Approach to Co-Creation

Introduction

The practice research cases so far contributed to constructing the ethical and methodological dimensions of intercultural co-creation of performances investigating human–more-than-human[16] relationships. The pilot projects with Ecuadorean partners led to the composition of a relational ethics of co-creation and kinship. Practice research in Chile enabled ethical translation of aspects of cosmovision into performance through an indigenist value scaffolding and employed the overlap of theatre and ritual to allow the expression of animist sensibilities and a secular sacred. The work in South Korea added new materialist inflections and established movement as a means for an embodied and lived experience of a relational approach to the environment and the more-than-human. This chapter presents the final practice research case – the community-based salsa musical *A Place to Call One's Own* in the Aguablanca district of the city of Cali, Colombia. It investigates how to bring these insights together to co-create and perform a story about the relationship between a community and its environment. As with the shows *The Waterfall of San Luis* and *Aillaquillén – The Island of Nine Moons*, the work is based in South America, presenting the narrative of a community resisting social and environmental justice challenges. As with the showcase *Asul Asul / Nick of Time*, the context is non-Indigenous and urban, and a movement practice existing within the community – here, salsa dancing – is employed as an ecosomatic strategy of relating to the land and environment. Developing the latter component further addresses RQ2b, 'How to mobilise the existing professional/performance skills of a community or group of participants?' while the combined strands from all previous practice cases weave a holistic approach to address RQ3, 'In what ways can the complexity of the climate crisis be navigated through interculturally co-created community-based stories and performances?'

Drawing on Gregory Bateson's systems theory and its concept of interconnected mind systems, the chapter suggests that salsa dancing as a cultural, historical, and shared performance language presents the functional memory of the many integrated systems making up the Aguablanca district and its people. According to Noel G. Charlton, systemic functional memory is "whatever retains and transmits shape, pattern, or the ability to respond to environmental challenge or other knowledge

[16] In this chapter and the rest of the thesis, I return to the term 'more-than-human', avoiding the implicit binary structure of the term 'nonhuman' as mentioned in the previous chapter.

that the system or organism will need in the future" (2008, p.65). This research proposes that the dance choreographies incorporated into *A Place to Call One's Own* transcend their performance presentation to a more fundamental function of identity integration within the expanded community, including the people, the environment, and all the interacting systems. Salsa dancing is positioned in, and indeed enables, dialogue with neighbourhood, land, ancestry, and history. It becomes the medium through which ecological and ethical relations are articulated and performed, transmitting the ability to respond to environmental challenges to the community as a system. With its constant flux and choreographic restructurings, salsa dancing communicates a performative understanding of change or coded difference that occurs between and within systems and signals Batesonian *learning*, which functions as the familiar form of a progressive spiral. Each next level of learning is a revision of the previous one, correcting its errors and evolving based on its insights (Bateson, 1979), from small changes in simple behaviour to much more far-reaching changes of worldview. This chapter suggests that through expressing an ecosomatic and indigenist practice of relationality, this type of performance leads to higher orders of learning within the integrated systems, which ultimately contributes to the extension of the self, a different perception of the environment, and the idea of the unifying sacred through an aesthetic engagement.

Although predating as well as influencing the developments of new animism and new materialism, Bateson's systems theory is worth revisiting in congruence with both younger post-humanist approaches. If new animism and new materialism deal with the aliveness and agency of human or more-than-human persons and matter itself (albeit grouping them in certain assemblages or apparatuses), Bateson applies relationality to increasingly larger interconnected systems. This leads to a 'macro' recognition of the sacred, complementing the inter- and intra- personal approaches described in the previous chapter. When addressing the ecological dimensions of intercultural co-creation (RQ3), both aspects are necessary. In *A Place to Call One's Own,* co-created with partners from the Pontificia Universidad Javeriana in Cali and the Son de mi gente culture and arts foundation in Aguablanca, salsa dancing represents the embodied and lived practice of relationality. At the same time, the wider (hi)story of the community articulates how resilience and cohesion are continually forged through shared narrative that includes a complex and evolving relationship with the more-than-human and the environmental crisis in the symbolic form of the Monster of the Blue Lagoon. Despite being less directly expressed than in the practice cases in Chile and Korea, an underlying indigenist scaffolding allows for the situating of the community within its neighbourhood and environment, affirming both belonging and responsibility to the wider ecological and social systems that sustain it.

The chapter therefore combines the insights of the preceding practice research cases to present an example of their holistic application to a specific community and the corresponding co-created narrative. The basic framework of the research underlies the analysis and is supported by excerpts from the show[17], while the practice is necessarily situated and attentive to the specific context of the Aguablanca district and its people.

Project Background

Similarly to the work in Chile, the practice research in Colombia was funded through the Contested Territories Network and features in their report *Deliverable 4.2, Documentation of workshops and performances* (2025). My host university was the Pontificia Universidad Javeriana in Cali, where professor Mónica Marión Cataño was the main programme coordinator, while my main collaborators were professor Carlos Andrés Tobar Tovar, Martin Alejandro Segovia, and Angelly Alvarez. Supported by a decades-long collaborative relationship with communities and organisations in the Aguablanca district of Cali, Carlos used Contested Territories funding to launch a large social, research, and creative project called Habitancia. A principal focus was placed on seeking social innovation practices in the district struggling with structural violence and systemic marginalisation that contribute to peacebuilding as well as "solidarity solutions of common problems in post-pandemic times" (Tobar Tovar et al., 2025, p.2). Thus, for my two-month stay in Cali between October and December 2023, Carlos suggested working within the context of Habitancia in the form of a collaboration with the arts and culture foundation Son de mi gente and its founders Nancy Torres and Jhon Murillo. The goal became to co-create a salsa musical with Nancy, Jhon, and the children participating in Son de mi gente programming, particularly in the dance classes led by Leidy Johanna Collazos. The script for what became *A Place to Call One's Own* was co-written by myself and Martin, co-directed by myself and Angelly, and originally performed by sixteen young salsa dancers as well as Nancy and Jhon. The narrative of the community's history was based on previous research as well as interviews with local community leaders gathered by Carlos. The Pontificia Universidad Javeriana provided space and materials to create a studio-recorded video of the show, which was produced and edited by professor Mónica Bravo Pedrosa and her film students. The show continues to be performed in 2025.

[17] The link to the video of the full show is available in the Practice Portfolio section.

Context

Aguablanca: A District Shaped by Conflict

Cali is the third biggest city in Colombia with a population of more than 2 million people, located close to the southwestern Pacific coast in the valley of the river Cauca. The valley was once a mix of dry tropical forests and expansive wetlands, more than 88% of which have been lost to systematic desiccation since 1900 (Perafán Cabrera, 2022, p.77). Aguablanca ('White Water'), the urban sprawl making up the eastern third of the city and considered Cali's poorest and most violent district (Labbé et al., 2017), lies on wetlands desiccated in the first half of the 20th century to create plantations of sugarcane and millet, leaving intact less than 2% of the original ecosystem (Ocampo-Marulanda et al., 2021). It was populated from the 1950s on, when Cali underwent a rapid expansion of its urban zone and a population growth from less than 350,000 in 1951 to 1.5 million in the 1980s (Urrea Giraldo, 2012). A major cause for the influx of migrants was the Colombian armed conflict that started with *La Violencia* period mid-20th century and erupted further in the 1960s, becoming one of the longest ongoing civil conflicts in the world (Morales, 2018) and internally displacing millions of people in the country (Steele, 2017). The urbanisation of the Aguablanca agricultural area began "with migrants from the Pacific Coast, /…/ [who] settled on land that was still flooded and overgrown, lacking water, sewage and electricity services, in houses built mostly of mats and recyclable materials," (Perafán Cabrera, 2022, p.99). Influxes of migrants from neighbouring provinces Nariño and Cauca continued through the 1970s and 1980s, 'illegally' occupying millet-covered lands and transforming them into improvised urban neighbourhoods. (Perafán Cabrera, 2022, p.99). Fleeing violence and conflict, the arriving migrants were presented with new challenges. Landlords and agents of government power fought to evict communities occupying private or public land, while government social housing programs were turned into scams by entrepreneurial middlemen tricksters (Sarria, 2021). One of these was Luis Alberto Marroquin whose name still adorns two neighbourhoods in the district, Marroquin I and II. The communities eventually won the fights over land ownership but faced the challenge of the lack of public infrastructure. Solutions were found through solidarity: neighbours and communities self-organised through mutual help and *mingas* (organised voluntary community help) to bring electricity to the neighbourhoods, pave the roads, and build sturdier houses (Torres and Murillo, 2021, 3.00-3.10). Eventually, as Aguablanca became incorporated into the city, government and municipal social programmes also helped with infrastructure construction and urbanisation processes.

