The beginning of a multifaceted partnership:

While attending the Shanghai Theatre Academy’s Experimental Theatre Festival in October of 2013, Jp Jordan (Artistic Director/Ensemble Member) and Lisa Jordan (Managing Director/Ensemble Member) of Touchstone Theatre had the opportunity to see the work of festival participant Teatro Potlach. Potlach’s adaptation of *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea* was a finally crafted intertwining of story adaptation, cutting edge projections, and true physical acting prowess. Seeing a kinship with their own work, Touchstone approached Potlach and conversation easily flowed. Excited by the exchange and each other’s work, Potlach invited Touchstone representatives to attend their annual theatre festival FLIPT in Fara Sabina, Italy. For nearly two weeks, each day was filled from dusk until dawn with workshops, lectures, and performances. As part of these daily activities, Potlach led morning exercises based in the work of Jerzy Grotowski. Touchstone had recently been reinvesting themselves in Grotowski, and Potlach founders studied firsthand with Grotowski, as well as with Eugenio Barba in the early days of Odin Teatre. This serendipitous meeting was invaluable to the Touchstone Company, who had been approaching the Grotowski training from a place of scattered memories and textual interpretation. Touchstone returned to Bethlehem with new exercises and a better understanding of old ones, merged them with their own practices, and for over a year have been engaged in a distinctly Touchstone approach to the work. While at the Potlach FLIPT Festival, Touchstone was given the opportunity to lecture about their outdoor, large-scale community-based work and lineage, including *Steelbound: The Art of an Industry* and *Don Quixote of Bethlehem*, through to their most recent epic *Journey from the East*. Again, Touchstone found an immediate kinship between their own material and the *Invisible Cities* work of Potlach. (*Invisible Cities* is an interdisciplinary and multimedia art project based on the theme of a city, based on the eponymous novel by Italo Calvino, which Potlach has adapted for dozens of cities worldwide.) At the end of the FLIPT Festival in Fara Sabina, it was clear to Potlach and Touchstone that there were multiple ways in which future collaboration could happen. With the support of NET, Moravian College, and other partners, Touchstone invited Potlach to come over for a one-week residency to explore how this relationship might grow.

Time is precious (and very limited), how do you spend it?

There was much ground to cover. Based upon the ideas developed from our previous interactions, there seemed to be three main areas that needed time and room for consideration:

1. The continuing pedagogical exploration
2. Potlach partnering on *Invisible Cities* in Bethlehem, PA
3. Laying the groundwork for a multi-national, international collaboration

Below is the itinerary that was created to facilitate the many aspects of the exchange. It is worth noting that during an internal post mortem after the visit, some felt this itinerary was too full and needed more breathing room. This is a point well worth considering.

**MONDAY**
9:00-10:30 – introductions with both companies (ALL)
10:30-12:00 – Jp runs Touchstone Ensemble lab (minus apprentices), Potlach observes
1:00-6:00 – *Piaf* tech setup (+ tour of Bethlehem if time allows)
6:00-? – Dinner - Jp chats with Potlach about observations from Touchstone’s morning sharing
TUESDAY
9:00-12:00 – Elab (minus apprentices) – Pino and Nathalie lead
1:00-6:00 – Moravian workshop tech setup
6:00-? – Dinner at Ensemble Associate Christopher Shorr’s home

WEDNESDAY
9:00-12:00 - more Ensemble Lab time lead by Potlach(ALL)
12:00-1:00 - discussing Dear Tamaqua/Invisible Cities (community based, site specific investigation)
1:00-4:00 - lunch, rehearsal, misc other final prep
4:00-5:00 - international collaboration discussion (JP/CS/Pino)
5:00-5:30 - transport over to Touchstone Founder’s home for dinner
5:30-? - Bill shows Potlach around Little Pond, then dinner

THURSDAY
9:00-3:00 – Lehigh Valley Charter Arts High School workshop
8:00-10:00 – show + talkback
10:00-? - opening night party

FRIDAY
9:00-12:00 - more studio time (ALL - Peacetrain Room)
12:00-1:00 - discussing Bhudoo process (JP/EC - Peacetrain Room)
3:00-5:00 – Jp and Pino have Skype an initial discussion with Hungarian Director Zoltán Balázs and Iranian director Kiomars Moradi, about possible models in which a multi-national production could take place.
8:00-10:00 – show + talkback
10:00-? - After party at Northampton Community College

SATURDAY
1:00-4:00 – Moravian workshop
8:00-10:00 – show + talkback + social

SUNDAY
2:00-6:00 – show + talkback + strike
6:00-? – final meal together

Even as packed as this schedule was, we were still clamoring for time to fit more in, both companies feeding off the exchange. While some wanted more room, it was determined that this schedule served the amount of work we needed to get accomplished.

