

What you will find on the following pages is a so-called Co-Constructed Conversation between *Ricerca X* and *radical_hope_house*.

>>> [more on the CoCoCo-score](#)

Workspace Ricerca X (since 2016) is a platform for supporting and developing artistic research and dramaturgy in the field of choreography and performance in Italy. It moves from the intention of strengthening a culture of artistic research in Italy, by activating spaces for practicing an approach to work that is alternative to production dynamics, instead focusing on the weaving of alliances and the circulation of knowledge generated in artistic practices. [>>> more](#)

radical_hope (since 2010) creates and manages frameworks for research and co-creation. Special attention is paid to artistic practices and the questions of how they emerge, what they render im/possible, and by/for whom they are developed and become meaningful (and/or not). [>>> more](#)

Un/Taming Desire

– a conversation as fundamental research

(With Ambra Pittoni, Elisa D'Amico, Francesco Dalmasso, Heike Langsdorf, Simone Basani and, silently witnessing, Alice Ciresola and Anthony Chang.)

Letter by Heike to Ricerca X / Spring 2025

Dear Francesco, Elisa and Ambra,

I'll start by sharing some resonant thoughts: reflections on what I think is "at work" in a similar way at *Ricerca X* and *radical_hope_house*. "Similar" in the sense of "recognizable" — I don't want to compare our fields of work but rather to open a conversation with you about how we live with the way we work.

TRUST

What struck me when I received your invitation at the end of 2023 was its pragmatic tone which, I noticed, I trusted immediately.

The moment you contacted me, you were applying for a grant, to create the conditions needed to sustain the research climate that you have nurtured for years. Dedicating your energies very efficiently at this moment, being short of time at that moment, you decided to trust the judgment of others by asking them to give you tips about who to invite—which meant trusting those you had worked with before. This notion of trust was something that recurred throughout the process we shared.

STRUCTURE

The way you structured the three weeks we had available for exchange and work at Lavanderia a Vapore made me realize once again that there's always "so much more" going on in our lives than a single (research) project, no matter how relevant it might feel.

If we hadn't been able to follow the schedule you suggested during our time in Collegno, we would likely have lost all opportunity to meet and connect "in practice". This seemingly banal schedule — a few lines that create time slots and titles for work sessions (which, admittedly, seemed mysterious to me before the meeting) — felt, to me, like an act of real care.

Creating a schedule for a group of (many) people is a huge undertaking. It's the challenge of anticipating and balancing our own individual life/work rhythms schedules, so they can be compromised in favor of shared time.

HOSTS, HOSTED

Another fact I keep thinking about is that the three of you who are hosting Ricerca X are, in turn, hosted by other people (especially, I think, by Chiara Organtini¹) who work for Lavanderia a Vapore – Centro di Residenza per la danza in Collegno. We discussed the possibilities and difficulties of being hosted by a large institution — and of becoming an ex-stitution² within it. That conversation changed my view on what it means to become part of a *hyperstructure*.

Not that I would abandon the interest of radical_hope to operate within a larger institution, but I do have to acknowledge the fact that we are operating at different stages of development. Since radical_hope is active in Brussels (and smaller cities in Belgium), I consider affiliation with one of the larger institutions to be an important and meaningful experiment. The chances of such an experimental reality becoming structurally supported in the near future are slim. Nevertheless, your "story" confirms what I consider as urgently necessary: to build the most sustainable relationships and connections possible with both funded and non-funded groups or organizations.

¹ Chiara Organtini is a curator and creative producer and the current project manager of Lavanderia a Vapore (Collegno, Italy).

² This term we borrow from Florian Schneider's "(Extended) Footnotes On Education", <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/14/61318/extended-footnotes-on-education/>

FATIGUE

I recall you talking about a growing fatigue linked to the conditions of this institutional arrangement. At that point, I realized I was trapped in my own idealization of you as a guest hosted by a larger institution.

This year, with radical_hope, we are dis/engaging in what we call *INTERVAL* — a much needed time to refocus (as the unfunded platform for artistic research and co-creations that we are) on the intentions we had when we started out in 2020, and to ensure we have the necessary resources to keep moving forwards.

I wonder if two places like Ricerca X and radical_hope could "do less – together."

