

Master's Thesis | August 2021

Becoming-Plant:

Cultivating an Understanding of Queer Ecological Dramaturgy through *Estado Vegetal* (2017)

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MA Contemporary Theatre, Dance and Dramaturgy 2020-2021

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God first made the plants, the forests, the seaweed
And then he divided the seas and made the light
And then he created man
Like “the cherry on top”,
And later, from that man he extracted the women
Like “the cherry on top of the cherry”, if you want to comprehend it
In a more contemporary, more modern, feminist fashion
And the woman ate the fruit from the forbidden tree of the Garden of Eden
She barely ate from it, not to say very little, but eat she did,
and as soon as she ate they felt such a great shame that... naked...
What did they do?
That they covered themselves with a leaf
The cherries covered themselves with the cake.

Manuela Infante, Marcela Salinas
Estado Vegetal (2017)

Abstract

This thesis aims to cultivate an understanding of queer ecological dramaturgy through an analysis of *Estado Vegetal* (2017), a plant-based performance by Chilean theatre maker Manuela Infante. Using the notion of becoming-plant, as Infante described her dramaturgical practice in the artistic creation of *Estado Vegetal*, a possible queer ecological dramaturgy is practiced. I begin by exploring the ecological performance, starting from the notion of ecodramaturgy and the representational challenge it poses on human-nonhuman relationships in the theatre. By employing a queer ecological perspective, I create a territory for an understanding of queer ecologies entanglements with dramaturgy and the possibilities it provides for navigating the representational challenges of ecological theatre. Through a close reading of *The Practice of Dramaturgy: Working on Actions in Performance* by Georgelou, Protopapa and Theodoridou, I constitute a more substantial understanding of what queer ecological dramaturgy might entail, arguing for their intrinsic entanglement. Through the notion of becoming-animal by Deleuze and Guattari, I create an understanding of what it means to practice a becoming-plant. From a further exploration of Infante's theatre practice and the dramaturgical procedures that were derived from that, I argue for a new way of thinking about ecological performance as an entangled practice of ecological thinking and dramaturgical practice establishing a theatre practice of embodied philosophy. From this perspective I point to the inherent queer ecological underpinnings that are weaving through this practice. By establishing that nature is queer, becoming-plant can be encountered as a practice seeping with queerness. From the conceptual tension created by the notion of becoming-with by Donna Haraway and Karen Barad's notion of intra-action, I argue how *Estado Vegetal* makes explicit the way theatre is able to be a site for queer ecological experimentation by entangling all its human and nonhuman agents and by embracing the theatrical machine, working from within - revealing the potentiality of queer ecological dramaturgy.

Acknowledgments

I want to express my gratitude to the following human and nonhumans. First of all, to my supervisor, Konstantina Georgelou, for your limitless trust and patience, your reassurance and the words “do whatever keeps you sane.” To Anastasia Lata, my friend, colleague and personal motivational speaker who I hope to one day see in real life. Thank you for your positivity and for always making me laugh. To Manuela Infante, for making a performance that provided endless inspiration and the extraordinary talk at the Transmission in Motion seminar. And last, to my plants, both inside and outside my house, for showing me what I was writing about. For growing unapologetically and for allowing me to keep you in pots.

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Introduction

Over the last two decades, in light of great environmental catastrophes, there has been an increasing attention for the evidently unsustainable way humans inhabit the world. For a long time, it has been a constant presence in my own consciousness, this summer of 2021 alone fueled by disastrous floods in The Netherlands, Belgium and Germany, extreme heat waves and catastrophic forest fires in Southern Europe. The need for a radical change in the way humans inhabit the world is also acknowledged in performance practice, recognizable in the growing interest in ecology in contemporary performance practice, both as theoretical and practical inquiry. In 2019 in The Netherlands, there were performances such as *Children* (2019/2020) by Het Nationale Theater, from a text by Lucy Kirkwood and directed by Eric de Vroedt, in which different generations are opposing each other in the face of climate change, questioning the limits of self-interest. In the same year, Boogaert/VanderSchoot produced *Botanical Wasteland* (2019), where they insist a radically different relationship between human and nature inside a futuristic biotope. Journalist Sandra Kooke analyzes, in the Dutch newspaper *Trouw*, what she calls, 'climate theatre'¹ in the Dutch theatre season of 2019 and notices an urgent need from theatre makers to deal with this subject matter, hoping that it will inspire spectators to think about the magnitude of the environmental catastrophe, and to contribute to change.²

Also in performance studies, ecological performance has reared its head as an arising field of inquiry. Already in 1994, Una Chaudhuri posed the challenge, in search of a possible ecological theatre, to raise awareness for the crisis of values lying in the midst of "the ticking time-bombs of ecological disaster" that loom over the twenty-first century.³ In theoretical discourse on ecology and performance and the interconnected artistic practice, attention seems to be going to questioning how performance can contribute to changing our relationship with the environment, often discussed in the context of ecocriticism and environmentalism and revolving around catastrophic narratives about climate change, questioning how to bring nature onto the stage: how to represent ecology, how to represent nature.

¹ My translation of 'klimaattheater'.

² Sandra Kooke, "Hoe red je het klimaat met een theaterstuk?" *Trouw*, 30 oktober, 2019, accessed June 2021, <https://www.trouw.nl/nieuws/hoe-red-je-het-klimaat-met-een-theaterstuk~b2a99534/?referrer=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.google.com%2F>.

³ Una Chaudhuri, "'There must be a lot of fish in that lake': toward an ecological theater." *Theater* 25, 1 (Spring/Summer, 1994): 23-31.

0.1 *Estado Vegetal* (2017)

In the fall of 2020, my attention was brought to *Estado Vegetal* (2017) by Chilean theatre maker Manuela Infante. In *Estado Vegetal* (Vegetative State) one actress ramifies into different characters, exploring and imitating plant behaviour. Infante characterized the performance as “a vegetative play, not an animal play,”⁴ meaning the performance imitates the vegetal in a speculative practice, “looking for what is vegetal in us.”⁵ In this performance, I saw something different: I noticed a dealing with ecology, or ecological subject matter, that went beyond trying to represent ecology on stage nor a performance that was simply ‘about’ ecology. I identified a performance that was at the same time ‘about’ ecological thinking and practicing it in a specific way.

Estado Vegetal (2017) by Manuela Infante is a one-woman show exploring plant intelligence, the vegetative soul, plant communication and the impossible dialogue between plant and animal. The performance specifically draws from the relatively new field of plant neurobiology, artistically practicing ideas by field pioneers Stefano Mancuso and plant philosopher Michael Marder, who notes that to encounter plants, and to encounter them as valid others, is to recognize not only what of human is there in plant, but also what of plant is there in human: to recognize the vegetal other in ourselves. In program texts about *Estado Vegetal*, it becomes evident that this exploration in the piece is two folded. First off, it is a probing into the way plants think, feel, communicate and are intelligent - but different. The recognition of which might transform human notions of what it means to think, feel and communicate. Secondly, the piece is an artistic research that explores the ways in which plant philosophy can transform creative practice.⁶

After watching the performance, I attended a seminar called “Plant-Based Dramaturgy” from Transmission in Motion, an interdisciplinary platform from Utrecht University for seminars and presentations to bring the academy together with artists and other partners,⁷ where Infante discussed the making process of *Estado Vegetal*, explaining how she arrived at plant thinking and the development of, what was referred to as, a plant-based dramaturgy as a set of specific procedures. Here, Infante provided a beautiful insight in her specific approach to dramaturgy and the theatre itself saturated with ecological underpinnings, approaching artistic production in a way that moves towards a profound kind of entanglement of all of its

⁴ Laurel V. McLaughlin, “*Estado Vegetal*, a gesture of imitation,” *Performance Research* 25, 2 (2020): 30.

⁵ *Ibid*, 31.

⁶ “*Estado Vegetal* (Manuela Infante),” Nave, accessed July, 2021, <http://nave.io/programacion/estado-vegetal/>

⁷ For more information about Transmission in Motion, see <https://transmissioninmotion.sites.uu.nl/>.

elements of existence, bringing ecology and performance together in an explicit way. *Estado Vegetal* does not merely question how we can put nature on stage, but questions how we can relate to others through an exploration of the human-plant relationship. Plants are intertwined with every element of the performance: potted plants on stage as fellow actors, but also as plant intelligence, plant thinking and the plant soul that informed the entire dramaturgical structure of the piece. In doing so, the play not only offers a way of thinking but also practices relating to otherness, to the human and nonhuman, to bodies and identity, which I suspect to be a certain queering: a queering by calling into question the human/nonhuman binary. Thus, in *Estado Vegetal* two specific territories come explicitly together: that of ecology and queerness. Timothy Morton already recognizes the intersection of these two domains, considering ecology stems from the nonessentialist field of biology and queer theory is the nonessentialist view of gender and identity.⁸ He thus imagines the meeting of queer theory and ecology as a fantastic explosion.⁹ I recognize fruitful notions to further explore queer ecology in discourse by theorist such as Karen Barad, Stacy Alaimo and Donna Haraway. I suspect the specificity of *Estado Vegetal* to shed light on the possibilities of the theatre as a site for practicing queer ecology, precisely because theatre is so readily associated with the human subject - a subject of culture - and a site of performativity. Following Karen Barad, who underscores that performativity is necessitous to queer theory, however “figured (almost exclusively) as a human affair,”¹⁰ I presume the specific dramaturgical practice of *Estado Vegetal* of being intertwined with plant-being to provide a new way of thinking about ecological performance and, furthermore, exceed into greater queries of human-nonhuman relationships and otherness by queering the human/nonhuman binary.

0.2 Methodology and Theoretical Framework

I decided to revolve this research around *Estado Vegetal* completely for two reasons. The first is to ground this research in theatre practice specifically in order to shed light on a performance practice that is rooted deeply within representational structures and in doing so, faces greater challenges of appropriation and relationality, because - in its essence - Aristotelian theatre and drama structures are so acquainted with anthropocentrism, making it hard to invite otherness on stage. I do, however, identify more choreographic, performance and visible arts work that operate from ecological thinking and discourse in more embodied and extended ways. Examples of this are the dialogical performance piece *Dying Together/Earth* (2019) by Lotte van den Berg that, in light of great ecological catastrophes

⁸ Timothy Morton, “Guest Column: Queer Ecology,” *PMLA* 125, 2 (2010): 275.