However, socioeconomic challenges continued to plague the district in the ensuing years and resulted in increasing youth participation in street gangs or *pandillas*, initiating a period of violence and crime. The gangs were "united by strong emotional ties. /…/ They 'hung out' together on street corners,

played street football, took drugs within their domains, and defended their territory with a knife." (Ordonez-Valverde, 2017, p.111). The demarcations between territories were invisible borders, the unsanctioned crossing of which would result in lethal consequences and blood feuds. The already tenuous situation became even more dangerous with the arrival of organised crime mostly related to narcotics trafficking. In the 1980s and 1990s, the city was ruled by the notorious Cali Cartel and the Norte del Valle Cartel. The 2000s were marked by disputes between drug trafficking groups and national-level criminal, guerilla, and paramilitary organisations of the Colombian civil conflict entering the territory (Ordonez-Valverde, 2017, p.109). Organised crime transformed the honour-based *pandilla* structure into an illegal economy-driven landscape. "This would imply that the new organised crime structures seek to avoid violence to guarantee the micro-trafficking business and avoid the incursion of police authorities, as well as guarantee the supply of young people for criminal acts" (Vinasco-Martínez, 2019, p.173). This led to a decrease of visible street crime as larger criminal organisations gained influence. The number of yearly homicides in Cali and its portion in Aguablanca has dropped in the last decade. Although official authorities are quick to take credit for the rising safety levels, the violence might have moved to less visible forms, such as use of fear, extortion, and the growing power of the drug traffickers (Vinasco-Martínez, 2019, p.173).

The district continues to be a victim of socioeconomic inequality within the city, of often corrupt local police, and of discrimination based on racial prejudice. Cali includes Colombia's largest urban Afro-Colombian population[18] (Wade, 2000, xvi), most of whom is situated in the *comunas* (official city neighbourhoods) that make up Aguablanca. Racist dynamics with "discursive formations that associate blackness with backwardness and impoverishment" (Waxer, 2002, p.48) still abound. The younger generations are the most affected: "The stigmatisation of the eastern neighbourhoods increases the vulnerability of the young people who live there, because given the few opportunities for social, cultural and labour insertion in the city, crime is presented as a quick way to get money." (Vinasco-Martínez, 2019, p.179). Aguablanca therefore remains a district with high levels of poverty, illiteracy, violence, and low levels of access to city services as well as green spaces. One of the only preserved remnants of the wetlands in the area is the Charco Azul ('Blue Lagoon'), which has gone through its own cycle of violence, pollution, and restoration. It was the receptacle for corpses of those killed in organised crime clashes leading to the legend of the Monster of the Blue Lagoon (Gloari, 2010). For decades, it was also filled with trash and highly contaminated (Colprensa, 2014), until it was finally cleaned and restored (Emcali, 2025). It has become a symbol of historical challenges and

[18] Most of Colombia's Afro population lives on the Pacific and Caribbean coasts.

resilience of the community and its relationship with the environment, and as such grew to be an important element in the co-created show.

Salsa as Resistance and A Place to Call One's Own

The multitude of socioeconomic challenges has had another consequence of resilience: Aguablanca is an incubator of strong artistic and cultural practices. Lise Waxer posits that for marginalised populations, "music and dance became an arena for negotiating the effects of this daily struggle. In addition to providing a safe outlet to let off steam and temporarily forget one's troubles, they also formed an important avenue for reaffirming the community bonds needed in other contexts for group survival and development" (2002, p.121). The prevailing form of expression not only in Aguablanca but in all of Cali is salsa dancing. The form isn't native to Cali or Colombia but was "developed in the 1960s by Puerto Ricans in New York City, based upon the Afro-Cuban and (to a lesser extent) Puerto Rican roots known in Colombia as *música antillana*" (Waxer, 2002, p.25). As it spread through Latin America, it coincided with social movements such as the urban expansions of cities, including the one in Cali. Caleños embraced it with a vengeance and quickly developed a local emblematic style of salsa that is to this day recognised as a particularly fast version of the dance, contributing to the self-proclaimed title of the 'salsa capital of the world' and the image of the people of Cali as joyful partygoers. The importance of salsa dancing, however, goes far beyond popular entertainment. Waxer states that it "revindicates black and mixed-race culture and music by freely drawing upon several Afro-Caribbean traditions in defiance of dominant Eurocentric cultural canons" (2002, p.47). The shape and form of the ubiquitous dance therefore carry a contestation of the hegemonical and colonial structures of power and influence. For marginalised communities, "salsa's lyrics reflected the experiences of the Latino and Latin American black and mixed-race working class, and /…/ the songs mirrored the violence and discontent of the inner city" (Waxer, 2002, p.32). Salsa functions as a cultural archive and an embodied resistance, preserving the histories of oppressed communities and challenging dominant narratives.

These aspects of salsa are woven into the social and historical fabric of Aguablanca and the partner organisation for the co-creation of the show, the foundation Son de mi gente ('Sound of My People'). Founded in the historically violent neighbourhood of Marroquin II by Nancy and Jhon, both of whom also performed in the project, the organisation offers a safe space with free artistic and cultural programming for children and young people of the neighbourhood. Salsa classes, performances, and competitions represent the core of the foundation offering. The dance is an expression of the history and culture for the young people in the foundation, a way to exercise and develop their artistic talents,

an alternative to getting involved in crime, and even a potential ticket to a higher living standard and a life outside of the district through professional dancing or dance-related careers. Salsa was therefore the main shared performance language for the show *A Place to Call One's Own*, performed by a group of Son de mi gente dancers, narrating a brief history of Aguablanca and the resilience of its community. It was based on the biographies of local community leaders and research done previously by Carlos at the Pontificia Universidad Javeriana in Cali through a long-standing collaboration with Son de mi gente. The narrative was split into two acts. Act I, based on the memories of the local activist leader Sandra Sarria, followed a mother and daughter arriving in search for a safe place to call home. This was the 'early period' of the district, when there was no infrastructure, neighbours survived through mutual solidarity, and land occupation battles were going on. Act II was placed sometime later, during the period of street gang violence, and portrayed the true story of Jhon, who was shot as a teenager by a street *pandillero* wanting to rob him of his sneakers. The gunshot left Jhon paralysed from the waist down and turned him into an activist for peace in the district. Woven into the story was the image of the Monster of the Blue Lagoon, a symbol of the complex and often violent relationships within the community as well as between the community and the land it occupied and built on.

Salsa as Functional Memory and Difference

Network of Mind-Systems

Gregory Bateson understands systems of interrelated processes that "produce, for instance, healing in organs, growth in organisms, development in societies, or balance in large ecosystems" (Charlton, 2008, p.31) as 'minds', in which the mental process is "the activity involved in receiving and responding to information and in gaining and using knowledge" (Charlton, 2008, p.31), even when that happens unconsciously. These minds are 'thinking', then, through the exchange of information and the circular or feedback systems that the exchange creates. Systems or minds can vary "from the very small, perhaps bacterial, genetic, or cellular, to the very large: a coral reef and its inhabitants, a forest ecosystem, the mind of a nation, or the whole process of biological evolution" (Charlton, 2008, p.29). Crucially, these systems aren't solely existing side by side but constantly interacting with each other, and smaller systems are nested in larger ones all the way to an ultimate connected whole, which Bateson calls the sacred.

The delineation of an individual system is arbitrary and can be 'zoomed in or out' to access either subsystems within it, larger systems that include it, or other systems with which it shares reciprocal and lateral relationships. Charlton (2008, p.163) uses the example of an acorn: a single acorn can be understood as a mental process in itself, but it is also dependent and nested within systems around

it. Moisture, warmth, sunlight, air, all affect it, as do organisms that pass it by, interact with it in beneficial or detrimental ways. This is a systemic way to express the networks of interconnectedness also present in animism: "The acorn must become one system (one mind) with air, soil, water, nutrients, weather, and much more" (Charlton, 2008, p.163). In a complex network like Aguablanca, one can delineate any number of minds or systems, starting with the individual people and their networks. Nancy, Jhon, and the children form the system of Son de mi gente, but each individually represents her or his own independent system that is nested within larger systems of family, street, neighbourhood, social class, race etc. Son de mi gente is nested within the system of a salsa community, involving salsa dancers, musicians, styles of music, its history, social and environmental meaning etc. It is also laterally connected to the systems of violence and crime, of the *pandillas* and their victims, the narcotrafficking organisations, national conflict, the agricultural efforts needed to produce the drugs etc. The system of violence presents a feedback loop (vicious circle), where 'successive cycles of information amplify any deviation from the norm, resulting in increasing change" (Charlton, 2008, p.23). A higher amount of crime results in more conflict, poverty and suffering, resulting in less opportunity and therefore more crime. A killing of one *pandillero* results in vengeance from the rival gang, continuing and escalating the conflict *ad infinitum*. All of these systems, from the individual people to the various units formed by familial, professional, creative, opportunistic etc. ties, are nested within the system of the drained wetlands turned fields of sugarcane and millet turned densely populated unplanned urban environment and its interrelation with climate change, government policies, demographic shifts and changes. They are all ultimately part of the district, which is itself nested in larger systems of the city, the valley's geographical features, and so on.

Importantly, Bateson sees the network of systems as a network of relations: "mental function is immanent in the interaction of differentiated 'parts'. 'Wholes' are constituted by such combined interaction" (1979, p.93), or in Charlton's words, "minds exist and function only as the *relating between material parts*" (2008, p.46, my italics). This is a performative understanding of mind-systems akin to the dynamic intra-acting of agential materialism presented in Chapter 6, based on networks of relations similar to the kinship structure of animism and cosmovision presented in Chapter 5. Just like the value of reciprocity in the latter and the agential cut in the former, it is these points of relating or interfacing that are the truly important parts of the systems and their connections: "All mental life is rigged around, dependent upon, made of /…/ these multiple interface meeting points where something different from something else meets that something else and something happens" (Bateson 1980 cited in Charlton, 2008, p.38). Bateson sees relationality not just within a system of matter or human and more-than-human persons, but of cascading systems of various sizes and overlaps.