A project that never really got off the ground, but repeatedly inspired me, was "Bonding Houses": people working with a place/space first articulate their needs and then their shared resources. On this basis, ecologically responsible and mutually supportive exchange and/or cooperation processes emerge.

And in this spirit, we would like to ask you three questions with radical_hope – in a conversation we'd plan in the near future.

Conversation in May 2025

(Edited in Spring 2026, with the proofreading help of Alice MacKenzie)

How do you find orientation again and again: how do you decide how much of your time and energy you can give to Ricerca X and what to hold "separated" from that sphere of work?

Ambra: One year ago, we asked ourselves more or less the same question: how much time are we, ideally, open to dedicate to Ricerca X? We settled on about 3 to 4 months per year.

Generally speaking, we like to believe that we can always separate Ricerca X from our personal lives.

One factor that helps us keep boundaries, is knowing that the time we spend together "in residency" is set.

What is harder is estimating how much time and energy it takes to prepare for that set residency period. But the practical exercise of pinning down the amount of time that we spend on preparation, organization and logistics, is always helpful.

Francesco: When negotiating with ourselves how much time and energy we can afford to invest, it helps that the basic format of Ricerca X is a residency period of around 4 weeks per year. We try not to go too far beyond that.

Of course, there are other activities we desire to engage with. But so far, we manage to tame these desires – and stick more to what is realistically possible - always bearing in mind that what we give to the project is already quite a lot. This way we avoid overloading ourselves and we remain true to the basic design and core objective. On

the other hand, the attitude of Ricerca X is quite deeply embedded in our lives. We carry this investment with us through other work endeavors: it serves as a lens or filter, with which we keep observing or reading what we do beyond Ricerca X.

Ambra: I want to add one very important detail: we don't have a physical space. If you don't have a physical space, you have to manifest something that "makes" a space: this can be hosting, for instance. And still, the time for this "space making" is always limited. This has pros and cons.

On the positive side you know when you have to finish, so you have to be very sharp, and then it's done.

On the downside: You can't afford a more loose approach – one that would allow for "the unforeseen", for the things that weren't supposed to happen. You know all too well what's possible when you have a relatively rigid framework. And this, I think, really shapes our way of working-thinking, you see...

Yeah – we appear and "manifest" for a set time and then somehow we disappear. We are, in this sense, nomadic.

Elisa: In order to develop an sustainable way of working we really had to ground ourselves in the structures that we found.

These found structures, of course, are not something that we simply repeat without questioning. Nevertheless, they serve as a solid foundation we can stand on, providing us with a certain sense of balance while navigating our relationship to and with the project.

The structure doesn't have to be invented from scratch, we don't need to start from zero each time. Instead we can invest in refining already existing patterns, while also finding new ones.

Perhaps one way we do that is by sticking to the external position of the observer and facilitator within the residency periods.

Simone: I would like to ask you, Ricerca X, if you could briefly describe how you would identify yourselves?

Francesco: As *Ricerca X*? Yes, that might be useful! Okay how do we identify?

Our basic description of Ricerca X is a platform for supporting and developing artistic research in Italy. This mainly happens through shared research residencies: every year we invite a group of artist-researchers, to share a few weeks of time in and around the studio in Collegno, a suburb of Turin. People are invited to bring their own interests and engage in an exchange with the group of participants.

Ambra: we are a research center manifesting in a choreographic center, hosting strangers, hoping that they will contribute and share some unprecedented way of experiencing knowledge or producing knowledge. This is a more phenomenological way to describe Ricerca X.

Elisa: And let's add that it is an artist-run research center...

Heike: I have a somewhat straightforward question: What is the balance between self-investment and paid work? Here, next to being available for *radical_hope* and *radical_house*, we all have jobs. This also has pros and cons. If I understood correctly, the three of you are partly working under contract for *Ricerca X*, which is still not enough, I guess?

Ambra: How to describe that? Yeah, I mean, it has been a work of resistance. Definitely, over the last years, the last 10 years, basically. Partly because, when it comes to the aforementioned self-exploitation, artists are probably the creatures on earth best equipped to sustain such behaviour: the more the work is based on interest the more self-exploitation tends to happen. This year, we decided to try to overcome this "talent": we want to proactively find forms of resistance to self-exploitation and, the often praised, resilience. We want to show some aggressive pro-activity, like, to go out and say: we want and need this! Yes, we need to try to have more support, because otherwise the ship, together with us, will sink.