⁹ *Ibid*, 273.

such as the burning Amazonian rain forest and, by embodying different elements of this catastrophe, opens up a dialogue that questions the way we die together to inform the way we live together. In an even more recent light, I am thinking of the performance *Our House Is On Fire: A Danced Manifesto* (2020) by choreographer Nicole Beutler. This performance, named after the world-famous statement by Greta Thunberg, explored the difference between understanding and actually taking action.¹¹ Through dance, this performance aimed to visualize the urgency of Thunberg's message, hoping that it "will finally really get through to us."¹² Or the artistic practice and research by Siegmar Zacharias who creates "situations of embodied visceral thinking together with and through matter."¹³

The second reason is because *Estado Vegetal* equips ecological thinking so explicitly in almost every aspect of its creative process. Focusing solely on *Estado Vegetal* allows me more space to delve into its being completely. It is not solely a performance about plants, underlined with certain ecological concepts. *Estado Vegetal* uses ecological thinking, notions, conceptions in every vein of the artistic process – a way of entangling a thinking with dramaturgical practice itself.

In awe of the performance as well as Infante's approach in making *Estado Vegetal*, I wanted to explore this specific dramaturgical practice of queer ecology in all its entanglements. Entanglement seems to be a key word here. Following Barad, entanglement "are not intertwining of separate entities but rather irreducible relations of responsibility."¹⁴ Three theoretical territories become evident in this. The first territory and starting point of this research, is ecological performance. In order to provide a contextualization of the subject and to have a clear place to take off from, I start from the already existing discourse on ecology and performance. The notion of ecodramaturgy, as coined by Wendy Arons and Theresa J. May in 2010, proposes a distinction between culture and nature that is specifically at stake in ecological performance. I consider this binary thinking to be a limiting classification, one that does not seem to be so easily renounced in theatre. In order to break this limit open again, I turn towards queer theory and from the entangled field of queer ecology, I will analyze the way *Estado Vegetal* calls the human/nonhuman relationship into question by equipping plant intelligence for its dramaturgical practice. My research in this field starts from Timothy Morton's conception of queer ecology and further explores queer theory as an ecological site, and vice versa. The third territory that I place this research in, is

¹⁰ Karen Barad, "Nature's Queer Performativity," *Qui Parle* 19, 2 (2011): 122.

¹¹ "Our House Is On Fire," Frascati Theater, accessed June, 2021, <https://www.frascatitheater.nl/voorstelling-ourhouse-nbprojects>.

¹² "Our House Is On Fire," Nicole Beutler Projects.

¹³ "Siegmar Zacharias," Siegmar Zacharias, accessed July, 2021, <https://siegmartzacharias.com/>.

¹⁴ Barad, "Nature's Queer Performativity," 148.

that of dramaturgy, again by entangled with ecological thinking. In *Estado Vegetal*, I identify an ecological approach towards dramaturgical practice - one that further establishes the entanglement of these three territories and allows to imagine further implications of queer ecological performance. The dramaturgical strand of this research is mostly derived from the work *The Practice of Dramaturgy* by Georgelou, Protopapa, and Theodoridou, From the entanglement of these three territories, I can answer my central research question: How can *Estado Vegetal* (2017) by Manuela Infante cultivate an understanding of queer ecological dramaturgy?

In approaching this research question, I used qualitative research methods. These mostly consisted of literary research in the fields of post-anthropocentrism, queer theory and performance studies. All texts were accessed online as digital sources via the Utrecht University Library on WorldCat. I also had the extreme privilege of access to an online registration of *Estado Vegetal* via a password encrypted video on Vimeo. Other performances or artists mentioned in this thesis were analyzed from web-material by the artists themselves or secondary online sources, such as articles, reviews and videos. I furthermore used my own notes and memories from the Transmission in Motion seminar which inform most of the second chapter.

I start this thesis by introducing the main theoretical concepts and texts that will inform my research and construct a profound contextualization of the territories in which this research is embedded. Chapter 1 addresses the first sub-question that encompasses all theoretical strands, namely: what might queer ecological dramaturgy entail? I use the notion of ecodramaturgy and the discussion started by Carl Lavery, when he asked what theatre can do ecologically, as my starting point to establish a theoretical foundation on which I will build my argumentation. The challenged posed by ecological performance, leads me into queer theory and the intersectional field of queer ecology. My aim is not to approach queer theory ecologically or ecology from a queer perspective, but to explore their interrelations that are already underpinning both. Consequently, I will approach dramaturgy in a similar way.

Chapter 2 will look closer into Manuela Infante's work and the specificity of *Estado Vegetal*, delving into the specific plant-based dramaturgical procedures Infante developed for this piece. They were informed by thinking through plant intelligence, relating to plant soul and plant thinking, laid out by Michael Marder's *Plant-Thinking: A Philosophy of Vegetal Life*, in order to establish a practice of becoming-plant, a term closely related to the idea of becoming-animal by postmodern French philosopher Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. This chapter works to contextualize *Estado Vegetal*, and Infante's work in general, in order to create a further understanding of this specific ecological dramaturgy and how Infante

approaches dramaturgical practice itself. The sub-question answered in the second chapter is: how can the plant-based dramaturgy through the practice of becoming-plant in *Estado Vegetal* form a further understanding of ecological performance?

In chapter 3 I will answer the sub-question: How can *Estado Vegetal* inform an understanding of queer ecological dramaturgy? In this chapter, I will analyze *Estado Vegetal* through the lens of queer ecological dramaturgy by exploring the ecological notions of becoming-with by Donna J. Haraway and intra-actions by Karen Barad through the lens of queer ecology, excavating fields of tension that become explicit in *Estado Vegetal*. Through the analysis of *Estado Vegetal*, I will arrive at an understanding of queer ecological dramaturgy. In the conclusion I will offer a reflection upon my research process and imagine the further possibilities of queer ecological dramaturgy and the implications the analysis of *Estado Vegetal* clarifies.

Chapter One: Understanding Queer Ecological Dramaturgy

Ecology is at its heart encountering the world, the things, the others - everything around us, as part of each other, as connected. It undoes hierarchical structures in the human and nonhuman, or more-than-human, or however you want to call it, relationships by acknowledging the agency of the nonhuman and encountering it as equal and valuable. But, questions and challenges still remain. One of the things at stake in ecological activities, is appropriation. Even when coming from the idea that we need to stand up for the nonhuman, to give it a voice, to allow it to speak up. But the human and nonhuman are not the same - and this is also not the objective. The challenge is to question how to relate to something that is radically different, or radically other, without making a gesture of appropriation, expecting the other to speak on our terms. The challenge is to find a way to encounter the other, the nonhuman, to relate to it without appropriation. I suspect the possibilities of ecological performance to reside here. I suspect performance practice to hold the potential to question, challenge and practice human's relationship to otherness. Therefore, I propose shifting the emphasis of ecological performance discourse on ecological representation and questioning the realm of mimesis, towards a focus on the potentiality of the intersection between performance and ecology to question the human and nonhuman relationship.

In this first chapter, I will initiate three theoretical strands that will allow me to come to my understanding of queer ecological dramaturgy in order to answer the first sub-question of what this might entail. This chapter will consider ecological performance discourse, starting from the term ecodramaturgy and the question raised by Lavery 'what can theatre do ecologically?'. From there, I turn towards the notion of queering and Stacy Alaimo's notion of transcorporeality to encounter the body in ecological performance. Subsequently, I employ the idea of dramaturgy as a process of working on actions, as laid out by Konstantina Georgelou, Efrosini Protopapa, and Danae Theodoridou, to argue for the apparent entanglement and fruitful connection of these three fields, that will allow ecological performance to navigate the realm of mimesis, for the ecological to become part of the dramaturgical practice itself, and move towards an active and alive embodied practice of queer ecological dramaturgy.

1.1 Ecodramaturgy

In ecology and performance discourse, I identify important questions to be: how to represent ecology or nature on stage, how can theatre contribute to a more sustainable way of living, changing human behavior in a way that may not cause the world as we know it to end? In *Readings in Performance and Ecology*, Arons and May start their work on performance and

ecology from the binary opposition between nature and culture and the catastrophic consequences this thinking has, as it is bringing us to the verge of environmental breakdown.¹⁵ They then go into the idea that the arts are traditionally perceived as the one thing that distinguishes human culture from nature, which makes the intersection of ecology and performance a paradoxical one, claiming furthermore that performance and ecology “do not easily or readily share space together, either materially or ontologically”.¹⁶ The intersection of ecological and performance discourse is imagined as a borderland, as the coming together of two fields at a dividing line. Starting the conversation from this perspective describes ecology and performance almost as their complete opposites: performance being the absolute representation and product of human culture and ecology as solely part of the natural world. However, I would like to argue for a different approach that I deem productive in light of transcending the binary thinking that I have described here, a thinking in which ecology and performance may reach an unforeseen limit. In order to surpass this thinking, I provide a different approach that stems from ecological discourse itself.

Firstly, I would like to continue with the idea of ecodramaturgy, a term coined by May and Arons, as it seems such a vital conception in the coming together of ecology and performance. As stated before, Arons and May start from the paradoxical relationship between these two fields. In order to represent or thematize the ecological or environmental space in performance, Arons and May state that there is always the requirement to reinscribe the division between culture and nature, as “performance itself is always already a cultural interpretation of and overlay onto the ‘natural’ world.”¹⁷ What is necessary according to Arons and May is a theoretical reconceptualization of nature and mimesis and a practical search for ways to represent nature. These notions form the foundation on which they build their concept of ecodramaturgy, which they define as follows:

Ecodramaturgy is theater and performance making that puts ecological reciprocity and community at the center of its theatrical and thematic intent. Ecodramaturgy carries with it new frames for thinking about theater and new approaches and challenges to making theater.¹⁸

Furthermore, Arons and May terminate that “[e]codramaturgy pays attention to the environmental impact of theatrical production, creating reciprocity between the story told and

¹⁵ Wendy Arons and Theresa J. May, *Readings in Performance and Ecology*, edited by Wendy Arons and Theresa J. May (New York: Palgrave Macmillan US, 2012): 1.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid, 1-2.

¹⁸ Ibid, 4.

means of production.”¹⁹ The latter also emphasizes ecodramaturgy's ties to environmental activism. However, according to Lavery, compared to other disciplines, theatre has played a minor role in ecocriticism. More postdramatic modes of theatre taking place in an “extended field” (site-based performance, immersive installations, durational pieces, community events, theatrical interventions) contain the possibility to “trouble the anthropocentrism that has long been associated with the theatrical medium.”²⁰ The ecological value of the dramatic theatre however has long been disputed because of theatre's obsession with “expressing the human psyche in dialogue form.”²¹ Lavery contests this perception, claiming that it does not adequately understand the ecological potential of “contemporary models of theatre and performance.”²² From Lavery's understanding it becomes evident that ecodramaturgy not merely indicates performances that are about ecological issues but also suggests an expansion towards challenging anthropocentric frames of thinking.