Coding Through Functional Memory

There are therefore two important loci to search for when trying to interpret chosen mind-systems through narrative forms: the *difference* that is the originator of the flow of information within a system, and the *interface* where two or more systems rub against each other. It is through these that Bateson's theory can help us see the way various parts interrelate but also how these relationships can be traced in the dramaturgy of the show. Differences are for Bateson what phenomena are for Karen Barad – basic units of an onto-epistemological world. Where Barad focuses on matterings happening within specific apparatuses, Bateson focuses on the interaction of the apparatuses, or systems, themselves. It is differences that make the systems work, interact, and remember. This research suggests that this difference-turned-functional-memory is presented and performed through salsa dancing in the show. In the first two scenes of *A Place to Call One's Own*, the Mother and Daughter fleeing conflict arrive on the marshland and agricultural fields on the outskirts of Cali and understand that they've found a potential home through the difference represented by the neighbours and the community that welcomes them to the land. Two systems are interacting, learning and storing memory, and becoming one mind: LINK10.

After the initial exposition, while still wandering around a supposed *terreno baldio* ('wasteland'), the Daughter asks the important question, *es aquí?* – 'is it here?' (2:22) – as the chorus of dancers comes on stage. The meter of salsa rhythm underscores the journey of the characters and becomes intertwined with the narrative and the story of the community from the beginning. In the first chorus pose (2:24) there is still a variety of shapes. Reminiscent of the Lecoq-inspired gestures in the previous chapter, each dancer is embodying a different tree, shrub, or element of the wasteland, which is nevertheless not yet *aquí*. There is still a split between humans and land and no real relationship to the more-than-human yet. As Mother and Daughter progress, the chorus movements behind them become unison (2:29-2:43); the *aquí* or the location of the interface between the two systems is getting nearer through a simplistic travelling background or parallax-like effect on stage. The shapes are salsa-based and at the same time not quite salsa yet – the systems haven't interacted enough yet for a difference to occur, and the meter keeps postponing the arrival. Instead, the 'frozen' gestures in the background evoke tall grass or wheat (2:30), shrubbery (2:33), a grove of trees (2:35), crooked branches (2:37), and a flock of long-necked birds (2:39). These are accompanied by projected historical photos of Aguablanca; the women are getting closer to finding a place to call their own, even if they cannot completely see it yet. The shift from movement variety to unity foreshadows the shift from individuality to community, but it is the final 'listening' pose of the series (2:43) that opens up the

possibility of interaction and connection – the possibility of "difference that makes a difference" (Bateson, 1979, p.99). Indigenist values are present although not expressed directly; the question *es aquí?* functions as a request for permission. While the Daughter is still sceptical of the home-making possibility of the 'strange' place (2:55), the Mother recognises its potential by connecting with the sound of the bees and the scent of a meadow. The chorus repeats the same gestures from before, but just as Wind in the show *Aillaquillén – The Island of Nine Moons* became welcoming and 'known' through a relating within the indigenist scaffolding, so the *terreno baldio* here has now transformed into a *terreno acogedor* – a welcoming land. The bees and the scent are symbols of permission granted, and it is the daughter's triumphant *es aquí!* (3:17), the recognition and acceptance of the difference of the new system, that 'unlocks' the appearance of the community, confirming the point of interface and the combining of the two mind-systems with a communal shout of *es aquí!* (3:29). The meter that has kinesthetically drawn the spectator into the rhythm of the scene and the community stops, setting up the expectation that there will be dance. But before the spectator is rewarded with the dance, the community is identified (3:33) – the final unlocking of the integration of the two systems.

The difference between the two systems creates an emergent change (in Barad's terms, dynamic intra-acting; in animist terms, life is now being produced through mutual respectful interaction) that is expressed and 'stored' in movement. A salsa dance confirms the arrival and integration of the travelers. The community bursts into dance (3:42-4:51) to the sounds of the salsa song *Siempre Pa'lante* by Jose Aguirre, which translates to 'always keep going', a continuation of the popular phrase *echa pa'lante*, 'go and succeed' – a message of resilience and resistance deeply embedded in many variants of the song from Puerto Rican salsa to the versions spread around the world. The movement practice becomes shared performance when the daughter responds to the invitation and joins the dance, blending in and standing out at the same time with her costume of a similar cut but different colour than that of the community. As in the previous chapter, movement practice becomes an expression of dialogue and relationality. Here, the first relational approach is to the Other of a human community; the relationship with the more-than-human is to develop later. The connections and belonging are also established by the camera[19] focusing on details of smiling faces (3:47), dancing hips and skirts (3:53), intricate footwork (4:02), waving hands (4:18), the Daughter increasingly fitting in while dancing (4:31-4:37) and participating in the final image (4:51). The repeating lyrics of 'always keep going' rhythmically underline the tenacity and resilience that immigrants in Aguablanca had to exhibit in order to survive. Resistance is coded into the joyful expressions, colourful costumes and

[19] The video of the performance was edited by film professor Mónica Bravo Pedrosa of the Pontificia Universidad Javeriana in Cali.

energetic dancing, behind which lies the stark reality of a still impermanent settlement with only the barest of living necessities present. The fact that all the dancers in this song are women adds to the significance of gender relationships within the community of Aguablanca, where women are frequently the ones exhibiting resilience and redistributing Thompson's fabric of the sensible away from 'male' activities of crime, conflict, and war. A hint of the dangers still unseen comes in the mysterious warning about the Monster of the Blue Lagoon (5:14), dismissed in the moment by the Mother.

The salsa dance therefore establishes the exchange of difference or information and takes on the role of performing the functional memory of these two systems now joined into one. As memory it "retains and transmits shape, pattern, or the ability to respond to environmental challenge" (Charlton, 2008, p.65) and stores these shapes and patterns as abilities for the system – the community – to develop further. This coding and storing happens iteratively through the narrative as the community progresses. The relational interaction therefore generates information in the shape of a new difference, coded and stored through salsa. In the first scene, the Daughter and Mother have joined the community and changed it while doing so. For the two women, the difference is one of going from no home to having a place to call one's own; for the community, new arrivals mean additional points of interaction and reciprocity within the human and more-than-human network. The simple pattern of belonging is a "latent difference made manifest or /…/ developed" (Bateson, 1979, p.53); in other words, this type of difference is already inscribed into systems and can, when made manifest, constitute the familiar pattern of a spiral. Each time it happens, it is a new and 'improved' version of the one before. The previous practice research case opened up the inherent relational qualities already present in movement practices. Here, the next section suggests that communities have the inherent capacity to function within an indigenist value scaffolding and progress beyond the communal self to relate to the more-than-human around them. This inherent capacity can be unlocked by communally shared movement practice to help the systems learn and advance through cycles of difference and information.

Ascending the Spiral of Learning

Basic Levels of Learning

Bateson's necessary and sufficient criteria for a system to be understood as a mind are: 1) A mind is an aggregate of interacting parts or components, 2) The interaction between parts of mind is triggered by difference, 3) Mental process requires collateral energy, 4) Mental process requires circular (or more complex) chains of determination, 5) In mental process, the effects of difference are to be

regarded as transforms (i.e., coded versions) of events which preceded them, and 6) The description and classification of these processes of transformation disclose a hierarchy of logical types immanent in the phenomena (Bateson, 1979, p.92). He also argues that *thought, evolution, ecology, life*, and *learning* "occur only in systems that satisfy these criteria" (1979, p.79, original italics). The first two criteria of parts interacting through difference were reflected upon in the previous section, as was the final criterion of a hierarchy of logical types, which understands minds as "particular beings, entities, and processes that /…/ are 'nested' within larger mental systems" (Charlton, 2008, p.46). The third criterion reminds us that the energy which creates the difference is to be found within the systems interacting. In other words, although a performative understanding of systems supposes the important interactions happen *in between*, the perceived difference *itself* is immaterial – much like Barad's agential cut – and dependent on the interacting entities. This section focuses on criteria 4 and 5, which express the necessity of mind-systems to self-regulate based on circular pathways of information that respond to the difference carried in the information by adapting, or *learning*. The circular pathways of information that regulate and evolve the system are reminiscent of the Kichwa spiral of life and the epistemological spiral of practice research. Each next level is a reassessment built on understanding the previous one: "When organisms or systems advance in their ability to live successfully, they are achieving levels of learning that enable them to recognize (not necessarily consciously) the wider context of their previous learning" (Charlton, 2008, p.52). This research suggests that this type of learning in the community narrative of Aguablanca is enabled by coding, storing, and performing difference using salsa dancing as an ecosomatic practice. This unlocks the inherent relationality and learning capacities of integrating systems.