Simone: Could I maybe ask for a concrete example of this new approach?

Elisa: Yes, sure. We recently applied for State funding: we are going for a 3-year grant from the Ministry of Culture. Writing and applying for it has been a nightmare. But we really want to say explicitly that if we don't get this, the project is over. And yet the question remains: what do we do if we don't get it?

Ambra: We were talking about this while sitting in the car. I was just about to get out to take the metro. And we just left each other saying: if we don't do this, the project might truly end – because it will, if the current conditions don't change. We now look back to this moment as a kind of shamanic moment, during which our mindset changed. Through this alteration, or shift in mindset, we now mean to change our working conditions.

Heike: I feel with these words of yours we are transitioning into the second question. I just want to note a few things:

- we talk about 'going for ministerial funding' as an aggressive, proactive act, one that is more likely to be endured than enjoyed?
- the discrepancy between *Ricerca X* and *radical_hope*: you are hosted by a bigger institution with some dedicated budgets but you lack an autonomous space, we, on the other hand, have a space here – *radical_house* – but lack institutional embeddedness and dedicated budgets.
- it seems easier to slow down self-exploitation in the absence of money than in its presence – since funding often comes with expectations and interdependencies.

- yet, clear expectations and interdependencies can bring along a certain visibility, something that autonomously working projects or self-sufficient spaces often lack.
- It seems like a noble intention to do 'less together', but (given the different spheres in which we work and live) we would need to figure out what kind of exchanges would be useful for our differently situated desires and forms of organising.

What would be the most ideal development of your working conditions for Ricerca X – beyond receiving more money?

Francesco: While we are waiting for the results of our application – which if positive would be a big step in *Ricerca X*'s history – we have been wondering what structural funding would do over a period of three years. A period that is not too long but definitely brings a comforting perspective.

So what could the structural funding do to us and vice versa what could we do with it over three years?

The most critical point in our relationship with the project so far, has been having to deal with a huge load of practicalities alongside the work in the studio. Extra money would very simply cover more of “this stuff”. We could then concentrate much more on the curatorial and artistic aspects of the work – definitely one of the more ideal working conditions for *Ricerca X*.

Ambra: And beyond *Ricerca X*, it would affect how and with whom we engage in artistic research.

The structure we would have, once we don't have to cover all practical aspects, would finally allow us to also dedicate time to ourselves: we could re-assess the relationship between the three of us. Very often, we don't have time for feedback and resonating amongst ourselves, for developing our research, or for re-engaging with issues of authorship and the project itself.

Elisa: We could finally develop a longer-term perspective for and with the project instead of navigating year by year. This is a wish we have had for quite some time, but in only receiving strictly designated funds, it just hasn't been possible to dedicate time to this desire.

However, writing an application of this size helped us think longer-term, regardless of whether we get the structural grant or not.

Francesco: I would like to think separately about structural funding and alternative ways of working, but somehow this seems impossible: for us, any real further development towards a sustainable alternative requires money. Thinking about alternatives and

having the means to realize them are deeply intertwined: with funding can come a clear positioning in the field, and in the context within which we work. Although acknowledgement can happen without money, with more financial support, it does become easier. You are visibly recognized as an entity that proposes a different way of working. And I would add a third necessary ingredient here: Allies or partners.

Ambra: Last but not least, more time to practice research by ourselves will help us re-frame our presence as hosts. A recurring question has been “where are you as artists in this? Next to supporting and facilitating, how do you situate yourselves? Until now we ended up in the position of the “giver”, with the main movement being outsourcing ourselves...

Heike: I see. Up until now, your work was kind of project-based, moving from year to year. Whether you wanted it or not, as the hosts of *Ricerca X*, you were contributing to the visibility of the bigger institution hosting you, which in turn makes it feasible for you to be hosted. Things needed to be sold, in one way or another. I now understand that in a more prosperous future for you, you would finally be able to work also as artists instead of as “pure” organisers, right? Fundamentally engaging in research, instead of facilitating a platform. I think you are also contributing a lot to legitimizing a place for artistic research within Italy. There “only now” seems to be a shift towards the recognition of artistic research as an autonomous practice. Whereas here, in Belgium, we seem to be quite “spoiled”: artistic research doesn't require such intense legitimization, for better or for worse.