I furthermore propose a weight shift from ecodramaturgy as a category of performances that deal with (often catastrophic) environmental and ecological narratives, to an emphasis on performances that consider how humans encounter the world they live in and themselves in relation to it, “displacing the human subject from the centre of the ‘world’ and locating it instead in an agential landscape of flows, systems and networks.”²³ However, the general conception seems to be that it is in the realm of mimesis that the intersection of ecology and performance reaches a problematic limit, because the structure of privilege of theatrical representation remains in place and thus often reproduces “prevailing ideologies.”²⁴ Dramatic models of theatre remain centered around the anthropocentric drama of human characters. Does this mean that there is no place for ecology in the soft cushions of the proscenium theatre?

In his prominent work *Theatre and Ecology: What Can Theater Do?*, Lavery continues his search by starting the discussion with questioning what theatre can *do* ecologically, rather than represent or be about ecology. In this context, he suggests that “theater's ecological contribution is not found in any explicit ecocritical message it may purport to communicate, but rather resides in the more oblique possibilities inherent in the theatrical medium itself.”²⁵ Lavery approaches theatre in a way that tries to move away from the idea that theatre can

¹⁹ Arons and May, *Readings in Ecology and Performance*, 6.

²⁰ Carl Lavery, ed., *Performance and Ecology: What Can Theater Do?*, edited by Carl Lavery (New York: Routledge, 2018): 2.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 3.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ Karen Jürs-Mundy, “Introduction,” *Postdramatic Theatre*, Hans Thies Lehmann, translated by Karen Jürs-Munby, (London; New York: Routledge, 2006): 5.

²⁵ Lavery, *Performance and Ecology*, 1.

only gesture towards the real thing, rather than impacting on it. He remains in the realm of ecological performance discourse that questions how performance can have ecocritical impact, but the approach he establishes is a viable one. Lavery points towards theatre's unique practice as a "frame of appearance" which "might have the capacity to alter how we exist in the world by troubling conventional modes of thinking and feeling."²⁶ He points towards a number of theatre performances that turn the attention towards the material aspects of the theatrical medium itself. This implies an indirect and negative teaching, or 'weak thought', a notion that Lavery borrows from philosopher Gianni Vattimo and indicates a thinking that postpones 'strong meaning' and remains open for interpretation and dialogue. He continues this notion into the realm of performance and comes to the idea of weak performance, which aims "to trouble notions of mastery and intentionality, to remain hypothetical and suspensive."²⁷ This way of approaching theatre moves towards taking the step away from the realm of representation, and into the possibilities of performance practice itself. More importantly, this allows to encounter ecological performance beyond its ecocritical messages and environmental narratives. It allows to consider ecological underpinnings in performance as a way to bring forth, or practice even, deeply rooted entanglements of supposed binary oppositions, such as human/nonhuman or culture/nature. As Augusto Corrieri points our attention to the question "whether we can now imagine a non-anthropocentric theatre - and if this sounds like a contradiction in terms, then it is precisely a matter of refiguring the terms itself."²⁸

1.2 Imagining an Ecological Theatre

In its essence, ecology is the study of the interconnections between all living things and their environment. It is about acknowledging others, all others - also objects and plants and nature and everything that you are a part of and that is a part of something together with you. It is about acknowledging their agency and their being, and their existence in a certain network together with you. Important here is thus that the human is not situated outside of this network but always also part of its environment. Here I would like to point to the influential work *A Thousand Plateaus* by Deleuze and Guattari, in which they provide a vocabulary with which to further comprehend this relationality that is embedded in ecological thinking. First off, they use the term 'assemblage', which is the idea that one object or thing or entity, is connected to other entities in a unique constellation of leaking, that puts forward

²⁶ Ibid, 2.

²⁷ Ibid, 2.

²⁸ Augusto Corrieri, "The Rock, the Butterfly, the Moon and The Cloud. Notes on Dramaturgy in an Ecological Age," *The Practice of Dramaturgy. Working on Actions in Performance*, ed. Konstantina Georgelou, Efrosini Protopapa and Danae Theodoridou (Amsterdam: Valiz, 2017): 242.

a unique kind of ecology, which is whole in itself and exist outside of humanity. One happens to encounter into it. This idea puts forward a relational approach to the world around us that invites the acknowledgment of networks that one can enter. One can step into constellation with matter, with things, with others. Another important, influential concept that opens up the possibility for encountering things ecologically is the notion of the rhizome, which describes the way that plant roots grow. Deleuze and Guattari imagine it however as “ceaselessly established connections between semiotic chains, organizations of power and circumstances relative to the arts, sciences, and social struggles.”²⁹ A rhizome is a map, not a linear, hierarchical narrative of something, but a map that presents connections without pointing to an origin: for a “rhizome has no beginning or end; it is always in the middle, between things, interbeing, intermezzo.”³⁰ Both these notions establish a relationality of things that are all existing in constellation with each other, a constellation that one can encounter and step into, becoming part of it. From this perspective, I would like to point also to the inherent relationality of the theatre: it not only takes place between actors and spectators but also, as Lavery points out, contains an explicit networked quality “in which the human being is always part of a larger assemblage of objects, technologies and processes.”³¹

The specific performance practice where this research focuses on is precisely located within this entanglement of ecological thought in the performance practice itself, transcending a mere ‘being about’ or ‘involved with’. This research revolves around the within and in-between. In *Estado Vegetal*, this is explored through the human-plant relationship which is, as I will argue, related to the queer theory. In order to create a profound understanding of and to provide tools for analysis for the aforementioned possibilities, to shift the focus of ecological performance discourse and to, furthermore, imagine a non-anthropocentric theatre, I will initiate my second theoretical strand of queer theory, which forms an alliance with ecology in the territory of queer ecology.

1.3 Queer Ecology

At the end of his article on queer ecology, Morton states: “It is not that ecological thinking would benefit from an injection of queer theory from the outside. It’s that fully and properly, ecology is queer theory and queer theory is ecology: queer ecology,”³² which I consider to be quite the powerful statement to explore further in this section. In this research, I approach

²⁹ Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (London: Athlone Press, 1988): 7.

³⁰ Ibid, 25.

³¹ Lavery, *Performance and Ecology*, 3.

queer theory as a critical theory “to unpick binaries and reread gaps, silences and in-between spaces.”³³ Jeffrey J. Cohen states that “queering is at its heart a process of wonder.”³⁴ It is a reflexive and relational term, a term that also insist on wondering in itself. Following Myra Hird and Noreen Giffney, queer is a doing, rather than a being.³⁵ It is loose, challenging and disruptive, emphasized by Eve Sedgwick as “the open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances and resonances”³⁶ of queering, as well as by Robert Mills who approaches queering “as simply unveiling the systemic oppression at the heart of representation.”³⁷ Additionally, the workings of queerness is defined by Carolyn Dinshaw as:

...contiguity and displacement, knocking signifiers loose, ungrounding bodies, making them strange... It makes people stop and look at what they have been taking as natural, and it provokes inquiry into the ways that ‘natural’ has been produced.³⁸

In queer ecology, the term ‘natural’ is of course not so innocent. Nicole Seymour refers to the strange position of nature in queer theory in the sense that it is “both abhorred and needed.”³⁹ She refers to nature as one of the most flexible words in the English language, at times being a synonym for heterosexuality or heteronormativity, but sometimes also meaning ‘status’ or ‘essence’.⁴⁰ She also points to the difference in the meaning of “naturalness” in relation to heterosexuality, which seems to be unrelated to “naturalness” in relation to a category such as wilderness.⁴¹ Seymour thus refers to ‘natural’ as “something of a dirty word in queer theory”⁴² and argues for articulating queerness through ‘the natural’ or the non-human world specifically, in order to avoid creating “an antipathy between the queer and the natural”,⁴³ meaning queers to align themselves with the cultural and against the natural.⁴⁴ This is also a tendency in feminist theory, discussed by Stacy Alaimo in *Bodily Natures*. Because women have long been thought of “as creatures mired in ‘nature’”,⁴⁵

³² Morton, “Guest Column: Queer Ecology,” 281.

³³ Myra J. Hird and Noreen Giffney, *Queering the Non/Human* (Abingdon: Taylor & Francis Group, 2008): 5.

³⁴ Jeffery J. Cohen, *Medieval Identity Machines* (University of Minnesota Press, 2003): 38.

³⁵ Hird and Giffney, *Queering the Non/Human*, 5.

³⁶ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Tendencies* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993): 8.

³⁷ Robert Mills, “Whatever you do is a delight to me!": Masculinity, Masochism, and Queer Play in Representations of Male Martyrdom,” *Exemplaria* 13 1 (2001): 3.

³⁸ Carolyn Dinshaw, “Chaucer's Queer Touches / A Queer Touches Chaucer,” *Exemplaria* 7, 1 (1995): 77.

³⁹ Nicole Seymour. *Strange Natures. Futurity, Empathy, and the Queer Ecological Imagination*, (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2013): 4.

⁴⁰ *Ibid*, 4.

⁴¹ *Ibid*, 2.

⁴² *Ibid*, 2.

⁴³ *Ibid*, 2.

⁴⁴ *Ibid*, 3.

