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STUDIA UNIVERSITATIS BABEȘ-BOLYAI

1/2023



**CORPOREAL NARRATIVES
IN PERFORMING
AND VISUAL ARTS**

**STUDIA
UNIVERSITATIS BABEŞ-BOLYAI
DRAMATICA**

**1/2023
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In Memoriam Professor Georges Banu



The entire editorial board bids farewell to Professor, Critic and Friend Georges Banu. One of the most important theatre critics in Romania and France has left us, leaving a huge void in our souls. He was a true lover of the fine arts, of the Art Theatre and of the magic of the stage where he



immediately recognised great talents, regardless of the type of performance, the aesthetic approach or the cultural space where he met them. An ever-awake spirit with a lively intellectual curiosity and an impressively vast culture, a connoisseur and friend of all the important names in European and world theatre, Georges Banu was never indulgent of imposture, stupidity or artistic cowardice, always open to constructive dialogue with both his peers and the younger ones, seeking depth, human and artistic honesty, poetry and the charm of authentic creation. A Professor beloved by all students at the Institute of Theatre Studies in Paris, as well as by those at the Romanian Theatre Faculties, respected by his colleagues, a prolific critic and essayist, Georges Banu left a huge legacy to future generations and theatre lovers, writing the history of this art together and alongside the theatre people who dedicated their entire existence and energy to performing arts. Dozens of volumes, hundreds of lectures and interviews illuminate the path of young people who want to understand the unknown ways of theatrical creation, sharing the fruit of their predecessors' experience.

Ștefana Pop-Curșeu

ARTICLES AND STUDIES

Foreword of the Issue

Delia ENYEDI¹

Scholarly approaches to narration in performing arts and visual arts have focused on identifying an array of narrative structures driven by plot or characters. However, Mieke Bal's seminal *Narratology* (1985) separates the study of "elements" (events, actors, places of the story) from "aspects" (presentation of those elements by means of the text). In Gerald Prince's (1982) words this opposition arises in questions of "how" against questions of "what", with an emphasis on the fact that the latter has garnered significantly more attention than the first. More recently, Daniel Punday (2003) proposed "corporeal narratology" as an interpretive method focusing on textual features of the human body in relation to the other narrative elements. In line with the Posthuman Paradigm, Punday's "corporeal hermeneutics" contradicts the soul-body dualism approaching the body not as a mere prop, as an inanimate object but as a vital agent.

At the same time, inspired by the way philosophers such as Merleau-Ponty, Gilles Deleuze or Jean-Luc Nancy take into consideration "a bodily knowledge", contemporary dance scholars and choreographers such as Martin Nachbar, Susanne Traub, Mathilde Monnier, Deuffert & Plischke, William Forsythe, promote abstract dance techniques centred on the body itself, with minor interest in the classical rules of storytelling and representing

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characters. The digital age of virtual reality/body/identity redefines the issue of disembodiment, the promise to lift us beyond our individual bodies. Steven Shapiro, the English translator of Deleuze, reveals some hidden perils of this tempting promise, analysing the fluid, mutable and constructed nature of the virtual body, which nevertheless has become both an essential part of our digital persona and a key figure of our recent narratives. Lev Manovich, the father of new media art and former student of Mieke Bal, describes the structure of these digital narratives as non-linear and relates them with the replacement of the modern linear narrative with the database, the postmodern archive of photographs, documents, descriptions.

To conclude, the advent of the virtual body is related with the birth of the hyper-narrative, the non-linear story that enable *the space navigation* of the computer games' player and make possible the encounter of the user with digital interfaces and *databases*. Thus, we invited scholars and practitioners to explore and contribute to the study of the human/human-like body as prevalent in relation to the narrative world/space/plot in performing and visual arts.

The first section of the journal covers an extended range of research fields, from painting, theatre, photography, cinema and television to new media. Ioan Pop-Curşeu, together with Rareş Stoica, examine the corporeal duality of the witch in a rich selection of works of art belonging to the fields of painting, literature and cinema. Daria Ioan's article explores the aesthetics of supernatural subjects as represented in photography and film. My own contribution restrains to film, presenting an overview of articles printed in the interwar Romanian newspapers regarding the status of the actor in the emerging sound cinema. Alina-Gabriela Mihalache revisits the first stagings of Eugène Ionesco's play *Rhinoceros* within the post-theatre paradigm. Dana Monah demonstrates the way in which concepts belonging to the historical avant-gardes shape two performances based on Shakespeare's *Richard III*, in order to place the main character above the events and to bring forward the image of his body. Dana Rufolo completes the articles dedicated to theatre with an insight on street theatre, more precisely staging street theatre on the topic of human rights, in multicultural urban environments.

Further in this first section, Flavius Floare confronts the film theory of body horror with the construction of the altered body in the television adaptation of the video game *The Last of Us*. Adelina Bulibaşa extends the topics of the issue to transmedia, detailing the process behind the *In-Between Worlds: Myths, Creatures, Traditions* exhibiton, as experienced from the standpoint of project coordinator. Last but not least, Alexandru Sterian discusses modern digital media in an attempt to address key issues regarding the reconfiguration of the sign and the message.

The second section consists in an essay and an interview. Practitioner Oana Pocan approaches the vocal training of the actor, more precisely the use of language disorders in creating a comic Commedia dell'Arte character. In addition, an interview of theatre and film actress Maia Morgenstern, taken by Sorin-Dan Boldea, provides an intimate exploration of the craft of acting, and a second interview with Çağlar Yiğitoğulları, taken by Ramona Tripa, brings into our attention the active, productive minds and bodies during the process of creation, focusing on a performative shamanic *Quest* at the National Theatre in Cluj.

The third and final section is dedicated to reviews. Ştefana Pop-Curşeu sheds light on the Japanese theatre as found in the Romanian contemporary theatrical landscape, both in artistic experiences and teaching practices, as demonstrated at the 2022 edition of the Sibiu International Theatre Festival. Cristina Pop-Tiron ends this issue of the journal by presenting the *Human Presence in a Digital World* showcase, consisting in the *Anxiety* and the *Jungle Machine* digital interactive performances.

The Witch's Body as a Narrative and Symbolic Tool

Ioan POP-CURȘEU, Rareș STOICA¹

Abstract: This paper aims to propose an exploration of the corporeality of witches insofar as it has been used as a medium or nexus for narratives, or as a symbolic sign in various artistic forms and arrangements. The starting point is the highlighting of an antithesis, which is permanently nuanced and overcome in the long evolution of culture, namely between the beauty of young witches and the ugliness of old ones. A first section of the article focuses on painting, looking at works by Baldung Grien, Salvator Rosa, Frans Francken, Luis Ricardo Falero. A second section looks at the corporeal duality that characterizes witchcraft and its resolution in synthesis in Vasile Voiculescu's short story *Magical Love*. The last section is devoted to cinematographic works and how they have incorporated in their complex visual and textual narratives an ancient representational and iconographic tradition with roots in Renaissance and Baroque painting and in the literature of Greco-Latin Antiquity.

Keywords: witches, body, narration, symbolic, visual arts, literature, cinema.

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Introductory words

If one looks at how witches have been represented throughout European history, one discovers certain significant constants both anthropologically and artistically. In this article, we start from the premise that artistic representations are worthy of study rather than other types of representations because they condense very well the ideas, beliefs and social practices that have been linked to a particular topic over time. Let's take witch stories, for example. Whether one refers to fairy tales, cartoons, painting and photography, children's literature, fantasy, and horror films, one will notice a particular attention paid to the appearance and corporeality of witches, the transformations they undergo, etc. The witch's body is a revealer of phantasms and a highly effective artistic sign, a fundamental support for all essential stories, and can therefore be defined as a narrative and symbolic tool, regardless of the type of art in which one encounters it. The body of the witch tells something by its mere presence, by its simple semiotic inscription in a text or in an image: it is vital to understand these meanings, these complex narrations by crossing a great multitude of points of view. In the following paragraphs, we will be more concerned with some cases taken from the visual arts, literature, and cinema.

The European cultural tradition – rooted in Greco-Latin Antiquity – describes the body of witches² in a dualistic perspective, insisting on two poles. On the one hand, there is the beauty of Circe³, who seduced Odysseus and his companions to the point of making them forget their way back to Ithaca, while on the other hand there is the ugliness that Horace attributed to his favorite witch, Canidia, who appears in several *Epodes* and *Satires* (Epodes XVII, Satire VIII of Book I, Satire I of Book II, Satire VIII of Book II)⁴.

² Sarah Ferber, "Body of the Witch," in *Encyclopedia of Witchcraft. The Western Tradition*, Volume 1 A-D, edited by Richard M. Golden, 131-133. ABC-Clio, 2006.

³ Ioan Pop-Curșeu, "Circé à l'écran: portraits d'une sorcière séduisante ou la force de l'Eros," in *Etudes comparatives sur la sorcellerie. Anthropologie, cinéma, littérature, arts visuels* (Cluj-Napoca: Școala Ardeleană, 2021), 25-53.

⁴ Ellen Oliensis, "Canidia, Canicula, and the Decorum of Horace's *Epodes*," in *Horace: Odes and Epodes*, Edited by Michèle Lowrie (Oxford University Press, 2009), 160-187; Christine Walde, "Canidia and Erichtho: Snapshots from their Postclassical Life", in *Ancient Magic and the Supernatural in the Modern Visual and Performing Arts*, edited by Filippo Carlà and Irene Berti (London, Oxford, New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015), 119-134.

Canidia is a hideous old hag and her face is “fierce;” she hides her body under a black dress, walks barefoot and has “untidy hair entwined with little snakes” (Epodes, V)⁵. This opposition, which implies both aesthetic, narrative, and psycho-sociological issues – briefly described in the conclusions of this article –, was taken up again in the Middle Ages, but especially during the witch hunt (15th-18th centuries⁶), in demonology treatises written by Institoris and Sprenger, Jean Bodin, Pierre de Lancre, Guazzo, and in visual representations. The body of the witches is depicted either as very beautiful, seductive, sexually attractive, endowed with all physical perfections, or as monstrously ugly: old⁷, full of wrinkles, pustules, with a slimy appearance, exorbitant eyes, a big nose, rotten or sharp teeth. We will see the reasons for this representational tradition, developed by cinema, at the end of this journey, which will therefore respect a historical and thematic criterion for the presentation of materials.