Francesco: Yes, a burning question for us right now is how to keep facilitating space for artistic research, for groups of artist-researchers without having to take so many steps back in our own artistic practice. How can one thing – facilitating artistic research – not exclude the other – practicing artistic research ourselves?

Ambra: When we talked with an administrator recently, she reconfirmed: “if our personal work passes through the administration, it will reinforce the institution’s reason to exist. So why not use a part of the available money?” Not in order to create a space to showcase our own work, but to position ourselves as artists – something completely out of our concept until now. We tend to shy away as artists behind the face of service-deliverers. It’s time to approach it differently, artistically, and through the very practical work.

Elisa: It's exciting, to reframe ourselves and our sense of hosting, from a new perspective: how to not just host through the schedule and the space, but also through our positioning as artists? This is something we have already started subtly opening up to in the context of research residencies – but “the door” I feel can open far more.

Heike: Yeah, interesting. As artists, we often are shy about positioning ourselves with our practices, the very practices we artistically develop...

Francesco: In the feedback sessions, we already avoid being mute facilitators, we allow ourselves to witness our perceptions just like everyone else. The role of facilitating the feedback sessions still allows us to speak. In that context, being facilitators does not mean that we cannot share our thoughts.

Ambra: Well, *Ricerca X* historically has been based on the model of the hidden rulers, right? But we indeed need to work on transforming the idea of invisible governance into something more shared and openly negotiated. And I realize as we are speaking, we're not really questioning, we are reframing it, and want to figure out how much visibility, how much agency we need.

Elisa: It might be also interesting, in this regard, to reframe the notion of peers. Being peers sharing practices could also mean sharing responsibilities as peers - by, for example, taking on different roles and drawing on our diverse capacities fueled by our own backgrounds. Adding our needs, as artist-facilitators, to the table just as the invited artists do, could move things in this direction.

Simone: Maybe I can ask you to say a few words about the history of *Ricerca X*? As you did not create *Ricerca X* yourselves and rather "inherited" a space – a framework – for artistic research, right?

Ambra: Yeah, it was founded in 2014, and activated in 2015 – by Erika Di Crescenzo, a choreographer and artistic practitioner, and Carlotta Scioldo, who was working as a dramaturg at that time, "between" Belgium and Italy. Carlotta was also attending the Brussels-based post-graduate programme *a:pass*. Together with Erika she imagined and brought into being a workspace dedicated to fundamental research, inspired by the North-West European model and the Belgian model in particular. And their idea was to activate the artistic field through research: motivated by the belief that through research, we'd have so-called better "outcomes" in terms of artefacts, modes of production, internal policies of sharing, attending, witnessing, etc. – all within our North Italian context, with its possibilities and very specific problems. The three of us met *Ricerca X* in different moments, as invited artists. Taking care of artists in residence started for us between 2019 and 2020 – after we were brought in by Erika and Charlotta in 2018.

Francesco: Receiving something precious and the responsibility that comes with that – especially as we were not the ones who had done the pioneer work – marked quite a moment in our trajectories.

Ambra: At that point, and in total over more or less 8 years, we also all had been living further north - Francesco and Elisa in the Netherlands, me in Berlin - traveling out there, working out there, and eventually coming back to Northern Italy. It meant living in and with friction: the need to be elsewhere and also wanting to come back; the need to feel at home, and not being at home.

And consequently the need to create a house somewhere, to dare to claim a territory I could step into and be active within. A place where I could develop discourse - which is something I couldn't do until then.

I'm becoming a little bit personal here, but I feel the three of us share it, right?

And I think it is also for this reason that Carlotta and Erika invited us to take over.

Heike: Interesting, and beautiful, that you compare the sphere of research with a house – and with “a home”... – a sphere where discourses can resonate with one another, because they're not constantly on the road – us and them racing through space.

