

Foreword

The present issue of *Studia Dramatica* aims to approach theater and performing arts from the perspective of the richness and variety of current research goals. Entitled „Directions, targets and interrogations in contemporary Theatre Studies”, it can offer to its readers a glimpse of important directions in which the interest of contemporary researchers go, in theatre as well as in film studies. What are the topics that concern us today in the field of theater and performing arts or at the intersection between the performing, the visual or the cinematic arts? Are researchers nowadays more interested in theater history or in analyzing contemporary phenomena? Does their interest go more towards monographic, documentary or comparative studies? Text, performance or audience analysis? Technological evolution or a more in-depth study of classical techniques? What methods do we consider to be the most valid in research today? These are a few questions that challenged us and we thus invited practitioners, as well as researchers, to contribute on their main fields of interest.

In the section “Articles and Studies” one can find relevant perspectives on themes that go from the craftsmanship of mask, to the revisiting of well-known theoretical texts; from the study of new stage practices in relation to post-dramatic approaches, to case studies of dance companies and their Organizational Strategies; from the analysis of the interference of new technologies in the creative process of set-design in contemporary visual and performative arts, to audience engagement and theatrical techniques used in film production.

In her study on masks, **Candice Moise**, examines the mask as a subject of interest from the point of view of its creators and of its purposes, as it is used both in live performance and traditional European festivals. The



analysis focuses on the ergonomics of masks and their relationship to the body, its construction and expressivity according to its employment when worn in parades and para-dramatic feasts. The way in which the essential parts of the face are conceived (the eyes, the mouth and the nose), becomes relevant for the final desired expression of the character. The technical choices are thus extremely important, implying the selection of materials and the manufacturing methods which reveal, as the author demonstrates, a dichotomy between the preservation of traditional skills and the pursuit of technical innovation. We have here a different approach to the mask, going beyond the conventional symbolic analyses, focusing on the materiality and craftsmanship of these fascinating theatrical objects. One of the targets is to understand better how communities negotiate with tradition and remodel constantly their given patterns. In this regard, as the author asserts, “the mask assumes the role of a mediator between permanence and change, between the physical body and its representation”.

The paper signed by **José Maria Vieira Mendes**, “The Paradox of the Self. Beyond Identity”, draws our attention to a fresh reconsideration of Diderot’s *Paradox of the Actor*, read through the lens of the questioning of nowadays relationship to what identity is, lived or perceived. Taking as a starting point the invasion of the stage during a performance by the trans woman Keyla Brasil at a theatre venue in Lisbon, in 2023, as part of a protest that claimed for the visibility of transgender performers, and considering the numerous reactions that followed, the author goes back to the principle of theatrical representation and of the ‘art of acting’ versus non-acting. The paper thus reconsiders the classical interpretation of Diderot’s idea of the actor as someone who never seems to be himself, and comes with arguments which try to prove that this is not an accurate interpretation and describes the action of Keyla Brasil „not as an ‘interruption’ of a performance but as a complex intersection of (re)presentations that think with each other, destabilizing epistemic boundaries between one and the other, actor and character or performer and audience”. This paper proves that classical texts did not finish to challenge our understanding and power of interpretation.

The artist and researcher **Patrick Laffont De Lojo** brings forward a subject of much interest for the new tendencies in performance Art productions. “An Ecology of Illusion: Technologies and Scenography in the

Redefinition of Relations Between Humans and Non-humans”, sheds light upon a problematic relationship with new technologies on stage, for the performers as well as for the audience, who are led to redefine their attitude towards their surrounding world. The analysis of artistic projects to which the author had important contributions come to bring into discussion the deep transformations generated by this presence of virtual realities which can “redefine the place of the stage and its role in shaping our collective imaginations”. Set design is no longer a framework for staging action, but a visual mechanism with critical and sensitive value that “questions the ways in which we perceive, inhabit, and coexist.” The essential concern about ecology enriches the approach and discusses the trap of illusion making that audience is confronted with. Scenography can function as a “site of ecological awareness, illusion, and transformation” in a duplicitous way taking into consideration that digital technologies are no more ecological than others, and that the ecology of illusion encounters the illusion of ecology.

The two following articles, signed by young researchers, prove contemporary practices in theatre and dance are of much concern. **Ioana Toloargă**, in “The Formal Import and Theoretical Metabolization of the Post-dramatic in the Romanian Context”, focuses her attention on the ways post-dramatic theory and practice entered the Romanian theatrical world and how they constructed a specific cultural landscape, generating different attitudes and reactions theatre critics and practitioners in state – repertory theatre – on the one hand, and private – project-based theatres – on the other hand. Adopting a historical approach as well as a comparative method, the study follows the evolution of Romanian dramaturgy after the fall of Communism, and the opening towards devised theatre and post-dramatic laboratories of creation. The coexistence of more traditional approaches of drama and dramaturgical writings with more hybrid, exploratory creative processes, create a complex performative art landscape in contemporary Romania.