1. Visual arts

In the course of time, certain artists have insisted on the beauty of witches, but without occasionally neglecting its opposite (Albrecht Dürer, the Pre-Raphaelites, Clovis Trouille) or on their ugliness (Goya, Fuseli), depending on the messages they wanted to convey to the public and which were often situated between the glorification of magic, seen as a technique capable of offering mastery of universal correspondences, and its condemnation

⁵ Horace, *Odes and Epodes*, Edited and translated by Niall Rudd (Cambridge & London: Harvard University Press, 2004), 280-286.

⁶ Nicole Jacques-Chaquin, “Représentation du corps sorcier à l’âge Classique,” *Revue des sciences humaines*, n° 198 (1983): 51-68; Yves Pelicier, “Le Corps de la sorcière,” in *Le Corps à la Renaissance: Actes du XXXe colloque de Tours, 1987* (Paris, Aux amateurs de livres, 1990), 139-45.

⁷ On the question of witches’ social, marital status, and old age, several sources can be consulted: Alan D. J. Macfarlane, *Witchcraft in Tudor and Stuart England* (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1970); Edward Bever, “Old Age and Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe,” in *Old Age in Preindustrial Society*, ed. by Peter Stearns (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1982), 150-190; Deborah Willis, *Malevolent Nurture* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995); Alison Rowlands, “Witchcraft and Old Women in Early Modern Germany,” *Past and Present*, n° 173, nov. (2001): 50-89.

in the name of Christian morality or Enlightenment philosophy. More important than these rather clear choices of some painters, there is a series of composite representations or combined iconographic types, where ugliness and beauty are set in opposition, while instituting a kind of strange synergy and dialogue between them. We will focus on some of these complex oppositional compositions below, trying to contextualize and explain them as best we can.

One of the great artists of German Renaissance, Hans Baldung Grien, seems to have had a fascination with witches, to whom he dedicated several works, distributed in time between 1510 and 1544 (paintings, drawings, engravings)⁸. These works tell complex stories through the skillful articulation of meaningful visual elements. Baldung Grien knows how to use spatial relationships and oppositions to great visual effect. Thus, in most of his compositions or at least in those that have the strongest visual impact, beautiful young witches appear in opposition to ugly old ones. They relate to each other, they have relationships of power or collaboration, they interact in many possible ways, which makes Baldung Grien's paintings highly translatable into narrative and symbolic patterns.

A woodcut dating from 1510, with versions in München, Staatliche Graphische Sammlung⁹, in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston¹⁰, and in the British Museum¹¹ represents one of Baldung Grien's most famous witchcraft

⁸ See these works, accompanied by extensive comments, in Charles Zika, *The Appearance of Witchcraft. Print and Visual Culture in Sixteenth-Century Europe* (London & New York: Routledge, 2007), 10, 14, 33, 71, 79, 80, 82, 83, 85 and *passim*. An interpretation of the sexual signification of these works can be found in Charles Zika, *Exorcising our Demons. Magic, Witchcraft and Visual Culture in Early Modern Europe* (Leiden & Boston: Brill, 2003), 237-267. See other relevant interpretations: Linda C. Hults, "Baldung and the Witches of Freiburg: The Evidence of Images," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, Vol. 18, No. 2. Autumn (1987): 249-276; Margaret A. Sullivan, "The Witches of Durer and Hans Baldung Grien," *Renaissance Quarterly*, vol. 53, nr. 2 Summer (2000): 333-401; Claire Sandberg, "Boil and Bubble and Male Trouble: The Visual Representation of Masculine Anxieties in 16th Century Witchcraft Prints," *Renaissance Reframed*, 28 Oct. 2020, <https://renaissancereframed.com/2020/10/28/boil-and-bubble-and-male-trouble/>.

⁹ Viorica Guy Marica, *Baldung Grien* (Bucharest: Meridiane, 1976), 31, 51-54.

¹⁰ Charles Zika, *The Appearance of Witchcraft*, 10.

¹¹ https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/P_1852-0612-105 (accessed 27.02.2023).

scenes. Four witches sit on the ground beside a dry tree trunk, focused on a pot in which a magic potion is boiling, filling the atmosphere with smoke and steam. The two in the foreground appear to be still young, though strong-bodied, but the other two are stranger. The first, an old woman with her hair unfurled and her body bare, holds up with her hands a strip of cloth and a platter on which animal remains seem to lie, and the second is so strange that she looks more like a mask¹² than a human being, even a decrepit one. Amidst the steam and smoke, a goat's head can also be seen. The most interesting witch, however, is another one, flying above the others on a goat, but facing the animal's tail. She is young, beautiful, muscular, with very long, curly, unfurled hair, and in her hands she holds a fork with two horns between which is a bowl of potion, from the steam of which a desperate human face seems to rise. With this woodcut the spectators find themselves amid Sabbatical debauchery.

In a chalk drawing by Hans Baldung Grien, dated 1514, kept in the Albertina Museum in Vienna and entitled *New Year's Greeting with Three Witches*¹³, one sees a group of women in twisted positions full of erotic allusions. One of the women is crouched on the ground, without her face or breasts visible, her posterior turned brazenly towards the spectators. The two other women, standing, seem to dominate and crush her with their authority, especially since one of them has her right foot resting on the shoulder of her companion. These two witches form an extremely interesting couple. The one on the right, young and beautiful, has firm and voluptuously rounded breasts. Moreover, she holds her left hand (and the symbol is transparent) in front of her vagina, while with her right hand she lifts a small container in which is probably boiling a love and death potion. The other witch, the one on the left, the old one, has sagging and flaccid breasts, with large nipples. The flesh is withered, the skin is wrinkled, and the vaginal region inspires disgust and horror, because the flesh has lost all its firmness. Jean Palou, a researcher of Western witchcraft, makes a distinction between the visual representation of the ugly witch and that of the beautiful magician,

¹² Ioan Pop-Curșeu, Ștefana Pop-Curșeu, "The Mask of the Witch: from Ritual to Carnival and Theatre," *Studia Universitatis Babeș-Bolyai. Dramatica*, vol. 65, nr. 1 (2020): 17-50, DOI:10.24193/subbdrama.2020.1.01, <https://dramatica.ro/index.php/j/article/view/29>

¹³ https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Baldung_hexen_ca1514.jpg (accessed 06.02.2023).

in his book *La Sorcellerie*. This distinction should, in fact, be subject to nuance and criticism, but nevertheless Palou's considerations on the representation of the witch's breast remain interesting: small, thin, and round in the case of the young, drooping, and ugly in the case of the old. In many cases, the breast comes in opposition with the belly and the lower abdomen, monstrous and profaned, expression of the horror that maternity causes to witches, but also clear symbol of the satanic births, because these damned women usually give birth to the agents of Satan¹⁴.

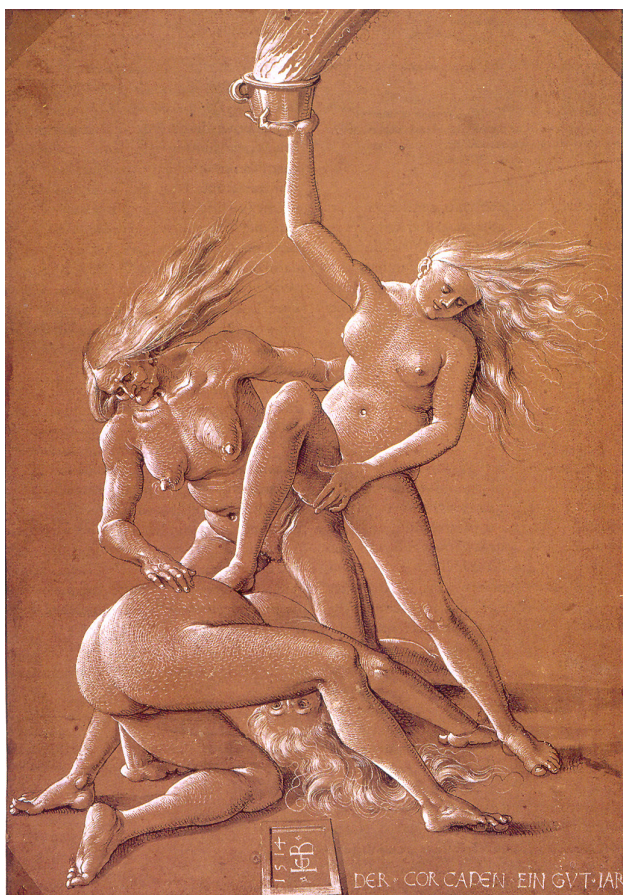


Fig. 1: Hans Baldung Grien, *New Year's Greeting with Three Witches*, 1514

¹⁴ Jean Palou, *La Sorcellerie* (Paris, PUF, "Que sais-je?", 1957).

The painter Frans Francken II (1581-1642) was very much concerned with witchcraft, to which he dedicated several important paintings which could be grouped into two main categories: those called *The Witches' Kitchen* (with three slightly different versions) and those usually called *The Witches' Sabbath* (with three basic versions). The most significant painting for the study of corporeality seems to us to be the one preserved in the Staatsgalerie Neuburg in Bavaria¹⁵. Here one can find the largest cluster of witches' bodies, in various poses and performing various actions. One is riding a broom and the spectators can only half see her flying through the chimney. Others are brewing filters or potions or reading from forbidden books. In this painting by Frans Francken, the viewers can also identify the biggest accumulation of naked bodies, which allows an analysis of anatomical details. The old witches have masculinized faces or animalistic figures, their postmenopausal bodies



Fig. 2: Frans Francken II, *The Witches' Sabbath*

¹⁵ https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:The_witches%27_Sabbath_by_Frans_Francken_II.jpg (accessed 10.02.2023).

are grotesque, while the young witches exude attraction and create fascination. In the distance, a beautiful, fleshy witch, who appears to be asleep, is lifted into the air by two devilish figures clearly inspired by Hieronymus Bosch's nightmarish creatures. Those who are dressed are already preparing to undress. In the foreground, one of them, softly beautiful and dressed in a sumptuous silk dress, slowly unfurls her blonde hair in a very sensual gesture. Just behind her is another splendid witch, even more naked, in a sort of spatial progression to the one being lifted into the air by demons.