⁴⁵ Stacy Alaimo, *Undomesticated Ground: Recasting Nature as Feminist Space* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2019): 2.

which “thrusts woman outside the domain of human subjectivity, rationality, and agency”,⁴⁶ feminist theory has thus worked to create a strong opposition between nature and culture.⁴⁷ This becomes especially apparent in one of the most revolutionary concepts of feminist theory: the distinction between the biological sex and the concept of gender. Morton furthermore states that the feminist separatist territory of ecofeminism, due to its commitment to this biological essentialism, “is grounded on binary difference and thus unhelpful for the kinds of difference multiplication that is queer theory’s brilliance.”⁴⁸ Alaimo suggests:

We must transform the gendered concepts - nature, culture, body, mind, object, subject, resource, agent, and others-that have been cultivated to denigrate and silence certain groups of humans as well as nonhuman life.⁴⁹

The potential for this transformation resides, according to Alaimo, in the notion of transcorporeality, the “contact zone between human corporeality and more-than-human nature”, in which “the human is always intermeshed with the more-than-human world.”⁵⁰ Transcorporeality focuses on the complexity of the materiality of human bodies in a way that ‘the environment’ and ‘the human’ no longer can be considered separate, because “the environment” is not located somewhere out there, but is always the very substance of ourselves.⁵¹ It furthermore opens possibilities for ecological and corporeal theories to come together in productive ways in complex modes of analysis.⁵² This notion of transcorporeality is also fruitful in relation to queer ecology, because it allows to consider the human body as an ecological category in itself, focusing on the human and nonhuman bodies as material sources and their relation with the physical world. As Cohan states, “when bodies become sites of possibility, [...] they are necessarily dispersed into something larger, something mutable and dynamic, a structure of alliance and becoming.”⁵³ Already so engaged with categories of the natural, queerness facilitates the reflection on the boundaries of bodily binaries, such as nature/culture and human/nonhuman. Queer ecology furthermore enables a way of thinking that embraces the idea “that the boundary between life and nonlife is thick and full of paradoxical entities.”⁵⁴

⁴⁶ Alaimo, *Undomesticated Ground*, 2.

⁴⁷ Stacy Alaimo, *Bodily Natures: Science, Environment, and the Material Self* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010): 5.

⁴⁸ Timothy Morton, “Guest Column: Queer Ecology,” 274.

⁴⁹ Alaimo, *Undomesticated Ground*, 13.

⁵⁰ Alaimo, *Bodily Natures*, 2.

⁵¹ *Ibid*, 4.

⁵² *Ibid*, 3.

⁵³ Cohen, *Medieval Identity Machines*, xiii.

⁵⁴ Morton, “Guest Column: Queer Ecology,” 276.

What I propose as powerfully fruitful for practicing queer ecology in performance is a specific approach to theatre making and dramaturgy that works from an explicit entanglement of these three strands: ecology, queerness and dramaturgy, something I recognize in *Estado Vegetal*. I find the theoretical grounds for this engagement with dramaturgy in *The Practice of Dramaturgy: Working on Actions in Performance*, as it ascribes similar categories as above - movement, doing, active, liveness - to the practice of dramaturgy. In doing so, I recognize queer ecological underpinnings which work towards a profound entanglement of queer ecology in dramaturgy.

1.4 Dramaturgy as Working on Actions

Dramaturgical practice and discourse have been subject to constant redefining and reevaluation since the emerging of the postdramatic theatre in the second half of the twentieth century. The established role of the dramaturg and dramaturgical practice stemmed from ideas from the late nineteenth century and were mostly concerned with ideas of guarding the intention of a performance and the meaning that the composition of theatrical elements produced.⁵⁵ Dramaturgy was a practice of analyzing, advising and guarding and the dramaturg was concerned with intellectuality, the drama text and the being keeper of the well-made play. But with the developing of performance practice into overlapping intersecting and interdisciplinary fields, the fixed paradigms of dramaturgy no longer fit the actuality of performance practice. The idea of the dramaturg as a disembodied outside eye appeared obsolete. A new era of dramaturgy arose, both practice and discourse, trying to answer questions about what dramaturgy is, how it manifests and what it offers to artistic production.⁵⁶ In this revisioning of dramaturgy, one established idea related to the difficulty of offering a concrete definition of the term dramaturgy and pinpointing its exact practice. In 1994, Flemish dramaturg Marianne van Kerkhoven, a central figure in dramaturgical discourse as well as in practice, even wrote that “dramaturgy involves everything, is to be found in everything.”⁵⁷ Also, Hans Thies Lehmann additionally writes that “‘the’ dramaturgy of a postdramatic theatre, is unthinkable. The theatre of sense and synthesis has largely disappeared – and with it the possibility of synthesizing interpretation.”⁵⁸ However, it is not an innocent act to open up dramaturgical discourse and practice to possibly entail everything, as it may become an empty and relative term. Still, the growing development of

⁵⁵ Magda Romanska, “Introduction.” *The Routledge Companion to Dramaturgy* ed. Magda Romanska. (New York: Routledge, 2015): p: 2-5.

⁵⁶ Cathy Turner and Synne K. Behrnt, “Editorial”, *Contemporary Theatre Review* 20, 2 (2010): 145-148.

⁵⁷ Marianne van kerkhoven, “Über Dramaturgie, On Dramaturgy, A Propos de Dramaturgie, Over Dramaturgy”, in *Theaterschrift* 5 & 6 (1994): p. 1

dramaturgy indicates a heightened reflection on the practice and discourse and a desire to explore performance practice in terms of its dramaturgical implications.

Dramaturgical discourse has been approached as an expanding field where its function, role and principles are constantly being redefined. A fluid practice thus, to be approached and filled in a way that fits the context. Again, this raises the issues of relativizing dramaturgy because if it can be everything, it is also nothing. So the question remains, how to move away from a term that can be defined in different contexts and practices but at the same time stay away from defining modules and fixed rules? In order to establish the idea of dramaturgy that I will employ throughout this research, I turn to the ideas formulated in *The Practice of Dramaturgy* by Georgelou, Protopapa and Theodoridou. In order to stay away from constantly inventing new and innovative practices and implying a strong division between traditional or old practices that are inferior to the new, they suggest approaching dramaturgy as a singular term. This allows for “a deeper understanding of dramaturgy as a particular process of work that is common to all artistic production.”⁵⁹ Dramaturgy thus becomes a shared practice among all participants in the creative process, which still holds the possibility to be approached in different ways and from different positions in order to connect to a certain specificity. Furthermore, the work suggests to approach dramaturgy as a practice that does not necessarily require the work of a dramaturg, but emphasizes a practice that comes into being in the shared spaces created by all contributors, a space where dramaturgy is practiced as a process that sets a work in motion. Finally, they opt for dramaturgical practice that moves beyond sense-making and theatrical coherence in order to move away from considering dramaturgy as a specific fraction of performance and appreciated in terms of the theatrical coherence it establishes. They suggest “to consider it as a fusion between action and work that operates in a specifically catalytic mode.”⁶⁰ What I would like to argue here is that this way of engaging with dramaturgy is already an ecological one and thus particularly vital for ecological performance. Working on actions becomes a practice through doing. It allows for a practice where connections, structures and relationships can be approached ecologically, because this attitude towards dramaturgy already has an ecological underpinning in itself. As the nonhuman is, in light of ecological catastrophes and climate change, unfolding as alive and forever in motion in our awareness, the boundaries between the world around us and the world we made are crumbling. Thus

⁵⁸ Hans-Thies, Lehmann, *Postdramatic Theatre*, trans. Karen Jürs-Munby (Londen; New York: Routledge, 2006): 25.

⁵⁹ Konstantina Georgelou, Efrosini Protopapa, and Danae Theodoridou, eds, *The Practice of Dramaturgy: Working on Actions in Performance*, Antennae Series, Nr 23 (Amsterdam: Valiz, 2017): 2-3.

⁶⁰ Ibid, 4.

creating the possibility, the urgency even, to imagine a theatre practice in which the human and nonhuman enter at the same time.

1.4.1 The Queer Ecological Principles of Dramaturgy

I am furthermore interested in looking for a way to imagine a queer ecological dramaturgy practice where the work itself is inseparably entangled with the practice of making it, not only practicing queer ecological thinking on stage but submerging it in every vein of the artistic process. My aim here is to point to these interrelations and to lift this research beyond the specificity of *Estado Vegetal* alone to offer a way to imagine a queer ecological theatre practice that entangles all its players.

In *The Practice of Dramaturgy*, three principles of dramaturgy are formulated through which I will start to imagine such a theatre practice because in them, I recognize strong queer ecological underpinnings. The first principle, mobilizing questions, stems from an exercise of answering questions with questions in approaching dramaturgy as “a process that works with questions as its actual material and in this way triggers their very mobilization.”⁶¹ Aiming to shift working individually to togetherness, dis-owning one’s thinking, they relate to Maaïke Bleeker’s notion of ‘thinking no-one’s thought,’ where thinking is understood as “a material practice that proceeds through enactment’, that emerges ‘through something that mediates between people involved’ but also ‘between people and things.’”⁶² The second principle of alienating works to allow a piece to become a mode of experimentation by “developing ‘broken compasses’ that will misguide or misdirect, without revealing a ‘proper’ or ‘expected’ destination, allowing one to be lost, but still getting them somewhere.”⁶³ The process of alienating is by all means a process of wonder and turning the attention towards the capability of dramaturgy to “revers[e] facts, making them strange and difficult to identify” illuminates its queer possibilities. The last principle is that of commoning, describing a practice of ongoing sharing and exchange, creating a certain plurality in the creative process, wondering how to make optimal use of the fact that it is a process of making and thinking with and between many.⁶⁴

The way of engaging with relationality, the constitution of togetherness, enabling and mobilizing processes of wonder, creating a practice that arises, moves and lives between all involved - between many - make clear the queer ecological underpinnings that this approach

⁶¹ Georgelou, Protopapa, Theodoridou, *The Practice of Dramaturgy*, 3.

⁶² Ibid, 5.

⁶³ Ibid. 8.

⁶⁴ Ibid, 10.

of “dramaturgy as a catalytic operation that produces [...] a process of working on actions⁶⁵” has. I furthermore recognize here the proposition of very concrete and practical principles that might work to constitute a queer ecological theatre practice, even allowing for immediate experimentation instead of remaining mere imagination.

1.5 Conclusion

Through an exploration of the stakes of ecological performance and the challenges it poses, this chapter has sought to constitute a more substantial understanding of what queer ecological dramaturgy might entail, arguing for their intrinsic entanglement and possibility to navigate the representational challenges of ecodramaturgy. By its inherently powerful mesh with the nature/culture opposition, queer ecology radically calls into question identity and otherness. This comes together the approach towards dramaturgy proposed by Georgelou, Protopapa and Theodoridou and the corresponding principles as a process of doing, which, as this chapter argued, contains underlying queer ecological grounds.

Having laid out the groundwork for an understanding of queer ecological dramaturgy, the next chapter will examine the dramaturgical procedures of *Estado Vegetal* that derived from a practice of becoming-plant alongside a contextualization of Manuela Infante's theatre practice and approach of the theatre as a space for embodied philosophy.

⁶⁵ Ibid, 2.