Bateson specifies a hierarchy of Learning, from zero learning to Learning IV, each next rung at a meta level in relationship to the previous one. Learning I means changes in zero learning, Learning II changes in Learning I, and so on. Zero learning is the very basic receipt of information, processed 'automatically' and determined by "genetic factors rather than experience" (Charlton, 2008, p.54). The mother and daughter fleeing a zone of conflict could be understood as an instance of zero learning, an instinctual response to find safety and peace. 'Real' learning starts with Learning I, which is "a change in specificity of response by correction of errors of choice within a set of alternatives" (Bateson, 1987, p.298). In other words, Learning I is the first instance of a reaction that is not completely automatic or expected. The search for a new home is an instance of Learning I as it functions through trial and error, until the appropriate place to call one's own is found, confirmed, coded and stored through the salsa dance. Throughout Act I, the Mother and Daughter (re)learn the strength of a community when presented with the challenges of constructing a house without proper materials, sheltering from the seemingly detrimental forces of nature, and resisting governmental

pressure for eviction after having discovered that they are victims to a scam. In each instance, the solution comes from a process which includes the cooperation and collaboration of the whole community and enables new ways of resolving the issues. These learning occasions are strengthened and coded by songs featuring not only salsa, but also Afro-Colombian genres of cumbia and marimba music, highlighting the community's varied cultural roots and sense of identity. In an instance of Learning I set within the indigenist value framework, the newcomers are reminded of the importance of relating to the elements. Finding them worried about the rain destroying their house due to lack of proper materials, the chorus proposes another point of view: "The rain cleanses / The water reminds us of the sea / Water is our connection to memory and culture / To who we are" (Petkovsek and Segovia, 2023, p.7), and this is immediately confirmed and coded by dancing to the salsa song *Los Charcos* ('The Lagoons') by Fruko y Sus Tesos.

The final scene of Act I happens within the context of the community (of women) resisting the Man representing governmental/landlord authority who wants to evict them from the land. It showcases an example of resilience, strength within the community, and an instance of a systemic Learning II, whose product is "the development and adoption of character in humans and other higher organisms" (Charlton, 2008, p.57). If Learning I still happens within a given set of rules or context, Learning II can change the rules of engagement, albeit still within the same general worldview. In the scene, the expected automatic reactions of fear and submission towards a symbol of authority – the system threatening to destroy the community – are overcome through group strength and solidarity. The moment of interaction is again performed through the coding of salsa, providing the functional memory of the shape of freedom and agency: **LINK11**.

The scene starts with a new cycle of setbacks and challenges. Having just resolved to build houses with sturdier materials in order to be able to coexist with the natural elements, the community is stopped in its tracks by the resounding 'No!' of the Man (0:13). When protestations and words prove of little use, the community's resistance to the hegemonic pressure, prefaced by the cry '*Negociemos!*' ('Let's negotiate!') (0:45) is performed through a type of dance-off, starting at 0:49. The song is *Paguan Paguan* by the Cali-based group Cali Flow Latino, led by brothers Andrés and Hárrison Mesa Cortés. It is a joyful and catchy ode to dancing and different versions and steps of salsa, chosen for this moment in the play due to Cali Flow Latino's foregrounding of the particularities of *salsa caleña* and the song's strong sense of a community woven from its individual yet united members. The community again uses salsa with all its historical and social connotation as a medium of resistance against hegemonic pressures. At the same time, it is an instance of the coding of home- or place-making of the mind of the Aguablanca system, claiming its own place within the neighbouring and overlapping nested

systems and exhibiting Learning II to survive the outside pressure. The Man is initially thrown into the dance 'to negotiate' with the community, a challenge he accepts with the gesture of a wagging finger (1:09), launching into and keeping up with a couples' choreography (1:11-1:29). The community presents the strength and skill of its members in the short solos (1:30-1:48), throwing down the gauntlet and underlining the gesture with provocative arm- and footwork (1:47-1:56). The man is challenged to a response (2:07), but his solo is too flashy and self-serving, and he is chased to the back (2:13). His quick return (2:24) symbolises the many iterations of battles, evictions, occupations, and resistance the historical community went through before winning the land. Despite 'imposing' on the typical *salsa caleña* moves such as 'the skateboard', 'the braid', 'the toe-heel', and 'the puppet', the Man is successfully chased away again by the community (2:43), which finishes with a triumphant pose (3:08) and the Daughter's (now a fully integrated member of the community) authority-defying shout, "This place is ours!" (3:12). The community codes and expresses the systemic difference of conflict and exclusion by an embodied difference of gesture, rhythm, and choreography, through which power relations are rewritten. This creates the type of 'difference that makes a difference' and exhibits Learning II.

Learning III: Going Beyond the Self

In Act 2 of *A Place to Call One's Own*, the mind-system of the social environment of Aguablanca comes into friction with the mind-system of crime and street gang fighting. This is a stress test of the community's ability to resist a viciously self-reinforcing feedback loop. If coming together was previously sufficient to survive challenges, the new situation is more difficult, as it comes from within. The higher level of threat opens an opportunity for Learning III, which represents changes in Learning II. If the latter was able to change the rules of engagement within a given worldview, the former can change *the worldview itself.* This is something that Bateson finds "likely to be difficult and rare even in human beings" (Bateson, 1987, p.307). Learning III can only occur through an experience of a revelation, which is what happened to a young Jhon Murillo when his life changed in an instant due to an act of meaningless violence: **LINK12**.

As can be seen in the video excerpts so far, *salsa caleña* is a particularly fast version of the dance that involves rapid and intricate footwork. In this scene, the *Pandillero* wants to rob Jhon's sneakers: a symbolic act of amputation that creates tension between the formidable footwork of salsa and the very real impairment caused by the shooting. When Jhon initially refuses to hand the shoes over, he is challenged to a high-intensity dance duel (0:28), in which the stakes are more severe than in the community dance-off with the authorities. Here, the battle is internal and life-threatening, menacing

the collapse of the community from within. In the initial confrontation of the parties (0:39-0:53), both hold their own to the energetic solo of the drum; the camera highlights the impressive footwork that amplifies the tension with a frenetic pace. Moments of poignant synchronicity such as the setting down of the heels on the beat at 0:46 reveal evenly matched opponents. Had this been a strife solely within the community itself, it might have been resolved through the embodied relating of salsa dancing. But the *Pandillero* is part of another system, that of crime, which plays by different rules. Nearly bested, he turns to physical contact at 0:59, surprising and gaining an advantage over Jhon. This escalation ends with the gunshot at 1:14 and a slowing down of time contrasting the fast tempo beforehand. The committed crime is at the same time an ironic banality as well as a deep tragedy, leaving Jhon without the use of his legs. This undercuts his possibility to continue as a part of the community whose identity is stitched together by the embodied expression of salsa dancing. The act of violence therefore disrupts collective memory and resilience and threatens a systemic breakdown. Although the community continues dancing (1:32-3:15), the symbolic resiliency is muted and carries a hint of resignation. The dancers are still in their *pandillero* costumes, symbolising the takeover of violence and crime, and the song has no lyrics. Rather than a joyful celebration of another coded systemic memory, this is silent preservation. Shootings and victims are so common that the community barely bats an eyelid, yet the ultimate unsustainability of this pattern is clear. It is up to Jhon – the stage Jhon who is at the same time the real Jhon – to achieve an instance of Learning III and change the core worldview. He reflects on this in his monologue (3:18-4:59) to the symbolic background of sneakers hanging from a lamppost. As he wheels around and comes downstage, the camera focuses on his feet (3:27), now inert. An appearance of Young Jhon at 3:39, gently dancing with sneakers in his hands, underscores the stark contrast of movement and stasis, life and paralysis. This is emphasised by the delivery of the monologue in voice-off while a silent, still Jhon looks straight at the audience, daring them to understand his story and make a similar choice. The tragic moment of the attack and injury offered an opportunity to Jhon: “I have a decision to make, to try and break this cycle of violence” (4:07). He took this opportunity in real life as well, deciding to break the cycle of vengeance and aim for a different worldview. In the monologue, he likens violence to the Monster of the Blue Lagoon that “only exists in our heads” (4:36) and connects the possibility of breaking the cycle to a shift in perception, one that redefines both the community within a relational system and reaches beyond to a wider perception of self that includes the land and the more-than-human.

Community and Environment: Accepting the Monster

The Monster as a Multilayered Symbol

Following the example of John's achievement of an individual instance of Learning III, the last scene of *A Place to Call One's Own* portrays a final development. This is a systemic attainment of Learning III of the whole community, or "the deep recognition of wide relationship, [Bateson's] insight closely related to his evolving understanding of vast minds within the systemic natural world" (Charlton, 2008, p.58). In this case, the system of the community acknowledges the wide relationship with its overlapping systems including the biome, shown through the metaphor of the Monster of the Blue Lagoon. After seeing the lagoon burn due to saturation with rubbish and pollution, the community encounters the Monster and converts fear into a relational acceptance, going beyond the self. The Monster integrates into the community with a solo salsa performance: **LINK13**.

The Monster scene underlines the complex relationship between the community and the land on which the Aguablanca district stands. As mentioned in the Context section, the original wetlands were systematically desiccated to 'acquire' agricultural lands. This left consequences in terms of a downgrading of resilience and higher vulnerability towards the effects of climate change (Ocampo-Marulanda et al., 2021). The immigrants, including the mother and daughter, were not part of the desiccation, yet their intervention within the ecosystem was just as radical. Fields and remains of marshlands disappeared for the creation of slum-like neighbourhoods and eventually an urban district with very few integrated green areas. In this instance of homemaking in an inharmonious relation with the environment, the interface between the human and more-than-human is a fraught one, lacking in an indigenist scaffolding due to the emergency of basic needs. It results in an initial understanding of the land as threatening: rain can destroy the fragile houses built of bamboo fabric and carton, and the Blue Lagoon harbours a monster that devours people. Not unlike the story of the young couple in *Aillaquillén – The Island of Nine Moons, t*he environmental threats of flooding and destruction are a consequence of past human interference with the more-than-human. It is up to the new community to construct an indigenist value framework and find a way to become an integrated place of balance between the human and more-than-human elements of the widened mind-system.