The Italian artist Salvator Rosa (1615-1673) distinguishes himself among his contemporaries by the constancy and naturalism that he put in painting witches. Salvator Rosa's paintings are part of an allegorical tradition specific to Renaissance and Baroque. In a series of four circular works (*tondi*), dating from 1645-1649 and kept in The Cleveland Museum of Art¹⁶, he combines allegorical depictions of moments of the day with scenes of witchcraft, focusing on a fantastic and terrifying atmosphere. The starting point for these paintings is to be found in a poem by Rosa, *La Strega* (*The Witch*), written in 1645-1646, as Luigi Salerno shows: "In these paintings, Rosa sought to ennoble his realism by reconciling it with a generic allusion to literature."¹⁷ In the morning scene¹⁸, a beautiful young witch sits on a rock, holding a sword in her right hand, and appears to pierce the mouth of a giant frog. Behind them, two gigantic birds, but belonging to no known species, rise ominously, alongside other fantastic figures, while to the lower right, in the background, the sky glows red with the light of dawn. Luigi Salerno and Ira Kohn show that this painting "represents the witch as a beautiful woman, that is, the type preferred in the Italian tradition – as proved by all the images of Circe from Dosso Dossi to Castiglione"¹⁹.

In the daytime scene, projected against a landscape that seems almost idyllic, in the foreground an old, naked witch with messy white hair and sagging breasts sits astride a giant owl. In her left hand she holds a broom,

¹⁶ https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Paintings_by_Salvator_Rosa_in_the_Cleveland_Museum_of_Art (accessed 27.02.2023).

¹⁷ Luigi Salerno (and Ira Kohn, translator), "Four Witchcraft Scenes by Salvator Rosa," *The Bulletin of the Cleveland Museum of Art*, Vol. 65, No. 7, Sep. (1978): 225-231 [230].

¹⁸ <https://www.clevelandart.org/art/1977.37.1> (accessed 27.02.2023).

¹⁹ Luigi Salerno (and Ira Kohn, translator), 228.

and with her right she drips an unfamiliar liquor over a large, pot-bellied lizard. Three other witches, also old, ugly, and grey-haired, clustered on the left side of the *tondo* also link their incantations to the lizard lying belly up. Surprisingly, the main witch has a piece of cloth of a deep, melancholy yellow, which was no doubt her dress.

In the evening scene, three witches (one of whom we guess is prettier than the others), huddled around a fire, perform spells, creating what appears to be a homunculus or operating on a wax statuette²⁰. One of the witches, old and grey-haired, holds a mirror turned towards the audience. Above this group, a monstrous skeleton, wrapped in a piece of red cloak, holds a sandglass in its right hand, an allegorical object dear to Baroque tradition. Here, the hourglass signifies the inexorable passage of time and the fact that the witch's beautiful body grows old and decays. In the night scene²¹, a few travelers wandering through a forest stumble across witch-made charms in the middle of the road. One of the pilgrims, armed with a wand and dressed in what appears to be priestly garb, tries to fend off the attack of a monstrous and indistinct being. Our interpretation differs from Luigi Salerno's, who sees this male character as a magician²².

The Spanish artist Luis Ricardo Falero created a very interesting witchcraft painting, signed, and dated 1878, which is currently in a private collection in Italy. As the painter is not well known and information about him is scarce, it is quite difficult to decide whether this painting should be called *Witches Going to their Sabbath* or *The Dream of Faust*²³. Since it is a

²⁰ The interpretation that sees a wax statuette in this painting belongs to Luigi Salerno (and Ira Kohn, translator), 228-229.

²¹ <https://www.clevelandart.org/art/1977.37.4> (accessed 27.02.2023).

²² Luigi Salerno (and Ira Kohn, translator), 229.

²³ Title retained by many online reproductions, including the one on Wikipedia http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/d/d3/Witches_going_to_their_Sabbath_%281878%29%2C_by_Luis_Ricardo_Falero.jpg (accessed 05.02.2023). On the German version of Wikipedia, one finds the title *Walpurgisnacht. Der Aufbruch der Hexen*. A site specializing in realist and neo-classical painting, Art Renewal Center, which reproduces 42 works by Falero mentions the title *Vision of Faust* <https://www.artrenewal.org/artworks/luis-ricardo-falero/vision-of-faust/29361> (accessed 05.02.2023). As for Wikipedia, *Faust's Dream* is another painting that contains many feminine nudes, cf. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Luis_Ricardo_Falero#/media/File:Faust's_Dream,_by_Luis_Ricardo_Falero.jpg

modern painting, the accents and nuances have changed. This magical scene is only a pretext for the artist to paint beautiful naked women, placed in a circular composition. Their postures, on brooms or on a goat, are most expressive. The bodies are arched in such a way as to highlight the shapes, especially the rounded thighs and pointed breasts, with clearly marked nipples. However, Falero does not forget, in this aerial debauchery, a crucial element of a centuries-old iconographic tradition: the ugly witch. In the center of the painting, towards the bottom of the composition, an old woman holds a gaunt hand on the rump of one of her young and beautiful companions. Her sagging breasts have lost all attraction and her face offers a condensation of monstrosity. Her hooked nose falls over thin lips, from which a tooth emerges, the only one perhaps that the witch still has. The eyes are bloodshot and haggard, like those of a vampire, while deep horizontal wrinkles bar the forehead. Gray hair ruffles in disorder on her head, in contrast to the profusion of rich, wispy hair, blond, red, or brown, with which Falero fills the visual space of his painting. In addition, her pelvis is wrapped in a purple cloth, in order to hide the ravages of time on her private parts, which young witches both exhibit and hide, with supreme carelessness. Towards the bottom of her back hangs a disheveled black cat, looking straight at the viewer with wicked yellow eyes. This ugly old witch is a surprising sign in the gigantesque visual orgy, as Falero was a specialist in beautiful neoclassical and Orientalist nudes. Besides this main painting, Falero is the author of several other paintings of witchcraft, including *The Witches Sabbath* (1880)²⁴, *The Witch, Painted on a Tambourine* (1882)²⁵, not to mention *The Enchantress* (1878)²⁶ or the many paintings of fairies and nymphs, where it is the plastic beauty of the bodies that is predominant.

(accessed 05.02.2023). On Art Renewal Center, the same painting is called, in French, *Le Rêve de Falero* <https://www.artrenewal.org/artworks/luis-ricardo-falero/le-reve-de-falero/43044> (accessed 05.02.2023).

²⁴ <https://www.artrenewal.org/artworks/luis-ricardo-falero/the-witches-sabbath/29360> (accessed 05.02.2023).

²⁵ https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/1/19/The_witch%2C_by_Luis_Ricardo_Falero.jpg (accessed 05.02.2023).

²⁶ <https://www.artrenewal.org/artworks/luis-ricardo-falero/the-enchantress/29356> (accessed 05.02.2023).

In *Witches Going to their Sabbath*, the bodies of the witch-women tell two diametrically opposed stories, namely that of youth and beauty and that of old age and ugliness, which, however, flow from each other and interpenetrate more than one would like to admit at first sight. The question of sexuality might be the most significant bridge here, as the positioning of the old witch in Falero's painting states. Moreover, a film called *The Witches*, directed by Cyril Frankel (1966), seems to suggest that the older women get, the more inclined they are to witchcraft. Stephanie, the wicked witch in the film, says that witchcraft is an occupation taken up by older women as a substitute for sexuality, a "secret power when normal powers are failing"²⁷.

As a sort of provisional conclusion concerning the representation tradition in visual arts, it should be said that the art of painting enjoys multiplying the anatomical aspects of the witch's body, with a particular attention to details, supposed to fascinate or horrify the viewers.

2. Literature

Iubire magică (*Magical Love*) is a text written by the Romanian writer Vasile Voiculescu, a specialist in fantastic stories, in 1947. The story is framed as a narration-within-a-narration, and recounts a poet's adventure on holiday in a mountain village, where he accompanies a folklorist friend. The two set off from Bucharest with precise goals, which are not revealed from the start. The poet wants to rewrite a version of the Faustian myth, "Faust, part three, the epilogue in heaven", in which he takes Mephistopheles and the alchemist up to heaven, reversing the roles²⁸. The ethnographer, equipped with all that field research entails, is concerned with beliefs, myths, magical practices, and everything that can be gathered in a village to compile its ethno-folkloric monograph. In the mountains, the two are hosted by a peasant who lives there only with his daughter-in-law, because the woman's

²⁷ Peter Shelley, *Grande Dame Guignol Cinema. A History of Hag Horror from Baby Jane to Mother* (Jefferson & London: McFarland & Company, 2009), 100.

²⁸ *Iubire magică* (*Magical Love*), in *Ultimul Berevoi. Povestiri II* (Bucharest: Editura pentru Literatură, 1966), 275.

husband, his son, is atoning for a crime committed out of jealousy. From the first signs of magic they stumble upon in the village (an old man chases fleas out of the house with a knife and incantations), the two main characters quarrel about the reality of magical phenomena: the poet takes a rationalist and critical view, while the folklorist argues that certain phenomena cannot and should not be explained rationally.

The poet, who uttered blasphemies against witchcraft, retires to work on Faust and concentrates on the character of Margaret, imagined far above Goethean ideas, and transported to heaven. At this very moment, without the poet having felt a thing, a beautiful girl appears before him, who introduces herself as Margaret, the daughter-in-law of their host... A consuming passion is unleashed in the soul of the poet, who is kept at a distance in the procession of Margaret's other admirers (including some grotesque figures, admirably described by Voiculescu), and cannot win her over with money, pleas, services rendered or the most unimaginable humiliations. The paroxysmal state that the poet experiences is compared to a "possession." In the meantime, the folklorist makes remarkable discoveries on the trail of a ballad. He tries to awaken his friend to reality, telling him that he is "bewitched," because Margaret had heard the curses "against the sorcerers and had taken revenge in this way"²⁹. His attempts to awaken the poet to reality (be it a magical one) fail, however, because the lover remembers exactly what interests him in the theory of magic that his friend explains to him: namely that through spells he could influence Margaret's will and make her fall into his arms. With this obsessive image in mind, he agrees to be taken to the most powerful witch in the village: this woman is hunched and thin, her cheeks drawn in, her chin lifted, but her eyes are piercing like burning coals.

From the beginning, it rains with warnings: "Margaret is herself a witch," who "works only with charms and that's why men are crazy" about her, but, in reality, she is old and ugly³⁰. In the face of the client's disregard, the witch begins to mutter a "spell," accompanied by practices described in detail by Voiculescu. The lover is blown in the cheek, then "down, under the groin,"

²⁹ *Iubire magică (Magical Love)*, 286.