Ambra: Yes, a place where we can reside for a while and start being moved by these discourses and vice versa – where we can reflect – *nachdenken*. A word that I like in German and Dutch: literally it means “thinking after(wards)”.

Yes, it's important to be able to dwell and be alive within it, not only to be nourished and receive information from landscapes you don't feel belonging to, but also to be able to transform the place where you do feel at home.

On the other hand we don't want to colonize Italy with what we bring from Northern practices. We always want to treat that as an inspiration which comes with the need for mediation, relocation and re-situation. This is not to be underestimated, since the Mediterranean abounds in intelligence and insight!

(Appreciating hand gestures, simultaneously on all zoom screens.)

Simone: Yep!

Ambra: It's just that it was always poor in art funding – soooooo poor, really. We need to put this in the middle of the table!

Heike: Yes, thank you for this!

Different spheres, in the hope of not colonizing each other...

Maybe this can be a bridge to the last question – relating to

Ricerca X in Turin and *radical_hope_house* in Brussels with *a:pass* somewhere in the middle of us as a common reference.

What could Ricerca X and radical_hope_house engage in or with together, so our efforts are spent ecologically well?

Elisa: one element we thought of is the simple act and potential of observing each other – with curiosity and care. Inviting each other, like Heike did now with this

CoCoCo. In the residency, she not only participated with her artistic practice but also witnessed our project, and the conversations we shared with her made us look through a specific lens at our own project. It's like an arrow that came from a stranger's direction towards another unfamiliar direction, and also towards ourselves.

Francesco: We've witnessed very different approaches by artists being in residency with us. This time it was very enriching to see how, besides being busy researching your materials, you brought an attentive and specific eye on *Ricerca X* itself. Which then caused several small and welcome explosions in our conversations.

I guess from this attitude we thought of the idea of visiting each other in our own contexts and dwelling in them not as simple guests somehow, but as critical guests – sensing where they or we are being hosted, the walls, the colors, the temperature, what is missing, the history...

So yes, that gesture of generosity and attention is something we can give to each other in our two different contexts.

Elisa: Being a critical witness of each other – a bit of a paradox.

Ambra: Conjuring things, welcoming each other with questions, questions from which emerge more clearly what is already lingering yet not moved to the foreground and declared a priority. Then those lingering things may even become statements – testimonies. I remember our morning conversation, the one during which “you asked us out” to make this CoCoCo, became almost a psychoanalysis (from our side) of our project.

So, yes, someone witnessing the project, making us be seen and experiencing you passing through the project with what this ‘critical’ guest sees...

Next to gestures, we can also “gather together” multiple attitudes. It inspired us to invite someone to each residency that is both an artist and a host of a space (or has experience running a space). And, in terms of kinship – we want to keep this conversation going, to visit each other.

And from there, who knows, we might discover ecologically interesting ways to engage toward or with each other.

Francesco: You mentioned it before, in two words: we can give “mutual attention”. Keep giving mutual attention. Yeah.

Heike: Interesting that we come back to mutual attention. I see, in the current context, many, many collectives forming and becoming active, proposing many interesting ways of working with and in spite of the lack of resources, in a way that is typical for the independent art sector. Some “hyperstructures” – organisations with the intention to serve and facilitate within this field are observing the scene. Their observations become so-called “landscape drawings”, situating, analysing and discussing small experiments and collectives proposing practices which seem “interesting”. I wonder what makes them interesting and for whom really once they are being discussed on platforms run

by employees. It easily happens that observed practices get – using a strong word here – appropriated, and I am not sure how I feel about this: practices emerging from artists' lived experiences "end up" to thematised problematics that subsequently shape the agendas of official support organisations.

I would think that what would be needed is that we'd invite each other, name each other, question what we experience through witnessing, make each other seen – recognised – in and with the means we can afford, from our interests and motivations. Often, organisations with budgets dedicated to improving the landscape, harvest what they can "observe" as emerging practices, without building relations. But we could enrich each other by truly working together as organisations and artists, instead of acting as coaches or branding consultants or becoming inspirational but entirely uncredited presences living parallel lives. For the latter to happen, nobody is certainly to blame personally! This is the result of an overly professionalized system, often guided by good intentions, but it leads to questionable relationships between organizations of different scales. I wonder how many bureaucratically and (ad)ministerially connected platforms the landscape can carry before the arts, in itself, turn entirely entrepreneurial.