As the lagoon burns, the Monster is announced (0:29) and the community reacts with an explosive ragga dance (0:45-1:17) embodying the felt fear and anxiety. The Monster, who appears in the middle of it, is still a symbol of violence, crime, vengeance, and corpses in the Blue Lagoon. After the community disperses, however, a change of realisation happens. The Monster *also* represents the lagoon itself, the more-than-human ecosystem damaged by the friction of the interacting and often incompatible systems, seeking to survive just as the community itself is doing. As the Monster presents

himself, one by one the dancers acknowledge him (1:40-3:08) as a complex and multi-faceted image, and most importantly, as ”our monster” (2:18), a mind-system of the environment that had been interacting and overlapping with the mind-system of the community this whole time. Small offerings create ritualising actions reminiscent of those in *Aillaquillén – The Island of Nine Moons* as well as *Asul Asul / Nick of Time,* and the birth of a new relationship between the community and everything the Monster represents. This is a glimpse into the sacred that Bateson understood as the “ultimate interconnected whole” (Charlton, 2008, p.29), akin to the secular sacred of animism explored in the previous chapter. Bateson’s sacred is “no more (or less) than the totality of living systems of the world, worthy of respect, reverence, and love” (Charlton, 2008, p.7), where ‘living’ designates all mental processes, human and more-than-human. His proposal is similarly secular: “a sacred unity of the biosphere that will contain fewer epistemological errors than the versions of that sacred unity which the various religions of history have offered” (Bateson, 1979, p.19). The sacred is therefore the integration of all systems through what this thesis has articulated as indigenist values of respect and reciprocity, which allow for a relational and interconnected view of the whole world. In the show, a gesture reminiscent of the pilot project in Ecuador acknowledges the final scene not as a happy ending or romanticised outcome but as a practical reality – the ending “simply is” (3:21). Another parallel can be drawn to the practice case in Chile. Like the Elements in relation to the young couple in *Nine Moons*, the Monster of the Blue Lagoon shifts from the Other to a known relation, from a terrifying presence to a ‘protector’, from a hostile system to an integrated one, and the community helps to recover the lagoon. The Monster states, “The Blue Lagoon is blue again, a place of pride and connection between the people. The water and time have the taste of salsa” (4:04-4:12) before encoding this transformation and instance of Learning III by dancing a solo (4:14-5:09). The virtuosic dance inscribes the ecological system into the community’s embodied archive, rendering the lagoon itself – as well as everything else the Monster represents, including the threatening authority performed by the same dancer previously – a participant in the ongoing relational performance. An indigenist value structure is placed underneath this transformation: the community’s recognition of interconnectedness and reciprocity, and a respectful and grateful approach to the Monster as newly found and integrated kin.

The Aesthetic Response of Salsa

Once the integration is completed, it is coded, stored, and performed through a final salsa dance, in which the whole community participates with Nancy and Jhon present as well. The song called *Salsa Caleña,* again by Cali Flow Latino, was chosen for its community-building content, its pride in the virtuosic way Caleños dance salsa (‘You want to know how we dance salsa in Cali? / This is how we

dance the *salsa caleña*' (Mesa Cortes and Mesa Cortes, 2023)), and its general buoyancy of exuberance. Initiated by Jhon's question, "And the community?" and the thunderous response of "Dances on!", it represents a final expression of belonging, resilience, and connection. After acknowledging the daughter and the Monster as both 'recently integrated', the camera then stays in a wide shot for the rest of the song, underlining the idea of the community as a whole, while specific *salsa caleña* steps (the 'caleñito' and the 'heron beak') are jubilantly showcased. The dancer who represented the young Jhon also receives closure, performing the same acrobatic move with his partner as the one preceding tragedy in the gunshot scene – this time, the move is one of joy and play. The dance ends with a communal shout of '*Distrito de Aguablanca*!': **LINK14.**

For Son de mi gente, salsa dancing and the performance of the community's narrative affirms the history, culture, and identity of the characters in the show and the dancers performing them. It opens the space to create connections within the community as well as construct an indigenist value scaffolding for a relationship between the community and the land. It provides a medium of relief and resistance against pressures from hegemonic structures as well as potential growth, learning, and change for the participants of the project. In his later writings, Bateson concluded that "aesthetic engagement will provide the grace /…/ to enable our reintegration with the ecology of the world" (Charlton, 2008, p.138). (Re)integration means a reducing of boundaries on the path of recognition of the ultimate wholeness or the sacred. This would perhaps represent an instance of Learning IV, which Bateson sees as a possibility only for the largest integrated systems such as the system of evolution (1987, p.298). Importantly, the pathway to reintegration lies in aesthetic response, which is "an extension, an enlargement, of our own systemic sense of self" (Charlton, 2008, p.141). Therefore in a show like *A Place to Call One's Own*, the aesthetic response generated by salsa becomes constitutive, enacting a relational worldview through dancing and contributing to the extension of the self toward the sacred.

Conclusion

The co-creation and performance of *A Place to Call One's Own* combined practice research insights from all previous cases. It mobilised the community's existing movement practice as an embodied and lived expression of ethical and ecological relations constructed on the underlying scaffolding of indigenist values. As in the cases in Ecuador and Chile, storytelling was used as a symbolic act of community-building and resistance against pressures of hegemonic powers. It also functioned as a reminder of cultural roots and historical resilience of a community brought together through shared suffering and trauma. As in the practice case in Korea, movement became the main means of exploring

human-human and human–more-than-human entanglements, constructing a relational approach that allowed for a recognition of interconnectedness within ecological and social relationships. Salsa dancing presented a communal approach to movement, providing a collective practice used ecosomatically to relate to the immediate and wider environments (RQ2b).

Drawing on Gregory Bateson's systems theory as a holistic approach in complementary alignment with the tenets of new animism and new materialism, this chapter proposed salsa dancing as the functional memory and means of storing, coding, and transmitting the shapes and patterns of the interacting systems of the community of Aguablanca. Expressing the difference that represents the flow of information within and between systems, salsa dancing acts similarly to Barad's agential cut, providing determinate boundaries to systemic interactions and translating them into embodied form and memory. With its historic role as a means of expression of marginalized communities contesting dominant structures of power, however, salsa isn't just a vehicle of determination but also infuses the coding of interacting and integrating systems with specific cultural, historical, and communal roots. This enables the Aguablanca system to react and adapt in its particular context by achieving increasing levels of individual and systemic learning. In the narrative, the community can therefore progress from an 'automatic' (zero learning) and 'trial-and-error' (Learning I) response to learning how to change the rules of engagement (Learning II) and ultimately discover a widening of the self that can lead to a change in the core worldview (Learning III). Along this upwards spiral of evolving recursive feedback, related systems are acknowledged and integrated, including a complex relationship with the more-than-human environmental domain, which can develop and evolve within an indigenist value framework.

The extension of self through aesthetic engagement is another articulation of the secular sacred explored in the previous chapter. Reflecting on Bateson's idea of the importance of the aesthetic process to the enunciation of wholeness and the sacred, Charlton concludes that "if aesthetic engagement offers us a remedy for our sealed-off, self-seeking purposiveness, it will do so by reconnecting, integrating, enabling wholeness and the recognition of oneness" (2008, p.141). Aesthetic engagement is therefore a compelling means of moving past boundaries towards systemic integration and possibilities of higher levels of learning that include a relational approach to the more-than-human. This research argues that a structure of a relational ethics and indigenist values, expressed through connective movement practice, provides a conducive pathway for storytelling and performance to facilitate these objectives. Such practices cultivate the capacity to re-situate the human in ecological terms and the more-than-human in ethical terms (Plumwood, 2014), and they enact a performative onto-epistemology that generates knowledge through embodied relationality.

Addresing RQ3, *A Place to Call One's Own* is a therefore a piece of community-based theatre that attempts to aesthetically integrate the many complex and interacting systems that make the district of Aguablanca. It acknowledges and narrates its aggressive environmental story, turbulent social and political history, and cultural memory as a whole, woven through the pattern with the community's core means of expression, salsa dancing. The performance bridges the micro level of embodied experience, explored in the practice case in Korea, with a macro recognition of systemic interdependence. Like the Pulgasari monster in *Asul Asul / Nick of Time*, the Monster of Charco Azul symbolises the complexity of the climate crisis as well as environmental and social (in)justice. Both monsters can present themselves as terrible adversaries bringing destruction and death. They can also be benevolent protectors when approached relationally, acknowledged through indigenist values, and integrated into individual and systemic learning that attempts to reach the sacred in the form of ecological balance.