³⁰ *Iubire magică (Magical Love)*, 288.

he is smoked with “a bunch of stinking weeds, mixed with hair torn from beasts,” a four-pointed star is written with a knife on his chest – right next to his heart – and he is given a small piece of bone on which the old woman takes care to write a five-pointed star (a pentagram), of which one corner is turned downwards. He is advised to go back home without meeting anyone (an almost universal recommendation given to those going on or returning from magical expeditions) and to slip the charm onto her beloved's body. The instructions, followed to the letter by the poet, yield an unexpected result:

In front of me was an undead woman, with eyes like twisted egg whites, slapped by heat; nose eaten by ulcers; scrunched cheeks sucked deep between the shaggy, festering gums. Her cleaved breasts hung like two empty bags, dry and wrinkled. Her ribs played like circles on a dismantled barrel. And in the basin, at the end of the leg bones, the spurred entrails hissed like venomous snakes, and the stench of death suddenly filled the world.³¹

In front of this terrifying revelation, the only solution open to the ex-lover is to flee; he leaps down the mountain and immediately leaves for Bucharest, forgetting his lover and his friend there. In the capital, he realizes that the witch had made “Margaret, like a spiteful woman, ugly,” by breaking their waves instead of harmonizing them³².

After listening to the account of this strange story from the poet's youth, one of the listeners – a doctor – enquires about the folklorist, asking what happened to him and what his name was. The poet, out of shame, severed all ties with the man who had taken him to the mountain, and even forgot his name. The doctor helps him to remember, revealing that he had treated a certain Teofil Kivu when he was a doctor “at the central hospice.”

³¹ *Iubire magică (Magical Love)*, 290. Translation ours. See the original description: “În fața mea era o strigoaică, cu ochii de albuș de ou răscopt, plesnit de dogoare; nasul mâncat de ulcer; obraji scofâlciți se sugeau adânc între gingiile știrbe și puruiate. Sâni tescuiți îi atârnav ca două pungi goale, uscate și încrețite. Coastele îi jucau ca cercurile pe un butoi dogit. Și în bazinul șoldiu, pe crăcanele oaselor picioarelor, măruntaiele spurcate clocoteau ca niște șerpi veninoși și duhoarea morții umplu deodată lumea.”

³² *Iubire magică (Magical Love)*, 291.

The patient suffered from “an exciting-manic psychosis, with systematized delirium,” speaking only of “spells, incantations” and “a charm that was cast on him.” Death, “in terrible torments,” put an end to his suffering: this story shakes the poet, who is certain that Margaret took revenge on at least one of the two townspeople who had made an irruption in the magical world and in her cortege of admirers. The doctor’s explanations, which attribute Kivu’s death to a “charged heredity,” are not accepted by the poet, who is now willing to give the powers and substance of magic an indisputable reality³³. Voiculescu’s story, one of the best the author has written, is masterfully constructed: the plot is subtly woven, the narrative tension is skillfully controlled, the boundary between reality and fiction, or between reality and madness, always remains permeable, the erotic spells gain consistency and the magic of the style captivates the readers.

3. Cinema

Cinema – continuing the spirit of painting – develops and refines the iconographic tradition that presents witches either as very beautiful women or as women of extraordinary ugliness. Examples are abundant and one could cite dozens, if not hundreds, from horror movies, fantasy films, cartoons, comedies, etc. At first glance, filmmakers do not pursue very different goals from those of painters, but – on closer inspection – one discovers that cinema makes a significant contribution to the development of an ancient iconographic and symbolic system...

The ugliness of witches is exploited by filmmakers in many films, where it serves as a revelation of the wickedness and desire for destruction that animates these satanic creatures³⁴. Italian director Dario Argento, in the so-called *Mothers Trilogy*, creates a series of witch figures that have remained

³³ *Iubire magică (Magical Love)*, 292.

³⁴ This is also the case in theatre and dramatic literature, as shown in Ștefana Pop-Curşeu, “Sorcières et sorcellerie dans le théâtre de Michel de Ghelderode,” *Studia Universitatis Babeş-Bolyai, Dramatica*, nr. 1 (2007): 44-59.

iconic landmarks in the history of cinema³⁵. In *Suspiria* (1977), he recounts the adventures of Susie Banion (Jessica Harper), a young American girl who comes to Europe to learn to dance and arrives at a school that hides a coven of witches who engage in sinister practices every night. The girl manages to destroy the sabbatical school by killing the old priestess Helena Markos, who has been surviving in a quasi-cadaveric form for a century in the center of a real labyrinth of rooms. At the end, when Susie has the courage to kill her, one discovers, with horror, the cheeks scratched with wrinkles, the flesh of the face green and glowing, where one can hardly distinguish the mouth from which comes a hoarse, metallic, inhuman voice. At the opposite of this sinister old hag are the witches in the film *The Third Mother* (2007). They are all young, beautiful, sexy, punk stylish, but with an evil that comes through in all their actions, as they are violent, perverse, and mean-spirited.

In Ridley Scott's *Legend* (1985), a fantasy film masterfully crafted, there is a fragment that presents the meeting of the hero Jack (Tom Cruise), who has gone to deliver the world from the grip of the Dark Spirit, with the witch Meg Mucklebones. The witch is a masterpiece of makeup, with her green, slimy skin, hooked nose, rare, sharp teeth, gnarled spidery fingers and menacing figure. The encounter takes place in a swamp emanating stinking miasma and giving off a terrifying atmosphere. The dialogue between Jack and Meg deserves transcription, as it plays on the antithesis between the apparent ugliness of the witch and her conviction that she is not without beauty, which the hero knows how to use to distract the creature's attention and pierce her vulnerable belly with his sword:

Meg Mucklebones: What a fine fat boy you are, Jack!

Jack: You don't really mean to eat me, do you, ma'am?

Meg Mucklebones: Oh, indeed I do! [*she giggles*]

Jack: That would be a shame because someone as fair and lovely as yourself, Miss Meg, deserves far better than scrawny me. Don't you think?

³⁵ Ioan Pop-Curșeu, "Dario Argento et la mère-sorcière: psychanalyse d'une image obsédante", *Studia Universitatis Babeș-Bolyai. Philosophia*, vol. 65, nr. 1 (2020): 19-37, DOI:10.24193/subbphil.2020.1.02, http://www.studia.ubbcluj.ro/download/pdf/philosophia/2020_1/03.pdf

Meg Mucklebones: Think me fair, do you, Jack?

Jack: All the heavenly angels must envy your beauty.

Meg Mucklebones: [giggles] What a fine meal you'll make, be the rest of you as sweet as your tongue!³⁶

As for beauty, the cinema brings accents unknown in the pictorial tradition, by developing the "sexy" and even "glamorous" dimension of the witch, starting with René Clair's film, *I Married a Witch* (1942), where Jennifer is described in the opening scene as "young, and beautifully fair. Fairer than all women that ever were.", continuing with Richard Quine's, *Bell, Book and Candle* (1958) and Griffin Dunne's *Practical Magic* (1998), and arriving at Anna Biller's *The Love Witch* (2016)³⁷. This has been a trend that has run through the history of cinema, often barely nuanced, sometimes questioned, and criticized, but never losing interest altogether.

The aesthetic oppositions between ugliness and beauty, that we observed in painting and literature, are found in cinema, where they are often intersected by ethical oppositions at the level of narrative and symbolic structures. In this logic, which only takes up the main postulates of the Great Theory of Art, ugliness can only correspond to wickedness, evil, perversity, violence, and destruction, while beauty is associated with virtue, goodness, and their corollaries³⁸. This kind of perspective is in the spotlight in fantasy movies or in films inspired by fairy tales, especially those made under the patronage of Disney and Pixar studios (*Snow White*, *The Little Mermaid*, *Rapunzel*, *The Emperor's New Groove*, *The Sword in the Stone*, *Brave*).

³⁶ This fragment can be viewed at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pOFQiB391Vc> (accessed 18.02.2023).

³⁷ Heather Greene, *Lights, Camera, Witchcraft: A Critical History of Witches in American Film and Television* (Woodbury, Minnesota: Llewellyn Publications, 2021), *passim*.

³⁸ This association has been pointed out by a very good historian of witchcraft, Julian Goodare, *The European Witch-Hunt* (London & New York: Routledge, 2016), 275: "Accusers of witches frequently used phrases like 'old witch' or 'old hag'. Whether or not these women really were old, they were being assimilated to a stereotype that assumed that they were. The commonplace idea that old women were ugly was a logical component of misogynistic ideas about feminine 'vanity': young women were supposedly vain about their beauty, but soon they would be old and ugly. And, just as beauty was associated with virtue, ugliness was associated with wickedness."

In Victor Fleming's *The Wizard of Oz* (1939), the Witch of the West is ugly and evil and everyone in the audience remembers her greenish-pale face, while Glinda, the good witch of the North, is radiantly beautiful and blonde, which does not fail to seduce the male spectators. In *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* (2010, 2011), Hermione Granger (Emma Watson), the beautiful and innocent young witch who is learning the secrets of white magic, is confronted by the violent and powerful Bellatrix Lestrange, whose name says both the warlike nature and the strangeness. This one, brilliantly played by Helena Bonham Carter, even if she is not particularly ugly, brings a touch of horror and darkness, maybe more disturbing than the direct physical grotesque.

The aesthetic opposition between ugliness and beauty is nuanced in many films, especially horror films, either by the disruption of ethical oppositions, or by the blurring of separating lines and boundaries. Often, ugliness is associated with goodness, while beauty is associated with extreme wickedness and irreversible moral decay. In Roger Corman's *The Undead* (1957), physical beauty hides a heart of stone, as the dapper Livia (Allison Hayes) will stop at nothing to take the man she loves, the knight Pendragon, while the old Meg Maud (Dorothy Neumann) shows more humanity. Similarly, a whole series of contemporary beauties hide a vile character, when they personify all-powerful witches: Lena Headey as The Mirror Queen, in Terry Gilliam's *The Brothers Grimm* (2005), Tilda Swinton as Jadis the White Witch in Andrew Adamson's *The Chronicles of Narnia* (2005), Moran Atias, in the fundamental role of Dario Argento's *The Third Mother* (2007), and Emmy Rossum as Ridley Duchannes in Richard LaGravenese's *Beautiful Creatures* (2013). Charlize Theron as Ravenna, in Rupert Sanders' *Snow White and the Huntsman* (2012), as the beautiful and wicked witch, takes up the tradition instituted by Disney in the famous 1937 animation, *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*.

This kind of sexy witch with a filthy character, imposed and developed by cinema, has greatly contributed to the blurring of aesthetic and moral ideas of contemporary spectators, in the same way that decadent art of the end of the 19th century did in its time, through the figure of the *femme fatale*.

But cinema brings another great novelty, because – thanks to its technical possibilities and astounding special effects – it was able to propose to the spectators exciting stories which bet on the *physical transformations* of witches. Beautiful bodies are transformed before our eyes into hideous masses: the skin cracks and is filled with cankers, the flesh rots and reveals frightening monsters of ugliness.