Chapter Two: Plant-Based Dramaturgy

What is at stake in this research project are the ways in which ecological performance can transcend questions of mimesis and by practicing queer ecological dramaturgy in all veins of its being. I imagine this coming together not as a juncture or an intersection of territories, but a profound kind of entanglement in which they come into existence together. Therefore, I am not purely concerned with calling into question the ways dramaturgy can be queer ecological or how queer ecology can be employed in dramaturgy. Instead, I propose to focus on the way they come into being and into existence solely in relation to each other, which provides a productive understanding of the interest of ecological performance, which is to question how we encounter the nonhuman and the appropriative gestures towards nature, the environment and the nonhuman of that encounter. At the seemingly paradoxical crashing point of ecology and performance, as described in the previous chapter, Manuela Infante turns towards plant philosophy from which she created *Estado Vegetal*. Even more so, she turned towards ecological thinking itself to think of ways to relate to something that is radically different from us, something radically other, without appropriation and to approach the paradoxical situation given by the representational nature of the theatre.

From the ecological thinking underlying *Estado Vegetal* Infante developed a practice of becoming-plant, a notion closely related from from the notion of becoming-animal, new way of thinking through human's relation to the things around them introduced by Deleuze and Guattari in their work *A Thousand Plateaus*. This practice of becoming-plant informed the process of *Estado Vegetal* and the development of a set of plant-based dramaturgical procedures. This chapter will discuss becoming-animal by Deleuze and Guattari in order to gain an understanding of what it means to practice becoming-plant. From that notion, the dramaturgical procedures developed in *Estado Vegetal* will be discussed. This second chapter works to constitute a contextualization of Manuela Infante's work, *Estado Vegetal* in specific, and to lay down the specificity of the dramaturgical structure that established a practice of becoming-plant.

2.1 *Estado Vegetal*

Estado Vegetal is a plant-piece. One woman, actress Marcela Salinas, ramifies into characters, layering them through polyphonic monologue.⁶⁶ The performance starts with a desk, a chair, a potted, visibly plastic, plant, a microphone stand and some twelve low hanging spotlights. A spotlight turns on and Salinas walks onstage as Mr. Raúl, a

⁶⁶ In multiple program texts explained as "one actress, many voices." See for example: <http://nave.io/programacion/estado-vegetal/>.

municipality's guard in charge of the green space of the borough, and starts describing a motorcycle accident involving a tree and a young man. Supposedly, there was a storm which caused a branch of the tree to touch a power cable beside it – laying there in the same way the motorcyclist was laying on the asphalt – resulting in a power outage, a fire and the motorcyclist crashing into the tree because of the dark. The accident is blamed on a series of unfortunate consequences, starting from the tree's being there in the first place. Because of its unrestrained growing – at a speed so slow that it was unnoticeable by human life around it. Like the tree, *Estado Vegetal* grows further in multiple directions, as a polyphonic monologue of fragmented anecdotes of different characters, all embodied within Salinas, layering speech and time with a loop-pedal. There is a young girl who lives in the house next to tree and stopped the municipality from pruning it because she kept sitting in the tree, and who is now a key witness in the motorcycle accident. With the loop-pedal, the girl is questioned by Mr. Raúl, ending in her revealing a big green ball from one of the plant pots and dropping it on the floor. After, we see Eva, a woman from the neighbourhood committee, frantically telling how she was lifted from her bed by the event. The green ball is placed in the corner of the stage, on a green mat, accompanied by the Eva saying via a voice recording:

When human being are no longer on the face of the earth,
It will take plants only three month to cover everything.
The planet is going to be just like a big green ball.⁶⁷

After, with the loop-pedal again, the mother of the crashed motorcyclist talks about her son in an interrogation, constructing the story in multiple layers of time. Then there is an old woman, tending to her potted houseplants, speaking with them as if they have a 'real' relationship – until the plants start to demand that the woman changes their pots. Her answer is to remove all floorboards from her home so the plants can grow their roots into the earth, ultimately swallowing the house. Later, there is a firefighter – presumably the crashed motorcyclist? – standing in between the scorched, dead branches of a burned down forests consisting of microphone stands. In an almost Shakespearean climactic monologue, he surrenders, in awe of vegetal life, to escape his own animal existence. A living wall of plants appear, applauding the man, before the piece continues with Salinas re-entering the stage covered in leaves and crawling into a big plastic pot. She drops an apple on the floor, referencing one again the Garden of Eden. After, with a bare plant in the pot next to hers, she converses as if two voices. Not layering them with the loop-pedal this time, but switching her voice and physique between the voices. The woman sits under the table for a moment, before setting the stage for the final scene: a big plastic ficus plant is placed in front of a microphone, the woman sitting across from it. The plant talks with multiple voices at once,

discussing the motorcycle accident with the woman, now the mother of the crashed boy, coming to terms with her son's vegetative state. The wall of plants is visible once more, as an auditorium watching the performance from the other side, opposite the human audience. The woman disappears off stage in the dark. The lights turn on, illuminating the stage for a last time with cold white light. We see the desk, the chair, the microphone stand and the potted plants once more. The lights turn off. *Estado Vegetal* ends.

2.2 Becoming-animal: Deleuze and Guattari

As mentioned before, the specific plant-thinking that Infante aimed to practice in this performance was inspired by plant neurobiologist Michael Marder, who suggests to relate to plants by thinking through what is there of plant in humans. The opposite, looking for what is human in plants, puts human affect into plants that might constitute to put them forward as equal, erasing their difference. To escape this, In the TiM-seminar, Infante underscored the experimentation in the artistic process of *Estado Vegetal* which was approached from the question of how to make a vegetal piece that, by embodying certain behaviors and cultures of plants, is a becoming-plant. This philosophical notion of becoming is often explained in aphorisms about nature, something that is always evolving, flowing, moving, never standing still. Thinking through becoming-*something* however, is an idea offered by postmodern French philosophers. In their book *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, an entire plateau (chapter) called “Becoming-Intense, Becoming-Animal, Becoming Imperceptible...” is offered to this new way of thinking about the human-animal relationship. Deleuze and Guattari move away from evolutionist ways of thinking about these relationships, namely through descent and filiation.⁶⁸ Instead, relationships are shaped through alliance, which they call becoming-animal. This concept proposes an understanding of human-animal relationship that is rooted outside of Western Aristotelian science and offers a way to transcend representations in terms of archetypes and classification and instead moves towards “something more secret, more subterranean.”⁶⁹ Becomings are rhizomatic: non-linear, non-hierarchical connections that “produces nothing other than itself⁷⁰” because “a becoming lacks a subject distinct from itself, but also [...] it has no term, since its term in turn exists only as taken up in another becoming of which it is the subject.”⁷¹ The becomings-animal entangle the human and the animal, and all living things beyond that, for “[b]ecoming-animal is only one becoming among others”⁷²:

⁶⁷ Manuela Infante, ‘Estado Vegetal,’ 2017, VIMEO video, 21:59.

⁶⁸ Deleuze and Guattari, 238.

⁶⁹ Ibid, 237.

⁷⁰ Ibid, 238.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid. 272.

A fibre stretches from a human to an animal, from a human or an animal to molecules, from molecules to particles, and so on to the imperceptible. Every fibre is a universe fibre. A fibre strung across borderlines constitutes a line of flight or of deterritorialization.⁷³

Deleuze and Guattari recognize the wavering territory that is treaded with becoming-animal, because "... you don't know what you can make a rhizome with, you don't know which subterranean stem is effectively going to make a rhizome, or enter a becoming, people you desert. So experiment."⁷⁴ It is this call for experimentation I believe Manuela Infante answered in creating *Estado Vegetal* through practicing with, in this case, a becoming-plant: practicing a shifting of fibers leading us from one to other, transforming "one into the other as they pass through doors and thresholds."⁷⁵

2.3 Becoming-plant

This becomes evident in multiple scenes in *Estado Vegetal*. Not portraying a particular character this time, Salinas layers multiple sounds of breathing with the loop-pedal. Accompanied by the moments before-made soundscape, she puts a big potted fiddle leaf fig on the table, sits next to it. She makes it lean over her legs, rolls it down over her legs and feet, onto the floor. Then, she comes down from the table and lays down behind the pot, extending below it as if being its roots, laying there for a second before getting up and taking the green ball from its place, holding it alternately close and away from a microphone, the soundscape increasing and decreasing in volume. Here, it becomes evident that the sounds are made up from her voice, now presented as the voice from the plants. In another scene, an old lady tends to her potted house plants, conversing with them as if she has human relationships with them. We only hear her talking, the plants are soundless, but the lady hears them. The plants demand she sets them free, allowing them to grow into the ground instead of being potted up. In the scene after, Joselino, a man from the community who visited the old lady every now and then, talks about the aftermath of the plants taking over the house and the old lady with it. Although the event is passed on to the audience second hand by Joselino and not visible on stage as such, the audience is presented with the imagine of the woman transforming, together with her houseplants, into a fragment of the big green ball the performance refers to so often, reclaiming the concrete mark humankind left on earth. In another instance, Salinas climbs into a large pot, wearing a leaf-like suit made from felt. The plant next to her sheds its leaves and is thereafter only branches. Salinas converses with the plant, alternating between her voice and that of the plant. In this instance,

⁷³ Ibid, 249.

⁷⁴ Ibid, 251.

⁷⁵ Ibid, 272.

Salinas is at the same time the plant that talks to her as well as the herself, a woman trying to be a plant, trying to understand what it is like to shed leaves, to live seasonally, to move slowly.

2.4 Manuela Infante

Manuela Infante's work is deeply rooted in critical thinking and theory, as this is where Infante takes her inspiration from and the theatre is her way of thinking about these ideas. Creating *Estado Vegetal* resulted in the development of a plant-based dramaturgy, based on a few dramaturgical procedures that were at work in the performance. As she elaborated in the TiM-seminar, these were the result of a path traveled, beginning with the development of a different piece called *Realismo* (2016). The inspiration started from Jane Bennett's *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*, a well-known work in contemporary post-humanism and nonhuman thinking (and using the words of Deleuze and Guatarri). It is concerned with ways to provide agency to the nonhuman. The new materialist ideas in *Vibrant Matter* argue the social agency of things and natural phenomenon. Bennett asserts social and political power to things and thereby providing materiality with vitality.⁷⁶ This is what she calls "thing-power"⁷⁷ and sees as something that is outside, that cannot be represented or comprehended, it is something that cannot be grasped. This vital materiality is something that runs through and across both human and nonhuman bodies. A related territory to this thinking, that also became a source of inspiration for *Realismo*, was that of speculative realism. This, also new materialist, thinking similarly aims to develop new ways of moving beyond perceiving nature and existence solely through the anthropocentric lens and to acknowledge that things exist apart from human relation, all in all reject the Kantian notion that "phenomena depend upon the mind to exist"⁷⁸. With *Realismo*, Infante tried to bring forward a drama of things and objects, a piece where the objects would speak and move for themselves while "posing a critical view of theatrical realism and how we can displace the work from anthropocentrism, towards these new materialisms, envisioning a *neo-realism*."⁷⁹ But whilst practicing these ideas in the theatre, ethical difficulties arose because the structure of privilege remained in place. By staging objects in this way, it was still a situation of giving a voice to the other and allowing them to speak in a specific moment and thus expecting the other to speak somehow on our terms. Moving into the creative process of *Estado Vegetal*, Infante turned towards different methods of working with the nonhuman and

⁷⁶ Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*, (North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2010): p. 3.