Francesco: I think now of the dramaturgical function within the residencies we host here – that this is always a shared function – something we all engage in.

And we normally apply it to the materials that are shared within the residency. It's mainly an act of giving attention.

We could apply this circulating function to our project itself, as an "ex-stitution" or para-institution. This would mean giving attention to another by placing myself in the position of the observer: and doing so with the awareness that it takes a lot of internal work to observe without projecting. Yes, it's a research in itself to understand the difference between observing and witnessing.

Ambra: Yes, also how to redirect the "gaze" in order not to create a dichotomy between "within" and "hyper" structure, as you called it before. I mean platforms that "float in a parallel sphere", seemingly serving the cultural landscape whilst they wouldn't be able to exist without this same landscape.

I want to repeat, talking about "hyperstructures" is meant as an observation and not as blaming. Let's ask: which practices do truly "redirect the gaze" beyond binary logics like "on and off", "in and out", "serving – needing", "delivering – demanding"...

Asking this not only to overcome dichotomies in general, I am not against those in certain contexts. Let's be careful too with the fashion of being "against dichotomy". Sometimes they do work, and often they are the very reason we find interesting discussion. Identifying dichotomies we live inside of motivates us to search for the so-called "third ways". We are in need of diverse ways of attending – so we can be mutually engaged in the work to do!

Heike: I have to think of what Simone and Alice asked, when in the last years we were talking about interlocutors – people who could be in critical dialogue with (the practice

of) radical_hope_house: *What kind of visibility, what kind of recognition do we need to achieve and what kind would we rather avoid?*

Which made me question: *Whose perception of ourselves do we value?*

Elisa: As *Ricerca X* we are definitely seen by students, other artists and through our efforts also what we call "other publics" – people who would not get in touch with the artistic field "just like this". But we are not seen by funders or investors.

Heike: There are surely many people that see what we do with *radical_house*.

Is it important when those people see it?

Is there a hierarchy of who should have access? I think there's a lot of work to do, a work that will grow rather than shrink in the politically repressive, regressive futures and realities we are faced with.

What we can do is visit each other and by doing so perceive each other. Very concretely: what if once a year, we invited *Ricerca X* to Brussels to see what you'd like to activate here? And the other way around?

Become critical visitors and hosts to one another?

Ambra: Yes – to recognize each other – because we recognize something of ourselves in *radical_hope*.

Mutual alterity? Maybe?

In any case a way of seeing each other that reverberates, as you said.

It feels to me similar to when a union of workers is created: they recognize each other, and they say, "okay – we are like this, we live like this – and this is what we need, and need to establish, for the sake of our kin!".

Heike: You think of it like a union, interesting.

I like this very pragmatic idea of kinship!

Looking at the clock – we now need to find a way to round it up – "to stop painting", to round up our conversation, even though it is, of course, never finished...

Simone: We've got one minute more, officially.

Heike: Well, for us, it's fine to leave it here. Once we see everything transcribed, we can still elaborate, erase, radically change what has come up together.

For me there are some interesting reflections that opened up in surprising ways, I think. So good that we can never predict how conversations will flow!

Francesco: Well, maybe something we do want to have transcribed is a thank you for the invitation!!

Heike: Well, thank you for responding to it – and for "unintentionally" provoking it. During the residency you invited us as researchers to go back in time and scan through

years of living with artistic practices, that's when I stumbled across the score for Co-Constructed-Conversations.

I then decided to re-use it, but I was nervous, as it felt a bit like going up to someone and saying: "Hey, I think I like you more than I thought – can we talk a bit more?" You never know how the other... reacts – if they have time, or if they don't like you back - or they do, but have no time...

However, it was a mutually exciting moment, there in Collegno, last fall!

I am glad I found the score again, and dared to go for it...

And it reminded me that I actually stopped inviting practitioners I deeply resonate with into this kind of conversation and collective writing / editing.

Ambra: Thank you, everyone – observers, witnesses and moderators of all kinds – Also to Anthony and Alice – for listening to us!