Beatrice Lupu leads her research on a topic linked to cultural management, analyzing the organizational strategies and the audience dynamics of independent dance companies in nowadays Cluj-Napoca. The results of a questionnaire with eighty-five respondents and four interviews with cultural dance space managers, analysed and discussed, show the heterogeneity of this

cultural sector, the plurality of structures, organisational models and behaviours but also problems of unpredictability and weak marketing communication although audience seems interested in dance courses and events.

Theatre encounters film studies in **Ada-Maria Ichim's** paper, focused on "Theatrical Techniques in Documentary Film". The author identifies a number of elements, such as the construction of characters, a narrative line with dramatic characteristics, the search for strong and immediate emotional impact, which leave the classical type of objectivity aside, bringing forward a more theatrical, subjective way of presenting and telling the stories and of reaching the audiences. More artistic and nuanced explorations of reality are a result of this conscious use of theatrical/dramaturgical tools when dealing with difficult topics such as war, social conflicts or historical episodes. Through concrete examples, analytically integrated and discussed, the paper shows how documentary films can be transformed into "powerful tools for emotional and intellectual engagement, capturing the transformative journey of performers and their impact on both the film's subject and the audience, ultimately expanding the scope of documentary filmmaking".

Ioana Lascar with the article "Navigating the Middle Ground: The Necessity of *Middle Films* for Audience Engagement in Romania", makes a pertinent radiography of Romanian film audience confronted with a particular situation of the film industry: on the one hand, "historically dominated by internationally acclaimed auteur films, the Romanian industry now confronts a critical disconnect with local audiences, who perceive these films as inaccessible and overly intellectual", this situation results in a lack of engagement and of cultural consumption, leaving movie theatres empty and internationally awarded Romanian filmmakers unknown in their own country. On the other hand, "influencer-driven commercial films have surged in popularity but frequently compromise artistic quality", promoted intensively by the means of internet channels. The urgent need for balanced "middle" productions" is thus highlighted, analyzing different innovative marketing solutions and social media strategies which could reestablish a link with the large audience and encourage Romanian film industry, reviving thus public interest and balancing the existing discrepancies between international artistic validation and local appreciation.

Another topic of interest, in the “Miscellanea” section of this issue, is the initiation of students in the study of Theatre history and in methods of research in the existing theater archives. A dialogue with **Renzo Guardenti**, Professor of Theater History at the University of Florence and specialist in theater iconography, reveals the challenges one encounters when convincing young people showing interest in theatre studies to take the path of hard research. One can notice that “younger generations are showing a growing interest in contemporary theater and performance studies, which may reflect current trends in a significant part of Italian theater historiography. Interest in the historical study of theater, particularly with regard to past forms of performance, seems to be declining, but what is declining is interest in history itself: this is a relevant feature of today's society”. Indeed, changings occur in the approach to the field of Theatre Studies all over Europe, and teachers have to face them trying to encourage students to make the necessary effort to go deeper into theatrical knowledge. We actually face a paradox: research seems less and less appealing because it is difficult and needs time, even though it is much easier nowadays than before the invention of the internet, due to databases, and online libraries with access to an ever-increasing number of digitized documents. Renzo Guardenti explains that it is not only the longer period of time needed for fundamental research which makes things difficult for students, antagonistic to the quick results demanded by the educational system, but that “there is also a kind of “schizophrenia” between the mass of information accessible via databases and digital libraries, and the lack of critical and methodological tools among students to use it in an informed way.” An identified solution is the creation of international master's degrees that could stimulate interest in research, but “the fundamental problem remains political: it is linked to the resources and funding that governments choose to allocate to research. This is a global and structural issue that concerns not only theater studies, but the future of the entire scientific community — and, more broadly, our society”.

Back to the practice of acting, theater critic **Dana Rufolo**, shows the difficulties one encounters when trying to make theatre nowadays with amateurs for Amnesty International in a city like Luxembourg. Comparing the interest and commitment of the participants in working groups for street

theatre 15 years ago to the present-day situation, the conclusion seems to be that “it is no longer an era where amateur groups can take center stage in the midst of a public space and expect to have their sentiments of justice resonate with the passing crowd.” Different and innovative strategies have to be found in order to bring people toward theatre practice and promote its fundamental social and personal therapeutical benefits.

The present issue of *Studia Dramatica* gives a pertinent image of the richness and variety of current research goals, of directions, interrogations in Theatre Studies, but also a glimpse of the challenges research as well as practice encounters, confronted to the evolution of nowadays society at the beginning of a more and more digitalized era.

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