Barbara Steel, in Mario Bava's *The Mask of the Demon* (1960) is in a way at the origin of the transformational trend. She plays a princess, Asa Vajda, condemned for witchcraft in a largely implausible Moldavia of the 17th century. The Inquisition, absent in the Orthodox Christian principality of Moldavia, condemns Asa to wear a mask with sharp points on her face, which causes her enormous suffering. Two centuries later, Professor Kruvajan and his assistant, lost in the princess' castle, discover the tomb and inadvertently wake her up. We then see a moving face with tanned skin, with a demonic look, where the marks of the thorns of the mask are clearly visible, constituting real craters. It is under this aspect that Asa Vajda comes back to life and launches into vengeful actions.

Sam Raimi's *Oz, the Great and the Powerful* (2013) offers a more complicated structure in terms of physical appearance of the three witches, who revolve around the male hero, the one who will become the Wizard of Oz at the end of an initiatory journey. Glinda (Michelle Williams), the maid, is beautiful and blonde, as in Victor Fleming's iconic film, from which Raimi takes some iconographic patterns. Evanora (Rachel Weisz), the villain, is also beautiful, but not blonde! A dark dominance characterizes her appearances, whether it is the hair, the look, the makeup or the outfit. Theodora (Mila Kunis), as for her, from beautiful that she is at the beginning of the film, is transformed by jealousy into the wicked Witch of the West, with her unforgettable greenish face.

Similarly, in Tommy Wirkola's *Hansel and Gretel, Witch Hunters* (2013), there is the beautiful and good witch, despite a certain ominous aura, who helps the two heroes, Hansel (Jeremy Renner) and Gretel (Gemma Arterton), in their quest, but there are also a host of ugly and wicked witches, who can

sometimes assume fascinating appearances³⁹. Many of them are bicephalous, crippled, hunchbacked, hairy, small, massive, shaggy, in a graphic unfolding of the many possible forms of corporeal monstrosity. Their leader, the great witch Muriel, sometimes presents the viewer with the sovereign beauty of Famke Janssen, the actress who plays her brilliantly, but often her skin fills with cracks that make the blue glow of the eyes or the bloody opening of the mouth more inhuman. Called to Augsburg to stop the child abductions that plague the city, the two legendary brothers are drawn into a journey through their own past. When they arrive at their childhood home in the woods, they learn from Muriel why their father abandoned them in the forest in olden times. He had resorted to this desperate solution in order to save them, because their mother, the beautiful Adrianna, a powerful “white” witch, was about to be attacked by the forces of darkness, who needed her heart to ensure invulnerability. Unable to defeat Adrianna, Muriel unleashes the townspeople against her, knowing that the good witch would never use her magical powers to harm them. So Adrianna is burned in front of her husband, who is hanged near their happy house. In this story where visual kitsch abounds, 3D technology creates a comprehensive and inclusive space, which fully engulfs the viewer’s body, who then more easily accepts the narrative shifts and twists.

Despite the fact that it does not use any 3D technology, one of the most spectacular films in terms of physical transformations of the witch and the quality of special effects is probably *The Witches* by Nicholas Roeg (1990), an adaptation of the novel of the same title by Roald Dahl. Anjelica Huston masterfully plays the leader of a coven of witches, The Grand High Witch, whose goal is to eliminate all the children in England⁴⁰, after transforming

³⁹ Willem de Blécourt, “Chapter Twelve. The Witch in the Owen: Exploring *Hansel & Gretel Witch Hunters*,” in *The Fairy-Tale Vanguard: Literary Self-Consciousness in a Marvelous Genre*, edited by Stijn Praet, Anna Kérchy (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2019), 229-246.

⁴⁰ On the representations of the witches’ infanticide impulse, see: Ioan Pop-Curșeu, “Le Meurtre de l’enfant dans les rituels de sorcellerie: commentaires sur un stéréotype culturel,” *Revista de Etnografie și Folclor / Journal of Ethnography and Folklore*, New Series, 1-2 (2011): 19-32; Ioan Pop-Curșeu, “Signes apocalyptiques: l’infanticide magique et l’enfant monstrueux,” *Ekphrasis. Images, Cinema, Theatre, Media*, issue 2 (2012): 145-163; Maria Tausiet, “Chapter Nine Witchcraft as Metaphor: Infanticide and its Translations in Aragon

them into mice. The moment when she turns the skin of her face over is memorable, because the spectators can see the unspeakable. An aged and decomposed face appears, adorned with a long and pointed nose, which grows larger and larger. The noise that this enormous nose makes, forcing the limits of the skin, makes the audience shudder with fear. Emaciated ears stand out from a skull dotted here and there with sparse hair, as well as the chin of the witch, which is quite masculinized. Moreover, the whole body of the witch has become monstrous in the course of the transformation: the back is afflicted with a hump and the flesh has taken on a purulent and cadaverous, bloody and mummified aspect, with very effective nuances from the visual point of view. Fortunately, The Grand High Witch is half covered by the black dress inherited from ancient Canidia!

A new film adaptation of Roald Dahl's novel *The Witches*, directed by Robert Zemeckis, was released in 2020. Although the novel appeared in 1983, this second adaptation sets the action of the film in the 1960s in the US state of Alabama and uses black main characters. The director's claims about his intentions, which we transcribe below from a television interview, have been translated into practice with great accuracy in the way the witches hide their monstrosity and physical deformities beneath a perfectly elegant exterior:

As it's indicated in the story, our witches are just normal looking, people who might be walking around on the street. But you have to find these specific clues that tip you off why they're a witch [...], they don't have hands, they have claws, so they have to hide their hands with gloves, and they don't have any hair, so they have to wear wigs to, you know, be incognito. So being able to design witches that have an evil glamour type of look rather than a traditional witch flying around on a broom look. [...]. The witches' wardrobe, which we didn't want to be traditional, black hat, witch stuff, so we went for something that we call Hitchcock glamour. So the witches have this kind of timeless, stylish type of diabolical costume.⁴¹

in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries," in *Languages of Witchcraft. Narrative, Ideology and Meaning in Early Modern Culture*, Edited by Stuart Clark (Houndmills: Macmillan Press, New York: St. Martin's Press, 2001), 179-195.

⁴¹ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9dFe4lyr3mU&ab_channel=FabTV, min. 2.50-4.14 (accessed 09.02.2023).

As for the physical appearance of the witches, the grandmother of the narrator named Gatsby draws his attention to some specific details. Witches are evil, demons in human form; they have the corners of their mouths elongated almost to their ears, hidden by thick make-up; they always wear gloves, because they have no hands, but claws; they have no toes; they are bald, so they wear wigs, which give them wounds that are called "wig rash"; they have nostrils larger than human ones, for sniffing out children, and when they do this their nostrils can enlarge up to 20 cm. Children have an awful smell to them, all the worse the cleaner they are. The Grand High Witch (Anne Hathaway) is the international leader of the coven. Hailing from the Norwegian tundra, she is all-powerful, evil and merciless, giving everybody orders, setting the steps for the witches' future actions and coordinating the global eradication of all children. "Her voice sounds ugly and squeaky like an exterior door swinging on a rusty hinge. (...)," Grandma remarks. In fact, over the course of the film, the voice of the Grand High Witch is constantly changing, oscillating between devilish and soft. Almost every word is backed up musically. For the first time, during her speech at the Great Witch's Congress, the Grand High Witch uses her mouth completely: she has a forked tongue, like a snake (which appears in Zemeckis' film as an emblematic animal for witchcraft, alongside the black cat).

The arrival of the witches follows the same pattern each time: the first intrusion is that of the Grand High Witch, elegant, imposing, self-assured, with an air of arrogance and malice; she is followed by the other witches walking behind her in military marching rhythm: the image is obviously that of a stern, fierce and impetuous general at the head of his devoted army. Each entrance of the witches is accompanied by music in a cadenced pace, accentuated by the sound of heels on the hotel floor. The witches are dressed differently, but all have modern costumes, gloves up to their elbows, with their heads covered either by very different hats or turbans (we could even see one witch that wears a nightie). The common element is the shoes with very high thin heels and pointed toes; both the sound/music (drums and violins in the orchestra) and the image (the witches' footsteps) create a rhythm that reminds us of an army on parade.

The witches' arrival at the hotel is in this pattern, with a lavish entrance: The Grand High Witch is slender, elegant, blonde, the perfect make-up of a true lady (one can glimpse, however, the lengthening of the corners of her mouth). She wears a striped hat with transparent portions, sunglasses that amplify her mystery, a white tunic with black stripes and diamonds, long black gloves with white stains, all perfectly matched with white shoes with a black rhombus at the extremely pointed tip and a black purse with gold inserts. The Grand High Witch's pet is a black cat (CGI), whose name is Hades, with whom she communicates wordlessly, but it turns out that there is no loyalty between the two characters.

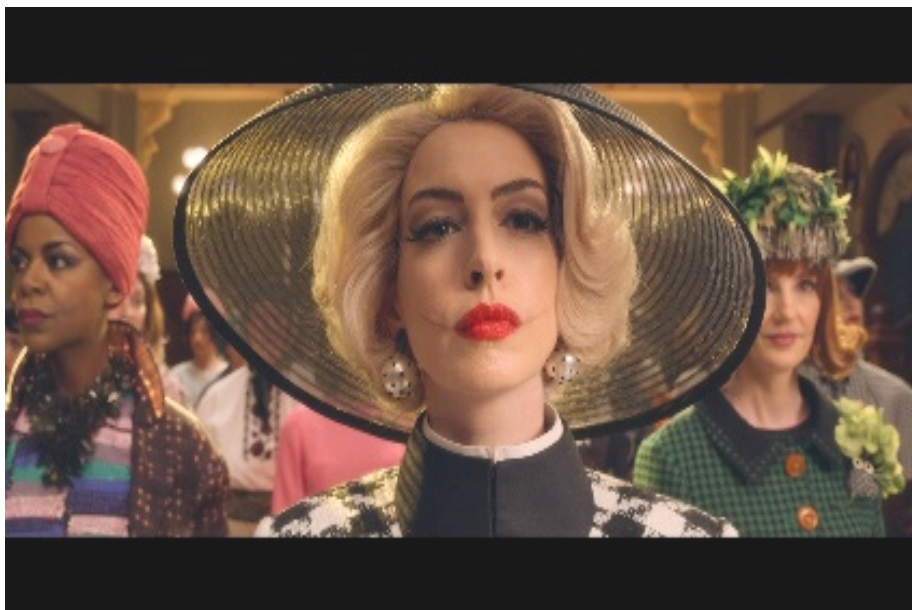


Fig. 3: *The Witches* (2020), dir. Robert Zemeckis, min. 24.40

A few minutes later, the Grand High Witch is presented to the spectators in the privacy of her hotel room (number 666). This time, she is wearing a pink turban to match her shoes, a dark burgundy nightgown, and over this a black robe, which has a burgundy boa, giving it a certain touch of preciousness. One can see the true face of the Grand High Witch in the

mirror, where she reflects and admires it with delight. Her face is full of scars old and new, her nose is missing, her mouth stretches to her ears, revealing a long row of teeth; only her eyes remain unchanged.