⁷⁷ Ibid, 2.

⁷⁸ Lee Braver, *A Thing of This World: A History of Continental Anti-- Realism* (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 2007), 39, as cited in Steven Shaviro, *Universe of Things: On Speculative Realism*, as (University of Minnesota Press, 2010), 5.

searched for ways that moved beyond representation of the other, which already showed its pitfalls with *Realismo*, but did not debouch into a passive documentary structure. What came up was the idea of speculation as imitation, from where Infante decided to “imitate plants with the ‘body’ of the piece, figuring out what of that other can be found in me, instead of what of me can be imprinted onto the other”,⁸⁰ resulting in a strategy of the imitation of plants within the body of the piece.

There are two important elements here that I want to dive into. First, in the Transmission in Motion seminar, Infante stated that she encounters her theatre practice as a form of embodied philosophy in the sense that she sees the theatre as a place to practice thinking, a place that opens up a way to think through doing. Then, the theatre cannot be a representational space, because that would establish a practice of staging something that is innately outside of it. For *Estado Vegetal*, it was not a practice of embodying plants, as one would represent a dramatic character. Instead, Infante puts all elements at work as already entangled with each other, enabling them always and only in relation to each other. The ideas that are being worked with, become materialized in the rehearsal space through this embodiment. That way, they become part of the relationship. In doing so, Infante, developed specific dramaturgical procedures that became the body of the piece first, before there were stories or before there was a script, as she furthermore explained in the seminar. Here, Infante specifically uses the word ‘procedures’ to describe the dramaturgical structure of the piece, as opposed to calling them principles. I sympathize with this explicit distinction, as principles signify more of a static, conceptual unifier, something that is applied to the making process. Procedures point more towards a certain way of doing, something that creates when it is in action. Even more so, something that must be embodied to become alive. This is a thinking that lies very close to the idea of dramaturgy as a practice of working on actions, as I have described in the previous chapter. Maybe even taken a step further: not seeing the dramaturgy as a fusion between action and work in a catalytic mode, but as an embodied practice that enables a further thinking and creating through and in itself. Dramaturgy as working on actions allows for creating a space of embodied thinking, of moving in different directions, of creating new connections. It opens up performance as a space for thinking, a place for embodied philosophy.

Estado Vegetal is a vegetal piece: “imitating the vegetal with the work, looking for what is or could be vegetal in us.”⁸¹ To approach this objective, Infante turned to plant-philosopher Michael Marder and his work *Plant-thinking: a Philosophy of Vegetal Life*. Marder states that

⁷⁹ Laurel V. McLaughlin, “*Estado Vegetal*, a Gesture of Imitation,” 31.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

humans have regarded plants through the evolutionary history of human kind, establishes vegetal life as less developed or less distinctive than their animal and human associates, thus making them readily subjects for manipulation and exploitation.⁸² Marder poses the problem that because we see no resemblance of human life in plants, we fail to grant them worth.⁸³ However, encountering plants in terms of their humanity would be an act of appropriation, as these ideas put human affect onto plants to make them equal, and making them equal erases their difference. Marder thus explores the possibilities of how we can encounter plants and in that “maintain and nurture, without fetishizing it, their otherness in the course of this encounter?”⁸⁴ In his work, he establishes a certain plant-thinking that allows us to approach these questions by focusing on what is plant in us. Plant thinking moves beyond claiming or appropriation, as it situates itself “at the fulcrum of its world⁸⁵,” allowing worlds to intersect and to maintain their otherness.⁸⁶ Through this plant-thinking, humans can relate to plants in a way that the plant, this other, is always non-exhaustive in that relationship.

2.5 Plant-Based Dramaturgical Procedures

From this plant-thinking, Infante developed, together with Marcela Salinas, five dramaturgical procedures that have come to be known as the plant-based dramaturgy.

The first notion of plant-thinking that was practiced, was the idea that plants are not individuals but multitudes, which resulted in the first procedures. Since plants cannot run away from predators, their survival strategy is to be able to be divided and thus to be multitude. In *Estado Vegetal*, multitude as a dramaturgical procedure manifested itself in the loop-pedal and the writing process of the piece itself. Infante describes the writing process as something that happened between herself, the loop-pedal and Marcela Salinas, the one actress in the piece. With the loop-pedal, they created a polyphonic actress that could embody all voices. Here, Infante refrains from the word ‘characters’ because she wanted to create a monologue containing multitudes.

The idea of multitude is closely tied to the procedure of branching. Plants grow up towards the light and their roots grow down into the earth, endlessly extending and never coming back to the same centre. Working from this procedure meant that there was no unity in the

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Michael Marder, *Plant-thinking: A Philosophy of Vegetal Life* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013): 2-3.

⁸³ Michael Marder, *Plant-Thinking*, 3.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid, 8.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

piece, there was not a linear story revolving around some kind of conceptual centre and the story developing in a trajectory towards a resolution - as one would expect following classic dramatic structure. In *Estado Vegetal*, events are branching out, moving to an exterior, one thing evolving from the other. This is evident in the structure of the scenes, where one scene evolves from another scene or by a question posed in a previous scene. Infante also stated that when she was asked to cut *Estado Vegetal* in order to make it an installation, she noticed that because of this branching structure, it was possible for the entire performance to grow again from one scene, similar to plants. All elements of a plant are in every element itself, so it has the ability to grow a new plant when a leaf is cut. Their modular structure is so that all basic functions are replicated in every bit of them, without having a centre. By the dramaturgical structure of branching, each scene of *Estado Vegetal* can grow the performance again, because all elements of every scene are in every scene itself.

This is close to another procedure, the practice of modularity, which stems from the idea that plants consists of modules that repeat themselves infinitely. This came into *Estado Vegetal* in the way that all voices use the same sentences, meaning they use the same words to tell different stories. Thus, these sentences become modules that can be applied in every scene, being repeated and being different at the same time. Also, modularity is also found in the way the scenes are constructed to somehow also survive on their own. Thus, there are eight or nine scenes that are self-contained in the way that they are constructed and thus also independent, constructing them as modules as well.

Another procedure is that of phototrophy, which describes the way plants move towards the light. This is another procedure where Infante disrupts the theatrical machine as we know it, in the way that we are used to the lights following the actors. In *Estado Vegetal*, however, the actress only moves when the light indicates her to or shows her where she can go.

Lastly, we find the procedure of sedimentation or layering, that becomes evident in the use of the loop-pedal. This constituted a way of storytelling that is not linear, and again moves our understanding of dramatic narrative structure, but is instead piling up time. Time is not moving forward, but rather piling up information in one specific moment, adding layers that are all connected and related to another. This opens up the network of actors of that moment in the now in a process of accumulation.

What we see here is thus, as Laurel McLaughlin calls it, a gesture of imitation. Plant behavior is used to inform the dramaturgical structure of the piece and, even more so, becoming an integrated part of the body of the piece. This idea of plant-thinking led Infante to question how to make a vegetal performance piece that is actually a work that is becoming-plant by embodying plant cultures and behaviors.

2.6 Conclusion

This chapter contextualized Infante's theatre practice from the territory of new materialism and plant neurobiology. Through an understanding of the notion of becoming-animal from Deleuze and Guattari, the practice of becoming-plant resulted in a number of plant-based dramaturgical procedures which came about from a profound entanglement of plant-based theory, ecological thought and dramaturgical practice establishing a theatre practice of embodied philosophy, which, as I have argued, touches greatly upon the approach towards dramaturgy as proposed in *The Practice of Dramaturgy*.

The next chapter will consider these plant-based procedures through an analysis of *Estado Vegetal* from the perspective of queer ecological dramaturgy. Finally, it will work to carve out an understanding of the possibilities and implications of queer ecological dramaturgy.

Chapter Three: Queer Ecological Dramaturgy in *Estado Vegetal*

In this chapter, I will analyze *Estado Vegetal* from the perspective of queer ecology in order to expose the possibilities of a queer ecological dramaturgy. I will argue the queer underpinnings of the practice of becoming-plant, explored through the notions of intra-actions by Karen Barad and becoming-with by Donna J. Haraway. Both these notions provide a field of tension for ecological thought, a tension that I consider to be queer, illuminating the inherent intimacy of queer theory and ecology that comes together in queer ecology. Here, a different way of thinking through becoming is offered - a way of queering - that *Estado Vegetal* makes explicitly evident. By means of its queer ecological entanglements, this performance offers a way of thinking through the theatrical machine, through normative dramatic models of theatre, about the challenges of representation and thinking through binaries of nature/culture and the human-nonhuman relationship - closing in on eradicating anthropocentrism from the theatre.

Lastly, I will turn back to the approach to dramaturgy offered in *The Practice of Dramaturgy* in order to form a final understanding of the possibilities and implications of queer ecological dramaturgy in practice.

3.1 Conceptual Tensions

Donna J. Haraway offers a critique on Deleuze and Guattari's notion of becoming-animal. Expecting to find an ally in becoming-animal when writing about companion species, Haraway actually discovers more of an enemy, describing becoming-animal as "a symptomatic morass for how not to take earthly animals— wild or domestic— seriously"⁸⁷ and accusing them of "the profound absence of curiosity about or respect for and with actual animals."⁸⁸ Instead, Haraway proposes the notion of becoming-with. Although also aligned with rhizomatic thinking, Haraway describes this as a game of string figures "proposing and enacting patterns for participants to inhabit, somehow, on a vulnerable and wounded earth."⁸⁹ In curious games of giving and receiving patterns, multispecies players are obliged to pay attention to their entanglement, making each other available to events. This is what Haraway calls "the dance of becoming with."⁹⁰ It is in this dance of encounters, in this game

⁸⁷ Donna Haraway, *When Species Meet* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota press, 2007): 29.

⁸⁸ Ibid, 27.