8 Conclusion

Addressing Research Questions

This practice research thesis has explored the process and potential of co-created performance practices, shaped by indigenist values and community participation, to articulate, reimagine, and perform stories about the relationships between the human and more-than-human, between communities and their environments, amid the global climate crisis. The results of this investigation are both theoretical and practical. Theoretically, the research contributes a novel synthesis of ethics steeped in relationality and practice research methodologies that challenges binary worldviews separating human and more-than-human as well as nature and culture. Practically, it offers an indigenist methodology as a transferable framework for practitioners seeking to engage in decolonial, community-based storytelling and environmental performance grounded in relationality and reciprocity.

The operational cornerstone of the research was the tripartite praxis framework of participation/ethics, storytelling, and movement practices. Using this framework, the goal in each of the practice cases was to co-create a performance that emerged from the needs, stories, and cultural realities of the communities involved. Instead of presenting a purely universal approach, this thesis suggests a situated and evolving practice: one that remains attentive to the needs of the individual communities, adapts through improvisational responsiveness, and maintains an ethics of respect and gratitude. The thesis integrated this approach with the frameworks of Dwight Conquergood's and James Thompson's theories of ethics (Chapter 4), Ronald L. Grimes' theory of ritual and Andreas Weber's theory of animism (Chapter 5), Karen Barad's theory of agential realism (Chapter 6), and Gregory Bateson's systems theory (Chapter 7). The theoretical synthesis of these approaches offers a framework for practitioners that provides a flexible and adaptive methodology for navigating complex social, (inter)cultural, and ecological contexts. It constructs a dialogical relationship with communities and encompasses a relational approach to the environment on a micro and macro level, including more-than-human and material realities in various contexts.

The research questions inquired about the ethical (RQ1), methodological (RQ2), and ecological (RQ3) dimensions of intercultural co-creation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous, Global North and Global South partners. The key insights of this practice research thesis are best articulated as guiding processes for the co-creation of intercultural performance, ones which express climate crisis-related, community-based stories through an indigenist value framework. These processes are:

- Managing partnerships with intercultural, Indigenous, or Global South communities through a relational ethics that presupposes not only taking responsibility for the Other but also finding a balanced reciprocal relationship of kinship (RQ1)
- Developing the necessary relational ethics through a transformation or shift of consciousness that needs to be lived and experiential (RQ1a)
- Employing performance to respectfully translate the religious and spiritual ritual components of cosmovision and animism into expressions of a secular sacred (RQ2)
- Integrating (with permission) the ideas of Indigenous cosmovision into performance by applying the indigenist value-based methodology of permission, respect, interconnectedness, reciprocity, and gratitude to the practice (RQ2)
- Mobilising existing professional movement or performance practices of a community or participants by employing them ecosomatically to relate to the more-than-human and the environment (RQ2a and RQ2b)

In addition to all the above, the thesis underlines the importance of informing the storytelling with specific, researched, and lived local cultural, geographical, and historical contexts. This defines a situated and adaptive approach to co-creating each community's individual story that strengthens cohesion with its environment and contributes to navigating the complexity of the climate crisis (RQ3). The contribution of the thesis lies in the merging of community-based theatre processes with the indigenist value framework and in the articulation of these guidelines as core elements of a transferable adaptive model for practitioners. In this approach, performance operates as a vehicle of translation of worldviews and values, re-confirming or re-imagining the human–more-than-human relationships towards an ecologically beneficial relationality.

Co-Creation as Ethical Intercultural Practice

Ethically grounded co-creation emerged as a necessity, especially when working with Indigenous and Global South partners, facing the challenges of representation, power dynamics, and unintentional replications of an extractivist or modern-colonial mindset. Dwight Conquergood's and James Thompson's theories of dialogical performance and care ethics, respectively, provided the basis for an ethical model that brings the Self and the Other together in an attempt to produce genuine conversation, approaching each other with presence, listening, and recognition of the Other's sovereignty. Through trial and error, this thesis builds on the model by positioning ethics as an emergent, balanced relational process grounded in reciprocity and gratitude, which needs to be experiential and embodied.

Reflecting on the pilot project work with Manuel Guatemal as well as the Shuar community in Ecuador in Chapter 4, this research suggests the necessary development of a relational ethics for the practitioner-researcher when preparing for intercultural co-creation. While this includes intentional prevention of pitfalls such as the Enthusiast's Infatuation, and acceptance of the ethical call of the Other, it *also* requires an avoidance of any presupposition, including that of the imbalance of the relationship in either direction, and an active humble presence *in the moment* that continually constructs the relationship through the respectful relating itself. The perceived ethical challenges of power dynamics in the conversations with Manuel were resolved by responding to the humility of his offer and his kinship mentality. Despite seeking knowledge through the exchange, the method needed to be primarily one of listening and responding; the structure and narrative of the digital artefact *DocuHaiku 0* reflects these exchanges.

The amplified intercultural dynamics during the co-creation of *The Waterfall of San Luis* further confirmed the need of an experiential ethics. Well-meaning but presupposed expectations of community-based models of co-creation faced crucial challenges related to sociopolitical consequences of the climate crisis, internal tensions within the community, and the Covid-19 epidemic. Notions of ethical interculturality were seemingly entangled with the image of an 'ideal Shuarness', skirting close to the stereotype of the 'Ecological Indian'. The fear of perpetuating a harmful stereotype turned out to itself be the product of a colonial aestheticisation of a very *practical* reality that the Indigenous partners employed as a method of remembering, restoring, and strengthening Shuar culture and unity. Informed by these experiences, this thesis suggests a relational approach based on indigenist values such as permission and reciprocity, which are emergent in the pilot projects in Ecuador, then acknowledged, formalised and rationalised into a set in Chapter 5, through the co-creation with Mapuche partner Alejandra Aillapan Huiriqueo.

The suggested relational ethical approach is confirmed through the practice in Chile, in Chapter 5, as well as in Chapter 7, which reflects on the work with a non-Indigenous marginalised Global South community, in Colombia.

The Indigenist Value Set: Ethics into Method

Arguably the most significant contribution of this research is the articulation and employment of the indigenist set of values, a result of the work with Indigenous partners, primarily Alejandra Aillapan Huiriqueo in Practice Case 1 in Chile. The five values – permission, respect, interconnectedness, reciprocity, and gratitude – were generously shared by Alejandra through ritual. Drawing on Ronald L.

Grimes' performative theory of ritual and using new animism as the Western 'cousin' of Indigenous cosmovision, this thesis suggests that by applying the indigenist set of values to performance practice, Indigenous cosmovision can be ethically integrated into non-Indigenous or mixed performance through the overlap of ritual and theatre. Ritual thus becomes theatre not via the erasure of the former, but through a transformation that translates the spiritual and ethical charge of the values into performance and then back into the expression of a secular sacred. This translation can speak to mixed or Western audiences while not appropriating the source and while retaining ethical relationality. Relational values are therefore sustained through their performance on stage, and a hybrid space of ritual and theatre is created, in which each enriches and justifies the other.

Chapter 5 reflects on this transformation, starting with the ritual addressing of natural elements and other more-than-humans by Alejandra. These actions – asking permission from the land, offering substance in return, expressing gratitude to the spirits of the elements or places – represent a spiritual and relational grounding within the local environment. Shared with the mostly non-Indigenous team co-creating the show *Aillaquillén – The Island of Nine Moons,* they slowly transform, through dramaturgical practices, storytelling, and movement, into the language of community-based performance. As with the relational ethics above, this is not a one-way transformation, but rather a cross-fertilisation. While framed within predominantly Western theatrical conventions, the dramaturgy and ethics of presence in the show were shaped by Indigenous epistemologies. The result was therefore neither a Curator's Exhibition of Mapuche culture appropriated by non-Mapuche performers nor a romanticised portrayal of an active Indigenous ritual, but an indigenist scaffolding for ethical co-creation that allows for a lived and relational performance of the sacred. Just as the dancers performing the four elements in the show join to create the scaffolding of the island on which the baby, a symbol of a renewed commitment between the human and the more-than-human, is born, so this thesis suggests that the indigenist methodology can present a dramaturgical framing for Western-style performance to investigate a renewed commitment to the environment and the sacred.

An example of a secular sacred performed in hybrid ritual and theatrical space is presented in Practice Case 2 in South Korea, which systematically applied the indigenist value-based set through studio experimentation with Global North, non-Indigenous performers. Relational epistemologies were established on stage, oscillating between ritualising action and performance and evoking animist sensibilities, yet not appropriating Indigenous religious practices. In their stead, the existing movement performance practice was mobilised as an entry into relationality.

Movement Practices and Materiality

Without the underlying offers of cosmovision and relating to the spirits that provided performance material in Chile, movement practice emerged as a shared performance language with indigenist potential in the non-Indigenous context of the Practice Cases 2 and 3 in South Korea and Colombia, respectively. This thesis suggests that by mobilising existing community or participant movement or performance practices *as an ecosomatic tactic* of relating to environment, place, and the more-than-human through the body and senses, a resensitizing of the relational aspect already inherent in performance practices can occur. Movement practice is the generator of the possibility of embodying the Other and seeing the world from their perspective, and therefore a conduit to performing a relational ethics and animist sensibility on stage.