1) The continuing pedagogical exchange:

Building on the exercises brought home from Fara Sabina and their integration with Touchstone’s ongoing practice, the pedagogy was taken to the next level with Potlach onsite, working directly with Touchstone’s artists. Greater clarity was brought to how the exercises may be used in a devising process through concentration on scoring and chorus work. In order to tackle the other elements in the ongoing concentration, we will look to bring Potlach over annually for the next three years to push forward the transfer of their pedagogical lineage. We will partner with Moravian College and the local performing arts high school to help subsidize this exchange. We will also look to open this up in a more formal way to other ensembles and theatre professionals in the tri-state area.
2) Potlach partnering on *Invisible Cities* in Bethlehem, PA:

The first step to site-specific work is picking the site and getting to know it. This visit allowed Potlach the opportunity for a comprehensive tour of Bethlehem, from the historic to the industrial to the modern. Being on the ground, together as team, was invaluable and, as expected, the flow of ideas was remarkable; conversation flowed into vision and then onward into to-do lists. It was determined that as a next step, prior to the partnership bringing to life *Invisible Cities* in Bethlehem, Touchstone personnel would travel to Italy and partner with Potlach on an iteration of *Invisible Cities* in June of 2016. It is currently intended that *Invisible Cities* in Bethlehem will manifest in 2019 as part of Touchstone’s 20th anniversary of *Steelbound: The Art of an Industry*.

3) Laying the ground work for a multi-national, international collaboration:

Conceived of during Touchstone’s time in Fara Sabina, a first step was taken during Potlach’s visit to Bethlehem to bring a multi-national team of theatre companies together to create a large scale work. The four “founding” companies had a Skype conversation, with three (Touchstone, Potlach, and Hope Theatre Company) of the companies in the same room together Skyping in the fourth (Maladype). Ideally, this group will expand after the project had gained more solid footing.

“Founding” Companies:

- Hope Theatre Company (http://www.hopetheatercompany.com), Tehran, Iran / Minneapolis, USA; Artistic Director – Kiomars Moradi
- Maladype Színház (http://www.maladype.hu), Budapest, Hungary; Artistic Director – Zoltán Balázs
- Teatro Potlach (http://www.teatropotlach.org), Fara Sabina, Italy; Artistic Director – Pino Di Buduo
- Touchstone Theatre (http://www.touchstone.org), Bethlehem, PA; Artistic Director – James P. Jordan

Below are the items we determined were essential to move forward before our next meeting in June of 2016.

1. Mission statement
2. Possible collective funding resources
3. Possible company specific funding resources
4. Proposed play adaptations
5. Additional artistic partners
6. Time together
7. Models of collaboration

The partnership pushes forward!

List of Takeaways:

- When exploring VISA options, see if you qualify for the VISA Waiver Program (VWP); it may save you a ton of money. Link to more details here.
• When talking numbers with international artists, always be clear which currency you are using and write the numbers down to avoid any misunderstanding.

• Stay flexible with start times (jetlag, cultural differences, etc.) and build in soft start times and/or a communication chain for updating the group on the actual start time.

• This process of understanding the theory before going into the practice worked well for us when preparing to learn with Potlach: read the book/research, try exercises on your own, then work directly with the instructing artists.

• Approach new training openly, but resist the temptation to receive it as an absolute dogma; remain fluid and use it to hybridize your own pedagogy.

• Make sure to take time for mutual exchange, despite the possible overpowering rigor of one partner’s approach or the trainer/trainee dynamic.

• It can be taxing to host artists in your home (and your theatre at the same time), but there’s no better way to get to know a company and form an intimate bond.

• Medical issues can arise; explore, at least briefly, how you might deal with them ahead of time.

• With “home field” advantage, know that hosting may include help with translating across the board, i.e. from restaurants to the US Embassy.