Fig. 4: *The Witches* (2020), dir. Robert Zemeckis, min. 30.29

To get revenge for being turned into mice, the protagonists intend to use the magical transformation potion on the witches themselves. They manage to pour it into the pea soup the witches will eat for lunch, and the maleficent women turn into rats, through the same process already seen in the film when children were changed into mice. The rats, unlike the mice from the children, are grumpy and aggressive. At first, the Grand High Witch escapes, but the final confrontation takes place in her apartment. The Grand High Witch is also transformed into an ugly rat. First, she exhales purple smoke, rises into the air, her skin covered in purple pustules. Grandma traps it in a glass jar, leaving it in the clutches of Hades the cat.

Short conclusions

What is the reason, the explanation of this iconographic and narrative tradition that is at least twenty centuries old and goes back to Greco-Roman literature, through Renaissance painting? Why the construction of a dialectic between ugliness and beauty, which returns unceasingly under the brush of the painters, in front of the cameras of the filmmakers, on the table of the film editors? One could sketch a hypothesis which concerns the affectivity of the spectators and another one, aesthetic. Even if they remain partial, the two hypotheses will nevertheless have the merit of opening avenues of reflection to be explored by further researches. First, we would like to point out that painters and filmmakers play with the binomial attraction/repulsion, which acts in a very strong way on the affectivity of the spectators. The beautiful witches attract, even erotically, with the same force with which the ugly old witches reject. When the two poles of physicality are united in the body of one single person (as we showed for some films discussed here), the spectators are plunged into a state of emotional ambiguity from which it is often difficult to reemerge. On the aesthetic level, in the paintings and films that deal with witchcraft, the construction of the images answers the requirement to balance the opposites in a superior artistic synthesis: the beautiful and the grotesque must dialogue and make each other stand out, according to the wish of Victor Hugo in the *Preface* of *Cromwell* (1827).

In fact, why are people so fascinated by artistic transpositions (visual arts, literature, cinema) of facts related to witchcraft? It is because witchcraft is an inexhaustible resource of excellent stories, full of strong emotional charge, narrative twists, themes that directly touch everyone. These are stories where, whether they are treated in pictorial, literary or cinematographic form, the body of the witch represents a central core of meaning: from this point of view, it is a most effective narrative and symbolic tool, by its simple presence in an image. Moreover, from Hans Baldung Grien to the work of contemporary filmmakers, the history of the witch is also a history of an increasingly accomplished mastery of illusion techniques which, beyond the content of the images, exert by themselves a lasting force of attraction on the audience... Basically, cinema is itself, perhaps more than painting and literature, a *history/matter* of witchcraft!

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Spectral Bodies and Superimposition in Photography and Film

Daria IOAN¹

Abstract: During the Victorian age, post-mortem and spirit photography became increasingly popular so that those who had lost dear people were offered an extended mourning ground. These types of images were produced in great number in order to prove the existence of the other world. It is natural that many of these dead people portraits deal with transparency, blur and diffusion, as the result of superimposing reality and spectrality. Later on, ectoplasms were caught on photosensitive materials by a great number of spirit hunters, aiming at the same purpose of demonstrating the physicality of the invisible order. Cinema imported the spiritualist themes and the subjects related to them and continued the same tradition of revealing to the common eye of the spectator a supernatural realm. Our paper analyses the aesthetics of different styles and techniques of working with these delicate subjects in photography and film throughout the ages, from Mumler to Méliès.

Keywords: transparency, blur, superimposition, vanishing acts, post-mortem photography, spirit photography, ectoplasms, fantastic film, magicians, spectrality.

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The emergence of the spiritualist movement in the United States in the mid-nineteenth century was the ideal opportunity to take a large number spirit photographs. Even if post-mortem portraits and the so called *cartes-de-visite* were already in high demand, pictures of those alive with those who were dead were about to become a special attraction. Thus, photography began to be used during spiritualist sessions as a means of proving the appearance of the deceased. Spiritualism was precisely a trend based on the firm belief that the spirits of the dead existed, and they had not only the ability, but also the inclination, to communicate with the living. With the dominance of spiritualism in English-speaking countries, the gate between the worlds remained open. The environment offered by photography fit perfectly with the needs of spiritualists to confirm the presence of loved ones who were no longer alive during their sessions. According to spiritualist beliefs, spirits, considering their superiorly evolved nature, could also provide ethical and moral support to the living in search of answers. The followers of the movement, in impressive numbers, sought for almost a century the guidance of good spirits, and the various practices through which they did so were the order of the day almost everywhere in the Western world.

In 1862, American spiritualists were surprised by the news that an engraver from Boston had discovered a kind of manifestation of spirits. This was William H. Mumler, who would later become one of the most famous spirit photographers. In 1862, he offered the press a photographic image of a child's spirit, next to a table on which there was a porcelain ornament and a framed photograph. After opening his own studio, Mumler took photos of a large number of clients, in which they appeared next to their deceased relatives or friends. No wonder this type of photography became so popular precisely in the years after the American Civil War, as then most people had lost loved ones. Mumler's success was followed, after seven years, by his trial for fraud. However, the probationers failed to discover the trick he used to obtain the images. Although the photography of spirits began to be subjected to a long series of examinations, sometimes with scandalous discoveries, it did not cease to be demanded by the public and existed until the middle of the twentieth century. Mumler's most famous photograph is the portrait of Mary Todd Lincoln, with the translucent appearance of her husband behind her.



Fig. 1: William H. Mumler, *Child spirit* (1862)

<https://www.sciencephoto.com/media/1011006/view/child-ghost-c-1862>
(accessed 12.06.2022)



Fig. 2: William H. Mumler, *Mary Todd Lincoln* (circa 1870),
<https://www.sciencephoto.com/media/1011006/view/child-ghost-c-1862>
(accessed 12.06.2022)

Aesthetically speaking, these images represent exceptions to the rules of that time. In order for the spirits to find room in the pictures with the living ones, the placement in the picture could not always be respected. In some photographs, the protagonists even seem cramped in the space delimited by

the edges. In the photo with the Lincoln couple, one dead and the other alive, the lady appears to be in an unnatural position, somewhat tilted, even though she is holding her body upright. The space occupied by each of the spouses in the image is almost perfectly equal, the composition benefitting from the balance of this duality. In the photo with the little ghost, likewise, the position of the body seems to be artificially tilted, in a similar manner to the table with the objects on it. By examining these images, we can observe the recurring tilted position of the figures, which rather results from the manipulation of other photographs and has nothing to do with a defective position of the subjects. In her article *A short story of superimposition: From spirit photography to early cinema*, Simone Natale demonstrates that photography of spirits, beyond its dubious documentary value, responded to the need for entertainment and spectacle in the society of the time, which culminated with its transfer to the screen once film appeared:

Even though many believed that photographs of spirits were indeed manifestations of spirits, they were seen by others as a curiosity rather than an object of faith. As I will show, numerous attempts to discredit the spiritualist techniques of the late nineteenth century prove this mixture of spectacle with religious belief and superstition.²

However, such photographs were also fascinating evidence, and the number of followers of spiritualism was ever-growing. Looking at the matter from both ends, the photographs of spirits were keeping the door open between belief and doubt, between faith and pure curiosity, and their existence simply proved that the world wanted the other world to exist, and that people wanted to communicate with it. In Mumler's case, as we learn from Natale's research, strange details have been pointed out that further indicate that his images were real. For example, when Mrs. Lincoln asked to be photographed by Mumler, she presented herself under a different identity. Therefore, the photographer could not know who she was, and he should have not been able to falsify the image with the spirit of her deceased husband.

² Simone Natale, "A short story of superimposition: From spirit photography to early cinema," *Early Popular Visual Culture* 10:2 (2012): 130.

In the field of spirit photography, William Hope is another famous and equally controversial case. He took an impressive number of photos of customers with the spirits of their deceased loved ones. The quality of this image collection is superior to those made by William Mumler as the visual association and the proportions between the portrait of the living person and the spirit are more normal, more natural. In Hope we do not find, for example, that entirely artificial and rigid tilted posture of the spirit. His first photograph with a spirit was done in 1905, when he immortalized a friend with a spectral appearance next to him. Shortly afterwards, Hope formed a spiritualist group called *the Crewe Circle Spiritualist Group*. Simone Natale reveals the existence of popular scientific publications such as *Scientific American* or, in France, *La nature*, in which were explained, along with tricks and optical illusions of the scene, some photographic tricks, later collected by Albert A. Hopkins in *Magic : stage illusions and scientific diversions including trick photography* in 1897: "Engravings illustrating how multiple exposures could be used to produce the so-called photographs of spirits, as well as other photographic illusions." (2012, 131)

In *Appearances. Ghosts, Dreams and Myths*, Aniela Jaffé gathers testimonies to classify the spirits. Thus, we discover in her book: the luminous spirits, the white spirits, the spirits without head and face, but also the companion of the dead, the little man-spirit, the ghostly creature of the white woman and others (Jaffé, 2005). A multitude of variations of appearances contrast with the linear and somewhat repetitive imaginary of Belle Époque spirit photography. Even if the images of this type evolved qualitatively, the way ghosts were represented remained mimetic and tributary to the realistic photography of those times. The spirits resembled the living whom they appeared next to in the pictures, they even had the faces they used to have when they were alive, and often the spirits' faces matched perfectly with photos they had previously taken in a studio. The art of copying these faces flourished in the early twentieth century, sometimes producing images of great aesthetic value, as in the case of photographs taken by William Hope.



Fig. 3: William Hope, *Couple with spirit in the car* (~ 1920),
<https://www.insideedition.com/gallery/are-ghosts-and-angels-real-28-times-spirits-were-allegedly-caught-camera-43631/couple-photographed-ghost-their-dead-son-881> (accessed 12.11.2021)

In the picture above, due to the strange positioning of the three characters, but also due to the optic aberrations, we have an ambiguity. It looks like the lady in the car is the ghost, and not the character in front of the car, who looks less translucent and more worldly than she does. The opacity of the spirit brings him from the afterlife among his living parents, and the diagonal framing almost excludes his father from the frame. However, the image has the charm of an eccentric collage and its value is confirmed by its presence in the collections of the Getty Museum.