In the co-created scenes of *Asul Asul / Nick of Time*, the movement of the performers embodying more-than-humans was inspired by concepts from the performer training pedagogy of Jacques Lecoq. Movement analysis and identification happened through play and mime, which led to theatrical transposition. The group performing an element in dialogue with a human character simultaneously enacted an external and internal exploration of the human–more-than-human relationship. In contrast to the individualised element interpretations of the *mestizo* dancers in Chile, the Korean ensemble's collective movement practice resisted not only portrayals of individualism but also direct anthropomorphism, emphasising the alterity of the more-than-human. The result was an embodied and performed relationality that employed the existing inherent relational qualities of movement practice.

Another example of a movement practice employed relationally is analysed in Chapter 7, in Practice Case 3 in Colombia. In *A Place to Call One's Own*, salsa dancing functions ecosomatically as a way of inhabiting the body in relation to the neighbourhood, land, history, ancestry, and social memory. In this way salsa becomes the basis for the community's relational ecological expression. As with the acting techniques in South Korea, indigenist values are manifest in the performance practice and are expressed through collective dance and repetition of coded gestures as well as the narrative itself. Drawing on Gregory Bateson's systems theory, this research suggests that salsa represents the difference or *functional memory* of the networks of mind-systems present in the district of Aguablanca in the city of Cali. By coding, storing, and expressing functional memory, salsa enables interaction and integration between systems. This is a form of learning that can eventually lead to the highest level – the recognition of a wide relationship, reaching beyond the self to a paradigm shift in worldview. This entails a recognition of the interconnectedness of all systems within an ultimate cosmic whole or the sacred. Thus, this thesis argues, indigenist values embedded in local performance practices and

systemic interaction can lead to recognition of a relational worldview and the expression of the secular sacred.

Adapting to the context of Western theatre practice with its manmade objects, props, and technology, this thesis also suggests that an animist approach should be aligned with a new materialist mindset in order not to find oneself back in the chasm of a subject-object dichotomy. Drawing on Karen Barad's theory of agential realism and its tenets of the indeterminacy of a generated and generative matter in Chapter 6, this research posits that relationality between humans and manmade more-than-humans on the apparatus of the stage is achieved through the agential cut of the theatrical scene. This exposes in each individual moment the agential intra-actions between the two, producing differential patterns of mattering. It is the performance itself that makes the relationality matter. In this way, the exercises of performing with chairs and other manmade more-than-humans in South Korea could give the possibility of a certain subjectivity to the objects involved. Expressing this subjectivity within the indigenist value scaffolding keeps it ethically and ecologically accountable.

Storytelling as Ecological Sense-Making

Across all practice cases, this thesis foregrounds storytelling as a mode of ecological sense-making. It is through stories that the communities and ensembles narrate their relationships to the environment and the land, as well as their memory, trauma, and resilience. Storytelling becomes a crucial method of celebrating and strengthening existing relations with the more-than-human, remembering local cultural patterns, and reimagining futures rooted in relationality. Although the indigenist framework for community-based theatre and environmental performance proposed by this research is transferable between different cultural realities, the stories themselves cannot be detached from specific place and relational context. Despite being interculturally co-created, the performances represent particular ecological and political positionings, responding to local histories of colonialisation, environmental harm, and globalisation as well as resilience. Each individual performance carries equal value for its local context and culture; any semblance of moving from the 'messy' to the more 'polished' in the trajectory of the practice of this thesis should not be taken as a hierarchical value system where one performance is considered better than the other.

Based on the ethos suggested by the pilot projects, this research proposes an improvisatory, adaptive and open way of co-creation founded on relational ethics. In *Aillaquillén – The Island of Nine Moons*, in Chile, storytelling became an act of contesting a hegemonically imposed narrative, affirming Mapuche identity through the embodied metaphor of the island and interconnectedness with the

land. In South Korea, the episodic storytelling of *Asul Asul / Nick of Time* mirrored the multiplicity of more-than-human perspectives in a fragmented and largely manmade urban environment. In *A Place to Call One's Own* in Colombia, storytelling through the medium of salsa presented a way of rooting the community in a history of resilience and survival, mirroring and connecting it with the suffering and resistance of the land.

This thesis therefore presents storytelling as a core method of ethical engagement, shaped by the socio-political, historical, and ecological contexts of each co-creation. Indigenist storytelling generates relational knowledge and showcases ecologically beneficial ways of understanding the more-than-human.

Limitations

This thesis presents practice research cases that vary significantly in cultural and geographical context. Nevertheless, it is necessarily limited to the locations selected based on a number of considerations, including pragmatic ones. Although the proposed approaches are demonstrably transferable between different situations, more applications beyond the scope of this thesis are needed to reconfirm their wider general applicability. It is my hope to continue this work and research, further increasing the diversity of the communities involved and continuing to develop the balance between a widely useable framework and its highly context-specific applications.

There are many significant areas of community-based theatre work that merit detailed exploration in relation to the guidelines proposed here. For example, this thesis does not directly address questions of gender and all its applications within the proposed practice. Intersecting factors such as race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic precarity are important topics in the thesis, but could each in their own right be investigated further; a deeper examination into how they shape the dynamics of co-creation was also outside the framing of this practice research. Similarly, it would be compelling to study further the impact of using different languages and translation approaches within the context of intercultural co-creation and the power dynamics of hegemonic vs. oppressed languages. In terms of practical applications and outcomes, the important reflection of how an indigenist framework within intercultural co-creation contexts could be translated into policy was equally outside the range of this work.

This thesis focuses on the point of view of the facilitator of community-based theatre and theatre workshops. Although some responses and reactions from the participants and the audiences are included, a wider study of the specific implications of the impact of such work is needed.

Further Applications and Urgency

The work presented in this thesis has already moved beyond its pages. Versions of its chapters or analyses have been published as articles or essays and presented at conferences. Partners from Chile and South Korea are planning further development and continuation of the co-created shows, while *A Place to Call One's Own* in Colombia has carried on being performed by the community with new generations of dancers being integrated into the performing group. My practice continues as well: in the Spring of 2025, I worked with first-year students at the School of Performance and Cultural Industries at the University of Leeds on their Performance Project module. We reflected on perceptions of the environment and the climate crisis through an adaptation of Anton Chekhov's *Uncle Vanya* and texts devised by the students. Conversations about indigenist approaches, relational ethics, and animism influenced the performance, including generating scenes inspired by the old English tradition of wassailing, singing to trees. Seen through the contemporary perspective of a generation just entering adulthood, the words of Vanya, Sonya, and Astrov resonated with devastating importance, and it was the indigenist value framework that enabled students to process and perform them as well as offer a glimmer of hope.

While my co-creative partners and I continue the practice together or individually in different spaces, my objective beyond the scope of this thesis is for its experiences, insights, and offered approaches to be available as a resource for theatre and performance students or scholars as well as practitioners and facilitators in similar situations. Besides offering interpretations and analyses of real practice cases in various cultural contexts as instructive examples for those researching or reflecting on climate crisis-related theatre and performance, there are two possible practical applications of a published and widely available version of this thesis or further developed sections from it. The first is as a model for intercultural (community or professional) practice, specifically between co-creators from the Global North and Global South, non-Indigenous and Indigenous, offering suggestions on how to approach the work, avoid or redress ethical pitfalls along the way, use the indigenist value scaffolding as a model for the process of co-creation itself as well as for the examination of the relationship to the more-than-human, co-create local narratives and performances that speak to various audiences at the same time, and contribute to understanding, expressing, and confronting the complexity of the climate crisis. This would ideally lead to more intercultural performance work engaging with these issues. The second application can be focused on the pedagogical aspect of introducing the topics of climate, the environment, and relational approaches to the more-than-human to Global North performance students, community theatre practitioners, or professional actors and theatre-makers through workshops, classes, and the co-creation of performances showcasing developing individual or group relationships to local environments. Practice Case 2 from South Korea can serve as a blueprint for this

pedagogical tool, offering concrete exercises underpinned with the indigenist value scaffolding, accessible videos of examples, and reflections on their practical use(fulness) and potential for development. The scope of such a resource would go beyond the three Actions interpreted in this thesis and draw from the entire *Asul Asul / Nick of Time* workshop, which included many more practical exercises exploring relational and movement approaches to the more-than-human and to processing one's own relationship to the climate crisis.

The urgency of this type of work has never been greater, and Western theatre practices can still be slow to embrace it. In 2023, at a post-premiere party of my first professional show at the National Theatre in Slovenia, one of the actors, a respected and brilliant member of the ensemble, inquired what my next projects were to be. I mentioned I was heading to South Korea and Colombia to do experimental studio practice and community-based theatre about the relationship to the environment. The actor nodded then said, "Yes, but what is the next *serious* project you have lined up?" In Western perceptions of art and the climate crisis, the question of what is 'serious' will need to be replaced with the question of 'what is actually *needed*' to navigate the Monster that is in all our communities. This thesis shows the importance and necessity of climate crisis storytelling, one that supports neither the complacency of the wealthy and comfortable nor the catastrophe porn thriving on shock value, but rather shows a possible way forward towards relational ethics within human society and between the human and the more-than-human.

9 Practice Portfolio

The following portfolio represents the full practice submission of this thesis. It includes videos of the entire shows mentioned in the chapters as well as the scripts and workshop plan written by the practice researcher.