⁸⁹ Donna Haraway, *Staying With The Trouble: making kin in the Chthulucene* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016): 10.

⁹⁰ Donna Haraway, *When Species Meet*, 27.

of relays and returns, giving and receiving, that partners are.⁹¹ Recognizing that “to be one is always to become-with many.” Species of all kinds, living and nonliving, do not precede their meeting, but play string figure games where their being in the world is constituted in intra-action.⁹² Intra-action is Karen Barad's idea that “individuals do not preexist as such but rather materialize in intra-action.” Contrasting interaction, which assumes causality and the existence of pre-established bodies in action with each other, intra-action goes against the assumption the independent or prior existence of individuals, but instead questions how differences materialize, how individuals are made, recognizing that all things are constantly existing in exchange and difference with each other.⁹³ Intra-actions establish agential separability, making it possible to re-open and refigure of ontological determinations through, what Barad calls quantum entanglements: “the (ontological) inseparability of agentially intra-acting components.⁹⁴” It is in their iterative intra-activity that matter is factored as an agentive element where identity and difference are thoroughly reworked. Here, Barad arrives at nature's intra-acticity and nature's queer performativity, stating that “identity is diffracted through itself” because “identity is multiple within itself.” She uses queer to go beyond identity as a relation between entities that are understood to precede those relations, but “to make the point that their very “species being,” as it were, makes explicit the queering of “identity” and relationality.⁹⁵”

The tension that becoming-with and intra-action create with their predecessors becoming-animal and interaction, provides a powerful playground for experimentation, delving into the hazardous grounds that form the territory of queer ecology, although only made explicit by Barad. Striking are the explanations in terms of movements, of back and forth, giving and receiving, cutting things together-apart, also very present in the notion of transcorporeality.

From this tension, I would like to return to *Estado Vegetal* and its practice of becoming-plant. I would like to argue that becoming-plant is, due to its plant nature, already a becoming-with. To become plant is always to become with many, because plants are multiple - leaving the uncanny feeling of queerness.⁹⁶ It is this rupture, this tension, this taking apart-together, that

⁹¹ Ibid, 12.

⁹² Haraway, *Staying with the trouble*, 13.

⁹³ Karen Barad, “Intra-actions,” interview by Adam Kleinman, *Mousse Magazine* 34 (2012): 2.

⁹⁴ Barad, *Nature's Queer Performativity*, 125.

⁹⁵ Ibid, 126.

⁹⁶ The word ‘uncanny’ pops up more often to describe the disillusioning, demystifying feeling that is evoked by “the touch of queer” – as it is referred to in Hird and Giffney's *Queering the Non/Human*. Also in *Queer Dramaturgies: International Perspectives on Where Performance Leads Queer* edited by Alyson Campbell and Stephen Farrier, uncanny is used to describe the reality queer dramaturgy brings forth.

is queer. As Morton also underscores, queer ecology “isn't soft and squishy like many of the organic metaphors” that are presented in postmodern theories because life, and nature, are “catastrophic, monstrous, nonholistic, and dislocated, not organic, coherent, or authoritative.”⁹⁷

3.2 Queer Nature

Continuing down this path, I will have to declare the actuality of nature's queer existence. For it is something that does not need to be imagined or argued for - it is a fact. French landscape architect Céline Baumann commenced a three year research project called *Queer Nature*, in which she explored the rare intimate behaviour of the botanical world. In a podcast by Camden Art Centre's online program called *The Botanical Mind: Art, Mysticism and the Cosmic Tree*,⁹⁸ and in an essay elaborating on this research, Baumann discusses this project, explaining the queerness of nature and the nature of queerness. At the end of the seventeenth century scientist Camerarius wrote the first modern publication on the sexuality of plants, used in the eighteenth century by botanist Linneaus as a basis for his work on the sexual classification of plants.⁹⁹ Plants can be unisexual, bisexual, hermaphroditic. They can combine different genders, which can evolve over time. Their sexuality is fluid. Some plants are unisexual, meaning that a certain species can have either male or female variants. Baumann names, for example, yew trees, where the female plants have red berries and the male plants do not. Plants can also be bisexual, meaning that they are both male and female. Bisexual plants have different looking male and female organs on the same tree. This occurs for example in spruce trees and birch. Over time, these plants developed hermaphroditism, where male and female organs are gathered in what botanists call a 'perfect' flower. Nowadays most plants we know are hermaphroditic, for example, tulips, roses, hibiscus, hostas, and many fruit trees. What is also striking in plants is that these categories are not fixed. For example, the pompom-shaped flowers of the wild carrot (*daucus carota*) contain male parts on the inner circles of the flower, but hermaphroditic parts on the outer circles, making the plant both hermaphroditic and male at the same time. The bladder campion (*Silene vulgaris*) has bulbous chalice-like flowers that are male, female and hermaphroditic at the same time. The yew tree is transgender, being male at the beginning of its growth and becoming female when it reaches its sexual maturity. The

⁹⁷ Morton, “Guest Column: Queer Ecology,” 275.

⁹⁸ The Botanical Mind: Art, Mysticism and The Cosmic Tree as an online project was developed in response to the Covid-19 pandemic, as the intended exhibition was not possible due to the closure of the gallery. Camden Art Centre launched the exhibition as an online program with artists commissions, podcasts, images, audio, films and text “expanding on and enriching the ideas and issues informing the show.” See www.botanicalmindonline.nl.

⁹⁹ Celine Baumann, “Queer Nature,” *archithese* (2020): 82.

classification of the sexuality of plants in the eighteenth century was a scandalous endeavour. Some botanists were even using terms like marriage and weddings to describe plant reproduction, which meant that one male and two female part in different or the same plants could marry each other. This, of course, did not fit the heteronormative preferential idea of marriage, gender and sexuality. Baumann conclusively states that saying that nature is queer, is thus actually a fact. There is always the tension between what is natural and what is not, but in the plant world there is a lot of diversity, richness, creativity, imagination, fluidity in genders, sexualities and identities - there is queerness. To practice a becoming-plant is thus also practicing becoming-queer, since being plant is always also being queer.

3.3 Queer Ecology in *Estado Vegetal*

So, how to imagine a queer ecological theatre? Through an analysis of *Estado Vegetal*, I will argue that it is a theatre that makes explicit the queering of identity, of the human and the nonhuman alike through a practice of differentiating: bringing the human and nonhuman onto the stage, being significantly other to each other, in specific difference. Such activities in theatre work this explicitness further, underscoring its performativity because it is being performed. These territories (the theatre and queer ecology) come together in specific entanglements, as a worlding practice. Barad uses certain “queer critters” to explore nature’s queer performativity, Haraway calls for experimentation and practice when it comes to becoming-with and Alaimo imagines transcorporeality as opposed to corporeality as a tool for analysis of bodily natures. The theatre, when approached as a site for experimentation, might answer to all these calls as it has the possibility to make explicit the materialization of differences, of identities of categories and, in a gesture of queering, take them together-apart.

Below, I will explore the dramaturgical procedures of *Estado Vegetal* through this queer ecological lens, pointing out certain elements in the performance where these entanglements become specifically explicit.

First, I would like to delve deeper into the idea of becoming-queer through the practice of becoming-plant. *Estado Vegetal* works from specifically formulated procedures that are informed by plant intelligence. The procedures of being multiple and modular are specifically located within the body of the actress by, as said before, ramifying into different characters, layering characters through sound and voice. It is the body that becomes queer through becoming a mechanism (plant) that is queer in itself. It is a body that becomes multiple through becoming a mechanism that is multiple in itself, thus becoming-plant is always a becoming-with, a becoming-many. The queer underpinnings of this becoming are

furthermore apparent in the visibility of difference and actually, the visibility of failure. The actress never fully becomes plant, which is actually somewhat of the dramatic climax of the piece: the firefighter in the burned down forest (made of microphone stands) continually exclaiming “I am animal!” in great frustration and desperation. Becoming-plant is more of a desire, an envy. On the other hand, there are no plants on stage at all - nature is not really there. All plants are plastic, artificial, *unnatural*. The plants are clear representations, imitations, as we are used to in the theatre. The sets and decor are fake, re-created, mirroring reality. Even in a performance that calls itself a vegetal piece, it is no different - situated still in a circus of representation. It is almost alienating, deceiving even. But when looked upon closer, I believe this adds another layer in the human-plant relationship *Estado Vegetal* proposes.

The clearly plastic leaves in a way that emphasize their materiality, which may even be a part of a practice of becoming-human. In the last scenes of the play, the actress sits across from one of the big plants in a conversation about being in a vegetative state, but also in other scenes the plants are given a human voice to speak with, thus acquiring a certain humanity. In these moments there is a certain tension of “material interchanges between bodies.¹⁰⁰” I do not believe this argument holds up particularly well, precisely because the plants are fake. However, I do believe that this adds another layer of tension to the human-plant relationship, exploding and imploding it at the same time. Barad calls for “a way of thinking that is not derivative of some fixed notion of identity or even fixed spacing,” since beings do not precede their intra-actions, as that is where they materialize - in their intra-activity. *Estado Vegetal* brings precisely the opposite on stage, namely exactly the boundaries that are in place in their constitution, exactly the binary opposition between the human and nonhuman, and taking it completely together-apart. Looking for what is plant in human and also what is not human in plant. It is this comparative tension, where they are “both the same and not the same at all.¹⁰¹” This also touched upon a remark by Infante in the TiM-seminar, when she talked about her search for a practice of relationship in theatre making that does not erase the other in that relationship. The other needs to somehow also remain obscure and inaccessible, non-exhausted. It is a practice of respecting otherness, respecting that there are areas that are unavailable for understanding or relating to - allowing the other to remain other, to leave something in the dark.

Working within these tensions of conceptions, perceptions and understandings in a queer reworking of it all, is furthermore entangled with the theatrical machine itself. *Estado Vegetal*

¹⁰⁰ Stacy Alaimo, *Bodily Natures*, 16.

¹⁰¹ Haraway, *Staying With The Trouble*, 13.

offers a way of practicing queering and ecological thought from within the theatre, therein answering to the representational challenges that ecodramaturgy poses. To use Haraway's words, *Estado Vegetal* is "staying with the trouble," exploring "possibilities of partial recuperation and getting on together¹⁰²" by working from the trouble itself - precisely from the tension of representation and nature. *Estado Vegetal* works within the theatrical machine, clearly hinting towards representational elements of the theatre 'as we know it', meaning linear, Aristotelian dramaturgies with underlying modern and anthropocentric ideologies. However, all these elements are becoming-plant. There are two points here that I want to emphasize.