Fig. 4: William Hope, *Two women with a spirit*, detail, (1863),
<https://publicdomainreview.org/collection/the-spirit-photographs-of-william-hope>
(accessed 12.11.2021)

Hope's photograph of two women and a spirit has a much more plastic nature than the previous one. Here, the image of the spirit overlaps the face of one of the women, thus revealing a greater exposure on the right side. The result of the overlap is that both the spirit and the living woman are transparent. The face of the deceased person is disproportionate to the two living characters, and its body is not visible. The dimensions are therefore not controlled for in the composition, which, as a result, makes the spirit seem surreal not only because of the spectral appearance but also because of the size of its face, as compared to the size of the living woman's body. The confluence area of the two parts of the image is still blurred, but it gradually gets more opaque the closer it gets to the other woman who does not have a ghost overlapped. The final result is similar to Dadaist photographs, taken during the Bauhaus period, in which photographers such as Lazslo Moholy-Nagy, Walter Peterhans, Christian Schad or Man Ray experimented by exposing various objects on the same photographic paper. The effects of transparency, shadow and light,

as well as the diagonal or centrifugal arrangement of objects and figures, are similar to cases of small compositional chaos in the era of spirit photography that purposefully used some not very well-controlled collage techniques.

In 1922, William Hope was exposed by a group led by paranormal investigator Harry Price and was charged with fraud, as a result of tests done at the British College of Psychic Science which showed that the photographer used the client's plates instead of his own plates. Even so, he continued to take pictures of spirits until 1933, the year of his death.

Ectoplasm photography is another particular case regarding the practice of recording paranormal phenomena. Compared to the photography of spirits, it is lacking images of the deceased from the frame, leaving room for the appearance of the opaque, liquid and viscous ectoplasmic substance next to the medium. Images with ectoplasms appeared in the early twentieth century and have nothing in common, visually speaking, with the 19th-century photographs of spirits. The diaphanous ghosts, along with the protagonists whose poses were usually rigid, are replaced by grotesque scenes of mediums invoking spirits. Ectoplasmic excretions, of a physical and easily visible nature, do not belong to the domain of transparency, but to that of the palpable world. However, their appearance is a sign of the encounter with the paranormal, proof that there existed a communication between the two worlds. In his article *Ectoplasms, Evanescence, and Photography*, Karl Schoonover evaluates the views on photography in the two hypostases:

The phenomenon of ectoplasms implies a different view on photography, appreciating less the device for its paranormal powers, and more for its mechanical extension of human vision. Photography no longer flaunts its independence from the laws of physics; it simply reveals the truth of the material world in more detail, similarly to a better glasses prescription. If ectoplasmic excretions are not ghosts per se, the role of the device in this phenomenon was not to capture spirits, but to attest to human contact with spirits, to record the manifestation in action and to document its fragile by-products.³

³ Karl Schoonover, "Ectoplasms, Evanescence, and Photography," *Art Journal* 62:3 (2003): 33.

Schoonover thus detects the turning point of the camera's role in paranormal photography. He is of the opinion that this major change is related to the development of its technical qualities, in parallel with the controversy in spiritualist circles regarding the manifestation of this kind of phenomena. Thus, the device moves from being the magical object that makes it possible to reveal the invisible, to the technical means of documenting the effects of conversations with spirits. The romance of images with ghosts floating around their living loved ones is replaced with the pragmatism of a visual document of spiritualism sessions. Likewise, as Schoonover observes, the protagonists change radically. In the case of ectoplasmic photographs, the presence of the medium in the frame is essential, whereas the spirits of the 19th century appeared spontaneously around their loved ones with or without the mediation of a medium, which was never present in the composition. For spiritualists, the appearance of ectoplasms somewhat resolves the debate about the immateriality of spirits, which in theory should not be perceived in photographic images, since they are invisible and autonomous from the physical world. The ectoplasm appears as an indexical object, says Schoonover. He shows that the existence of what cannot be seen is real.

The images of the ectoplasms were archived by three doctors passionate about the study of phenomena of materialization: Charles Richet, who followed the physiology of laughter, Gustave Geley, and Baron Albert von Schrenck-Notzing. They argued that ectoplasms could only be recorded using the latest surveillance technology. Their collections of ectoplasmic photographs have multiplied and become famous in the first two decades of the twentieth century. Baron Schrenck-Notzing ended up installing cameras in his studio, which became a sort of cinema, focused on carefully following all movements and expressions.



Fig. 5: Albert von Schrenck-Notzing, Stanislaw P. during the session of 25.01.1913,
<https://www.cabinetmagazine.org/issues/12/warner.php>
(accessed 19.11.2021)



Fig. 6: Albert von Schrenck-Notzing, Eva Carrière during the session of 22.11.1911, <https://www.cabinetmagazine.org/issues/12/warner.php> (accessed 19.11.2021)

The strange ectoplasmic substance eruptions were accompanied, during the photographed sessions, by the spectacle of physical suffering experienced by the medium, who was also often tied, while experiencing trance-specific convulsions. The grotesqueness of these images corresponded to the macabre taste of the audience who was devoured by a curiosity about the paranormal. However, the credibility of the recorded scenes has been questioned, as has the photography of spirits from the previous era. One of the famous cases is that of Eva Carrière, a controversial medium in Europe. The collaboration between her, Marthe Béraud as per her real name, and the baron was the subject of numerous curiosities and research. Also known as Mademoiselle Eva, in 1905 she held a

series of meetings at general Etienne Noël's *Villa Carmen* in Algiers, a general whose son had been engaged to her and who had died of a lethal disease in Congo. Spectators were also invited to the meetings, including the French scientist Charles Richet, who was obviously concerned with the veracity of the manifestations of the spirits. Eve claimed to manifest the serpent Bien Boa, the spirit of a 300-year-old Hindu brahmin. While Richet confirmed that he saw the snake breathing and moving around the room, as well as that he felt it touching him, other enthusiasts of the afterlife showed a more pronounced scepticism about the supernatural performances of the medium Eva Carrière. One of them was Harry Houdini, who, in his book *A Magician Among the Spirits* (1924), commented on several episodes in which he himself witnessed the dubious manifestation of the ectoplasms produced by her. During the meeting on June 22, 1920 in Hanover Square, number 20 in London, the magician saw that out of Eva C.'s mouth came, at one point, a large amount of matter that looked like foam, even if she had previously it had been wrapped in a black veil sewn like a sack, the "purpose of which was to prevent her from putting anything in her mouth."⁴

The last thing she produced that evening was a substance which, she said, she felt in her mouth and asked permission to use her hand to show it. This was granted and she took a load from her mouth, behind the veil which was wet and looked soaked. It looked like inflated rubber. No one saw a face painted on it. They (the others present) said it "vanished suddenly", but my years of experience in producing the Hindoo needle trick * convinced me that he "sleight-of-handed" it in his mouth while pretending to have it between her fingers. I know positively that the move she made is almost identical with the manner in which I manipulate my experiment.⁵

Unconvinced by the spectacle of Eva C.'s ectoplasms, Houdini held her hands during other sessions, but she continued to discharge substances out her mouth. After these experiments, the magician was convinced that "Eve's achievements are obtained by regurgitation. If not, the thing she is reputed to do is [set up] "from within."⁶

⁴ Harry Houdini, *A Magician Among the Spirits* (New York and London: Harper & Brothers, 1924), 169.

⁵ Ibid., 170.

⁶ Ibid., 172.

The aesthetic attributes of the photographs with Eva C. are complex, some of them presenting similarities and references to avant-garde collages or to the pictorial compositions of masters such as Marc Chagall. Even though following an investigation by the Society for Psychical Research in London, it has been discovered that her ectoplasms were false, the compositions resulting from her photography as a medium at work are still spectacular. All the objects resulting from the so-called encounters with spirits are physically present in the picture. It is no longer a question this time of meticulously obtained overlaps, as it used to be in the photography of spirits, but of a kind of conjuring of Eva C. herself. One of the ectoplasms, made from the French newspaper *Le Miroir*, refers to the paintings of Juan Gris, the cubist who also slipped pieces of text into his compositions. The strip of newspaper is glued to Eve's ear, as if coming out of it. The title of the French publication gives the photo a surreal air. What was meant to be a mysterious viscous substance that appeared in the ear of the medium is, in fact, the front page of the famous newspaper, and the letters that can be seen (*Miro*), bring the situation in the mundane, and far away from the beyond.



Fig. 7: Albert von Schrenck- Notzing, Eva C. with a cut-out piece from the French newspaper *Le miroir* as a fake ectoplasm, https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Eva_C_fake_ectoplasm_made_from_newspaper.gif (accessed 27.11.2021)

Likewise, the collage made by Eva C.'s collaborator, Madame, Bisson, puts Eva and Woodrow Wilson in the same plane, obtaining effect-wise a kitsch image with the pretensions of spiritualistic proof.

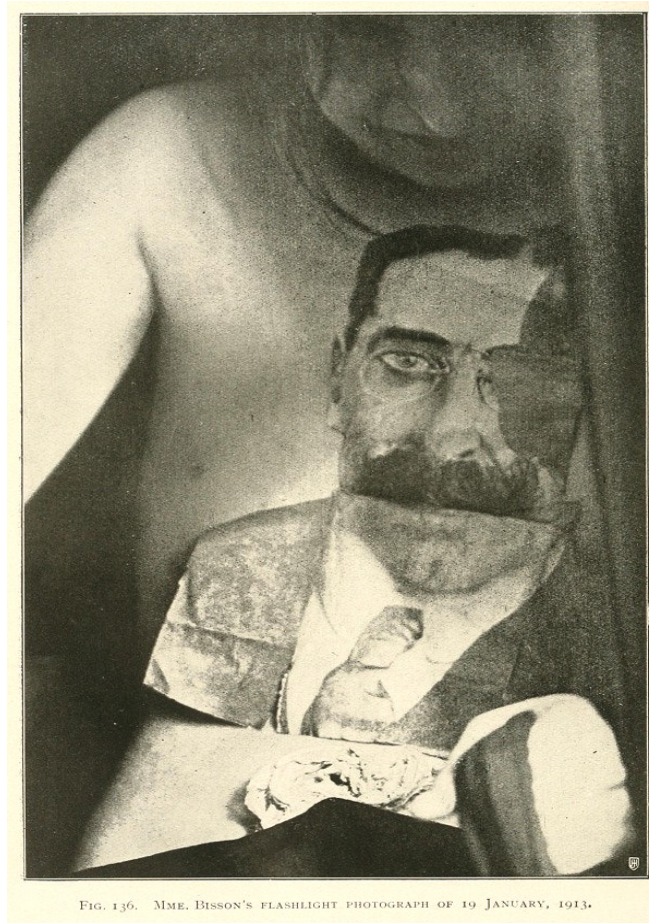


Fig. 8: Juliette Bisson, Eva C. and Woodrow Wilson (1913),
<https://publicdomainreview.org/collection/photographs-from-a-seance-with-eva-carriere-1913> (accessed 27.11.2021)

The American president, with the rigid appearance of a puppet, seems to be projected on Eva C.'s body, while she is in a trance. Physically, you can see the shape of the piece of paper on which his bust is printed, suspended

somewhat between the head of the medium and the bottom, which is not seen in the picture. The strangeness of the positioning of the two, the situation, the materials used to create this image, the magnetism of the medium with her eyes closed, and the unreality of Wilson's portrait, all of these factors make the visual result to have an aesthetic value which is independent of the context of its creation. Such techniques have been repeated by avant-garde artists and are still used today by contemporary artists.