4 Ecuador

- *DocuHaiku 0* (video)
- *The Waterfall of San Luis* (full show) (video)
- *The Waterfall of San Luis* (full script) (text)

5 Chile

- *Aillaquillén – The Island of Nine Moons* (full show) (video)
- *Nautüll and Lifkoyam Scene* (text)

6 South Korea

- *Asul Asul / Nick of Time* (full show)[20] (video)
- School of Fish Exercise (video)
- Scene With Chair (video)
- *Asul Asul / Nick of Time* Workshop Plan (text)

7 Colombia

- *A Place to Call One's Own* (full show) (video)
- *A Place to Call One's Own* (full script) (text)

[20] To view the subtitles for this video, it is necessary to have the 'Subtitles/Closed Captions' button on YouTube turned on.

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Appendix: Ethics Approvals

FAHC 20-055 (pilot project online)

Outlook

RE: FAHC 20-055 - AHC FREC Application Outcome- Favourable

From Erin Pickles <E.R.K.Pickles@leeds.ac.uk>
on behalf of
AHC Research Ethics <AHCResearchEthics@leeds.ac.uk>
Date Thu 2021-04-22 13:48
To Peter Petkovsek <pcpp@leeds.ac.uk>; AHC Research Ethics <AHCResearchEthics@leeds.ac.uk>
Cc Jonathan Pitches <J.Pitches@leeds.ac.uk>; Nicolas Salazar Sutil <N.Salazar@leeds.ac.uk>

Dear Peter (Nic and Jonathan for info),

RE: FAHC 20-055 / Digital indigenism through land based cultural practices as a climate justice discussion in Ecuador, Chile, and Colombia

Thank you for submitting your V2 documentation in support of your ethics application. am pleased to inform you that your research ethics application has been reviewed by the AHC Committee and I can confirm this has received a favourable ethical opinion based on the documentation received at date of this email.

Please retain this email as evidence of approval in your study file.

Please notify the committee if you intend to make any amendments to the original research as submitted and approved to date. This includes recruitment methodology. All changes must receive ethical approval prior to implementation. Please refer to the amendment form or contact the Research Ethics & Governance Administrator for further information (ahcresearchethics@leeds.ac.uk) if required.

Please note: You are expected to keep a record of all your approved documentation, as well as documents such as sample consent forms (if you continue to do this by post), risk assessments and other documents relating to the study. This should be kept in your study file, which should be readily available for audit purposes. You will be given a two week notice period if your project is to be audited.

It is our policy to remind everyone that it is your responsibility to comply with Health and Safety, Data Protection and any other legal and/or professional guidelines there may be.

Some funders require official confirmation that ethics approval has been achieved. If you require this email agreement in letter form please do let me know. I would be happy to provide this if it is needed.

I hope the study goes well. If you have any questions please do email me.

Best wishes,
Erin
(on behalf of the AHC Faculty Research Ethics Committee)

Erin Pickles

Research Administrator

FAHC 21-105 (pilot project in Ecuador and Practice Case 1 in Chile)

Outlook

FAHC 21-105 - Study Approval Confirmation

From AHC Research Ethics <AHCResearchEthics@leeds.ac.uk>
Date Wed 2022-06-15 11:10
To Peter Petkovsek [RPG] <pcpp@leeds.ac.uk>
Cc Jonathan Pitches <J.Pitches@leeds.ac.uk>

1 attachment (55 KB)
FAHC 21-105 Reviewer Comments & Approval for Applicant 2022.06.15.doc;

Dear Peter

FAHC 21-105 - The stories we must tell: fighting climate change through indigenist dialogue and co-creation

NB: All approvals/comments are subject to compliance with current University of Leeds and UK Government advice regarding the Covid-19 pandemic.

I am pleased to inform you that the above research ethics application has been reviewed by AHC Committee and I can confirm a favourable ethical opinion based on the documentation received at date of this email.

Please retain this email as evidence of approval in your study file.

Please notify the committee if you intend to make any amendments to the original research as submitted and approved to date. This includes recruitment methodology; all changes must receive ethical approval prior to implementation. Please see http://ris.leeds.ac.uk/downloads/download/179/amendment_form or contact the Research Ethics & Governance Administrator for further information (ahcresearchethics@leeds.ac.uk) if required.

Ethics approval does not infer you have the right of access to any member of staff or student or documents and the premises of the University of Leeds. Nor does it imply any right of access to the premises of any other organisation, including clinical areas. The committee takes no responsibility for you gaining access to staff, students and/or premises prior to, during or following your research activities.

Please note: You are expected to keep a record of all your approved documentation, as well as documents such as sample consent forms, risk assessments and other documents relating to the study. This should be kept in your study file, which should be readily available for audit purposes. You will be given a two week notice period if your project is to be audited.

If you require this confirmation in letter form, for example to show to external funders, then please do email me. I am happy to provide this if required.

It is our policy to remind everyone that it is your responsibility to comply with Health and Safety, Data Protection and any other legal and/or professional guidelines there may be.

I hope the study goes well.

Very best wishes,

Sou
On behalf of Professor Robert Jones (AHC REC Chair)

AHC FREC: reviewer comments

Application reference	FAHC 21-105	Date reviewed	14/06/22
Project title	The stories we must tell: fighting climate change through indigenist dialogue and co-creation		

Recommendation (Please tick one)	
Approve (please include a brief (min 25 words) explanation below)	X
Approve with suggestions of points to consider prior to carrying out the research	
Minor amendments required before approval can be given	
Major amendments required before approval can be given	
Reject	
Suitable for discussion at FREC meeting?	

General comments

Excellent proposal, thorough account of ethical issues and data management within a practice led piece of work. Exhaustive documentation and information sheets. Happy to approve.

This is a fascinating project that has great potential. The researcher has thoroughly thought through the ethical issues, the participant information sheets and consent forms are very thorough, and the measures the researcher is taking to ensure good ethical practices are admirable.

Application section	Comment	Response required/ amended application required/ for consideration
Please indicate who you would like to review the applicant's response		Reviewers/ Chair/ Administrator

FAHC 22-108 (Practice Case 2 in South Korea and Practice Case 3 in Colombia)

Outlook

FAHC 22-108 – Study Approval June 2023

From Rachel Prinn <R.Prinn@leeds.ac.uk>
Date Wed 2023-06-07 10:35
To Peter Petkovsek [RPG] <pcpp@leeds.ac.uk>
Cc AHC Research Ethics <AHCResearchEthics@leeds.ac.uk>

Dear Peter

FAHC 22-108 – The Stories we must tell: fighting climate change through intercultural dialogue and co-creation

NB: All approvals/comments are subject to compliance with current University of Leeds and UK Government advice regarding the Covid-19 pandemic.

I am pleased to inform you that the above research ethics application has been reviewed by AHC Committee and I can confirm a favourable ethical opinion based on the documentation received at date of this email.

Please retain this email as evidence of approval in your study file.

Please notify the committee if you intend to make any amendments to the original research as submitted and approved to date. This includes recruitment methodology; all changes must receive ethical approval prior to implementation. Please see http://ris.leeds.ac.uk/downloads/download/179/amendment_form or contact the Research Ethics & Governance Administrator for further information (ahcresearchethics@leeds.ac.uk) if required.

Ethics approval does not infer you have the right of access to any member of staff or student or documents and the premises of the University of Leeds. Nor does it imply any right of access to the premises of any other organisation, including clinical areas. The committee takes no responsibility for you gaining access to staff, students and/or premises prior to, during or following your research activities.

Please note: You are expected to keep a record of all your approved documentation, as well as documents such as sample consent forms, risk assessments and other documents relating to the study. This should be kept in your study file, which should be readily available for audit purposes. You will be given a two week notice period if your project is to be audited.

If you require this confirmation in letter form, for example to show to external funders, then please do email me. I am happy to provide this if required.

It is our policy to remind everyone that it is your responsibility to comply with Health and Safety, Data Protection and any other legal and/or professional guidelines there may be.

I hope the study goes well.

Very best wishes,

Rachel Prinn
On behalf of Professor Matthew Treherne (AHC REC Interim Chair)

Sample Consent Form in English

Partner/Participant Consent Form

Title of project:	The stories we must tell: addressing climate change through intercultural dialogue and performance
Name of principal investigator:	Peter Petkovsek, University of Leeds
Dates of the work:	16.10.2023-20.12.2023

I, the undersigned, agree to participate in this research project. The research has been explained to me and I understand what my participation will involve.

(PLEASE CIRCLE "YES" or "NO")

I will participate as a performer and co-creator of a devised theatre workshop and showcase. This will involve rehearsing with the PI and other performers, discussing the main topic and questions, contributing by generating performance material, and performing in the final showcase.	YES	NO
I agree that my activities on the project may be recorded on video/ audio and that it will be possible to identify me from this video.	YES	NO
I agree that my participation will *not* be anonymous or confidential and that recordings of the work can be widely disseminated beyond the dates of the project.	YES	NO
I agree that researchers on this project can use quotations from what I have said or written for analysis in research or as highlighted (and credited) text in live performance/video.	YES	NO
I give you my permission to use the video/ audio recording for the purposes of creating a video of the project for viewing by the general public beyond the dates of the project.	YES	NO
I am aware that: I can decide to withdraw from the research at any point during the process without giving a reason. I can request the removal of any audio or video material in which I feature until the release and dissemination of the final creative product. After that date, the removal of such material will no longer be guaranteed.	YES	NO

Name	
Contact detail	
Signature	
Signature of Guardian or Parent, if minor	
Date	

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