First, the becoming-plant is not a harmonious practice of transformation. It is disruptive, incoherent, violent. In one of the most powerful scenes of the performance, Salinas is a firefighter (supposedly Manuel, the boy who died in the motorcycle-tree accident), standing in a burned down forest of microphone stands. The man, in a big monologue, realizes his shortcomings as a human, desperately asking to become vegetable:

God, I beg of you:
 Absolve me of the animals kingdom's forms!
 Give me something of theirs!
 May my lungs beat instead.
 May the tips of my fingers breathe,
 May my stomach think!
 May I feed with my skin, so that eating is more like touching than devouring.
 May the ever-changing forms of my body be my only language,
 So I become incapable of lying.
 May death be something that occurs in my chest, while my back, in turn, is born,
 So I never get the absurd idea that we are moving forward.
 May the passage of time be nothing more than a new ring in my trunk,
 Every memory a layer of bark that covers me,
 So that I may touch my rugged memory.
 Teach me... here... now, with what is left of you and what is left of me, how to
 speak in chemicals.
 Open me for your chemical recitation.
 Teach me how to speak in combinations of bromine and water,
 Rather than in highs and lows.
 I want to use signifiers that taste of iodine.
 Signs that can only be deciphered with touch.
 Sentences that if exposed to the sun,
 Refract into mineral spectrums of blues and greens.
 I want to deliver speeches of poison.
 Let us recite poems whose lines only rhyme their levels of acidity.¹⁰³

The violent desperation of this scene inhabits a certain failure of becoming and, at the same time, seems to be the most exemplary of normative dramatic modes of theatre: a cathartic

¹⁰² Ibid, 10.

¹⁰³ Manuela Infante, "Estado Vegetal," 2017, Vimeo video, 59:09.

monologue of the main character, the peripeteia in the dramatic action. By residing so strongly in these modes, a process of becoming and a state of utmost dramatic representation, they are both none or the other. In a sense taking apart nature and culture, and with it its heteronormative, anthropocentric history that has seeped into and shape the theatre that is presented here, mingling them up at the same time, radically questioning the binary. It is this radical being non nor the other that is a queer ecological doing.

Furthermore, other elements of *Estado Vegetal* hint in similar ways to the queering of the theatre itself through the practice of becoming-plant. Characters are not portrayed by different actors, but exist in one single person who becomes multiple. There is a story unfolding, but it does not unfold linearly: it ramifies, moving towards the light. Scenes morph into each other, always consisting of the same elements by means of reassembling the decor pieces into different constructions but also in the characters using the same words, reconstructing the phrases from previous characters and sentences that return in new contexts. Especially in the first scenes of the play, it is very evident that the next character that is presented is the one that is mentioned first by the previous character, composing by association. This may touch upon what Lehmann calls a theatre of metamorphosis. However, what he describes is “the concept of action dissolves in favour of occurrences, of continual metamorphosis, the space of actions appears as a landscape continually changed by different states of light, appearing and disappearing objects and figures.¹⁰⁴” In this, I find a crucial difference in *Estado Vegetal*, namely that the concept of action is still very much present, however: it is plant action. By means of leaving these tensions in place, *Estado Vegetal* provides another layer of its queer implications, offering a way of thinking about ecological theatre from within. Approaching these tensions as a playground of difference. The practice of becoming-plant, of becoming-many, queers the ecological theatre from the theatrical machine itself. The plastic plants representing real plants or the microphone stand representing a burned down forest are both playing with the idea of representation, still existing very clearly within the realm of mimesis, but pushing against its borders. Playing with the natural and the unnatural and our perception of it. This is precisely what conjures a queering effect: it is the sense that an unnatural thing is placed to represent nature itself, working next to a body entangled in a practice of becoming-plant, in a state of becoming that nature. In this way, *Estado Vegetal* brings forward the most natural thing seen on this stage to be the body of the actress, in real flesh and blood, breathing, living, natural.

¹⁰⁴ Lehmann, *Postdramatic Theatre*, 81.

3.4 Imagining Queer Ecological Dramaturgy

In this research, I have established a queer ecological dramaturgy that becomes evident in *Estado Vegetal*. I recognize the specificity of this performance and the unilateral implications it puts upon my inquiry by resolving this project around one performance only. However, this performance does make explicit the very possibilities of such a queer ecological dramaturgy. Therefore, I would like to dedicate this last section to explore the possibilities of queer ecology as a dramaturgical practice, relating it to the way of approaching dramaturgy and the formulated principles in *The Practice of Dramaturgy*.

What is of great value and very explicit in *Estado Vegetal* is the layered and multi-faceted entanglement of queer ecology in the entirety of the creative process as in the work itself. The theatre is approached as a site for experimentation, of practicing embodied philosophy and work with, in a profound process of togetherness all agents involved, human and nonhuman alike. This allows for artistic experimentation as a world making process, where relations and connections can be made, both ecology and queer theory “demanding intimacies with other beings¹⁰⁵,” but also remains a space for difference. The theatre proves a valuable site for this kind of ecological practice precisely because of its inherent relationality.

There are also more visible connections with the principles of dramaturgy described in *The Practice of Dramaturgy*, such as Morton imagining “life-forms as a *mesh*, a nontotalizable, open-ended concatenation of interrelations that blur and confound boundaries at practically any level” and the objective of queer ecology to visualize what the mesh is not - which is precisely what can be practiced through the principle of alienating.

The preference of Infante to work with procedures instead of principles is a noticeable difference between the two. However, in *The Practice of Dramaturgy* the principles are formulated as means to mobilize artistic processes by working on actions, which similarly to procedures point to a way of doing, something that is comes into being by doing. This need to embody in order to come alive might hold the possibility of enacting ecology, engaging with the material body as a site for queer ecology.

¹⁰⁵ Morton, “Guest Column: Queer Ecology,” 273.

Conclusion

This research is entirely inspired by *Estado Vegetal* and the, dare I say, life-changing Transmission in Motion seminar with Manuela Infante that I feel privileged to have attended. I was intrigued by this performance and Infante's exciting approach to theatre, as I saw this great alliance between plants and humans, coming together but never being quite the same. This inspiration directed me into the realm of ecological performance. When I began to explore this territory, I quickly stumbled upon the challenges of representation, which might have led to performance artists veering out into different, more embodied, modes of performance practice. However, *Estado Vegetal* was very much taking place in the theatre, not only embracing the challenges of ecological performance but, even more so, disrupting them. Excited to explore this further and from the hunch that there was something queer about the human-plant relationship in *Estado Vegetal*, I began to explore the practice of becoming-plant as a clear descendant of Deleuze and Guattari's notion of becoming-animal. A question that kept coming up in these early stages of the research was what kind of order I should attribute to the fields I aim to relate to each other: is ecology queer or is queer theory ecological? Fortunately, I found my answer quickly in Timothy Morton's article on queer ecology which, excited by his description of queer ecology as "a fantastic explosion," provided me with the perfect interrelated territory to form the grounds of my research topic. I decided to mirror this theoretical journey in the first chapter of the research, since it did illuminate a clear theoretical and practical context of ecological performance that I was aiming to contribute to. It allowed me to break open the already queer underpinnings that I recognized in ecological performance discourse confirming the powerful possibilities of queer ecology.

The theme of entanglements immersed quickly after the decision to explore queer ecological dramaturgy, providing the relational perspective that I was trying to argue for but also setting traps along the way. Often I found myself trying to untangle the web of connections, searching for some kind of starting point and or the place of intersection. I realized, however, that there is no beginning, only an intra-active process of doing and becoming, recognizing the great queer ecological tool of taking together-apart and its inherent connection to the theatre as a space for embodied philosophy and experimentation.

This research has explored the possibilities of queer ecological dramaturgy through an analysis of *Estado Vegetal*. Chapter one provided a context and specification of the understanding I was trying to cultivate through ecological performance, queer ecology and the beautiful approach to and ready-to-use principles of dramaturgy by Georgelou,

Protopapa and Theodoridou, to which I illuminated the queer ecological underpinnings. In chapter two, I traced Infante's theatre practice through the field of new materialism and the practice of becoming-plant as related to notion of becoming-animal by Deleuze and Guattari. The chapter furthermore elaborated on the dramaturgical procedures that resulted from the practice of becoming-plant, which also demonstrate the profound interconnectedness of ecological dramaturgical thinking. Chapter three illustrates the practice of becoming-plant as a queer ecological one, working from the conceptual tensions coming from the notions of becoming-with and intra-actions.

At the start of this research, I was trying to find ways to analyse the way *Estado Vegetal* went beyond aiming to represent nature on stage but instead finding out that it did precisely the opposite. It started as a specific inquiry about how *Estado Vegetal* provided a new way of thinking about and engaging with ecological performance that created a way out of the realm of representation - but discovering the possibilities of staying exactly within it. In a queering exercise the performance is 'staying with the trouble', working from within the boundaries and the oppositions. From a thinking through queer ecology, *Estado Vegetal* allows a way of relating to the other in a process of differentiating, becoming significantly other in explicit difference in a dramaturgy practice where everything is part of everything and nothing comes from nothing. By claiming the theatre as a site for embodied philosophy, as an experimental space where, from an ecological perspective, everything comes into existence in relation with each other, thus creating a performance that is not being merely 'about' ecology. *Estado Vegetal* shows a multi layered queer ecology. In the performance itself but also in the dramaturgical structure of the piece, in the coming into existence of the practice itself. It runs through every vein of the performance, breaking apart and putting together ecology as queer and queer as ecological - but also the theatre itself.

Through an analysis of *Estado Vegetal* I have brought about a way to consider the possibilities of queer ecological dramaturgy. I imagine queer ecological dramaturgy as an inescapable part of any post-anthropocentric ecological theatre but I also see the possibilities of queer ecological dramaturgy to break open the rehearsal space and the process of creative production. To work with procedures and principles that mobilize a process of radical wondering, calling into question all sorts of identities, roles and categorization. Engaging with artistic production not as a brain that makes decisions for all parts of the body, but as a nontotalizable mesh. By doing so, queer ecological dramaturgy might veer into other modes of performance and create its fantastic explosion there. The theatre, however, does not need to be considered a dangerous site for ecological performance anymore. Instead, it might be the perfect place to explode.

But now, let us expand into our vegetative state:

Never reaching the full circle of "This is I".
"This is I."
To be, to grow, always, further out.
So that, that thing called I is only the memory of a seed.
To be oneself,
To be just one-self,
Is only a seasonal event.

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