Fig. 9: Albert von Schrenck-Notzing,
fotografie în timpul unei ședințe cu Eva Carrière (cca. 1911),
[https://catalogue.swanngalleries.com/Lots/LotDetails?salename=%28SPIRIT-
PHOTOGRAPHY--Albert-von-Schrenck-Notzing%29--2489%2B%2B%2B%
2B%2B320%2B-%2B%2B749517&saleno=2489&lotNo=320&refNo=749517](https://catalogue.swanngalleries.com/Lots/LotDetails?salename=%28SPIRIT-PHOTOGRAPHY--Albert-von-Schrenck-Notzing%29--2489%2B%2B%2B%2B%2B320%2B-%2B%2B749517&saleno=2489&lotNo=320&refNo=749517)
(accessed 27.11.2021)

Applying pieces of images that were foreign to the initial composition was one of the methods of composing surrealist and Dadaist collages from the first decades of the twentieth century. Between photography and graphics, the productions of these avant-garde currents have greatly influenced the art world. The image above is surreal in nature, regardless of the context of its production. The laws of physics and nature are momentarily suspended in this portrait of a woman in a trance. Atypical even for the world of photography, especially in its time, this is above all a portrait of a character with closed eyes, who seems to be sleeping. Such images have not been popular in the art of photography up until then, except for portraits of the deceased in the Victorian era. Portraits with closed eyes are not even popular today. Much later, in 1964, Andy Warhol made the avant-garde film *Sleep* (1964), in which John Giorno was filmed sleeping. The film is also, in fact, a collage. Warhol used a 16 mm Bolex camera which did not allow him to record more than 3 minutes, thus the whole film is obtained by post-processing. We find the image of the eyes closed as a close-up in the film *La Jetée* (1962) by Chris Marker, which is the result of a collage, a photographic one in this case.



Fig. 10: Andy Warhol, image from *Sleep* (1963),
<http://www.medienkunstnetz.de/works/sleep/> (accessed 09.02.2022)



Fig. 11: Chris Marker, image from *La Jetée* (1962),
<https://www.sensesofcinema.com/2015/feature-articles/la-jetee>
(accessed 09.02.2022)

There are, therefore, obvious multiple connections between post-mortem photography, photography of trance mediums and images of the avant-garde that unfolded and resumed throughout the twentieth century. The image of sleep, of the face with closed eyes, was revisited by artists and its significance evolved in different contexts, from surrealism to conceptualism. Beyond the already known associations, it remains another one of the very current iconic images, which offers countless possible reinterpretations.

The history of cinematographic art shows, from an early age, the directors' preoccupation with the representation of the phenomena of transcending dimensions, of the physical states that objects have, and of the transition between imaginable worlds. Georges Méliès's films and later those of avant-garde artists often relied on the effects of the visual transformation of matter. Continuing the illusionist tradition, Méliès used tricks and lighting systems in his productions to amaze the spectators with various representations of the invisible or impossible magical phenomena. Thus, the theatre of attractions moved to the cinematic field, in which the incredible presented on the screen became more and more credible, through the combined techniques used by image creators.

From 1899 to 1912, Méliès made more than 400 fantastic films, in which illusion, burlesque comedy and pantomime were combined to portray surprisingly surreal images of the universes he imagined. As in the photography of spirits, the idea of the double, one that can replace its true referent, appears in countless scripted and mise-en-scene variants in the effervescent visual creation of the French director.

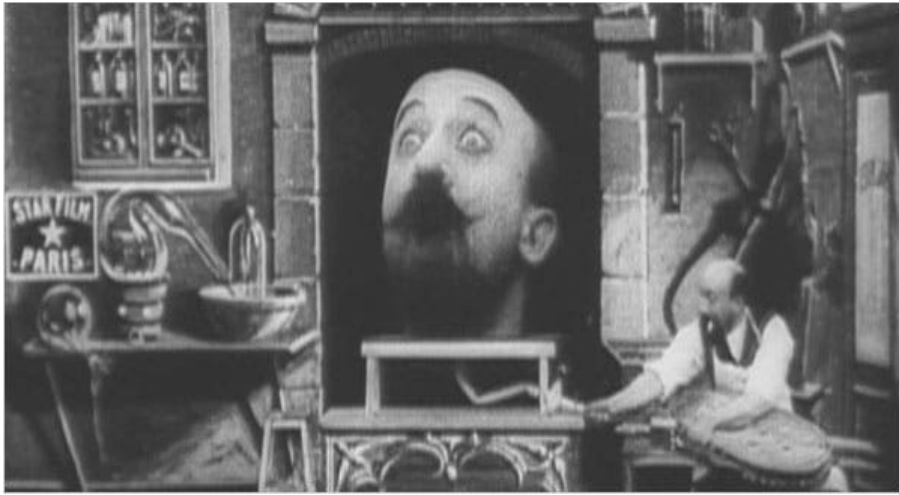


Fig. 12: Georges Méliès playing a scientist that is inflating a rubber head (also played by him), *L'homme à la tête en caoutchouc* (1901), Kehr, Dave, *Georges Méliès: The First Wizzard of Cinema*, <https://www.nytimes.com/2008/03/18/movies/homevideo/18dvds.html> (accessed 14.02.2022)

The multiplication, duplication, transformation or disappearance of the characters are frequent visual themes in his vast production. Generally devoid of narrative aspect, Méliès' films are meant to amaze the viewer with the spectacle of these phenomena, in the context of dream worlds. Transparency and diffusion are used to mask the juxtaposition between real and unreal, thus legitimizing their coexistence in the same plane of the visible. Photography plays an important role in the imaginary and instrumental of these films. But, as Tom Gunning says in *Phantom Images and Modern Manifestations: Spirit Photography, Magic Theatre, Trick Films, and Photography's Uncanny*:

Image and model have an interchangeable ontology here, not simply through an indexical process of tracing an image but via a mysterious process in which image replaces body and vice versa. For Méliès, spirit photography results less in communication with the dead than in an exchange of identities between image and model.⁷

Gunning refers to the film *Le portrait spirite* (1903), where the figure of the magician appears, played by Méliès, who transforms a woman into a portrait, after which he brings her back to life. In his approach, the subject is part of the practices in which magicians are manipulating the female body and transform it into an object of contemplation. However, beyond this aspect, the text that precedes the images indicates the film's true centre of interest, which is, first of all, a technical one: "Spiritualist photography. Dissolution effect without the black background. Great novelty." (text from the film *Le portrait spirite*, my translation). The informed spectator was thus a priori detached from the context imagined by the director, and his attention was rather channelled towards the way in which the director obtained the skilled magician's illusion. This type of greatly modern meta-discourse inserted in fictional worlds was resumed and developed, especially in theatre, where the scenographic and screenwriting skeleton became explicitly a part of the show for Brecht, Pirandello, Claudel and many other authors. Thus, Méliès also created the metaphorical diffusion between the stage and the backstage, which ended up merging, following thus the surrealist logic of mixing the real and the imaginary world. However, the crude explanation of the trick did not diminish the attraction triggered by the magic of the event, rather it contributed to an even greater astonishment for the spectators regarding the vast powers of the cinema. Using delimitation via the specially arranged frame for the illusion also refers to photography. The character on which the magician acts is thus placed beforehand in a separate space, which visually separates it from the rest of the setting and ensures that it is the centre of attention. In

⁷ Tom Gunning, "Phantom Images and Modern Manifestations: Spirit Photography, Magic Theatre, Trick Films, and Photography's Uncanny," In *Cinematic Ghosts. Haunting and Spectrality from Silent Cinema to the Digital Era*, ed. by Murray Leeder (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 35.

this real-world setting, magic becomes possible. The disappearing woman enters another world from the moment she steps into the miraculous window arranged by the magician, and her transformation into a graphic image becomes easier since the background is kept the same.



Fig. 13: Georges Méliès, scene from *Le portrait spirite* (1903), minute 0:01:35

The *Disappearing Lady*, a favourite of Méliès, is presented in a slightly different way in one of his pre-1900 films, *Escamotage d'une dame chez Robert-Houdin* (1896). The scene was filmed in the director's garden, on a platform specially built for the magical event, which is based on a famous stage illusion of Buatier de Kolta. The trick is to use a hatch through which the lady goes invisible. In Méliès' film, the protagonist, played by the actress Jehanne d'Alcy, not only disappears, but a skeleton also appears in her place, as the practice of substitution is one of the director's favourite techniques. In the end, the woman appears again, not due to a stage machine, but rather through modern cinematic special effects. Méliès found the solution to magical practices through editing techniques. His interests for disappearances and magic, or

the mysterious transgression of the spatial dimension are present throughout his filmography. Thus, in *Voyage dans la lune* (1902), he offers a true odyssey of the passage between worlds, by miraculously travelling the distance from earth to the moon and vice versa.

The complex montage on the subject of travelling to and exploring the moon opens the door to a fantastic universe whose mysteries are not revealed to the spectators. A year later, in *Le portrait spirite*, Méliès offers the key to the secrets, explaining in technical language the staged disappearance, as a “dissolving effect without a black background”. The manipulation of dimensions is thus transposed both verbally and conceptually. The imaginary world of this director, for which sometimes the skeleton of the machine is completely visible, marked the evolution of early cinema, the use of metaphor as a technical means opening a surprising path between worlds. Materiality became relative to him through a play of words. This method will later be explored by the avant-garde and used to its full potential in the case of dada, from the suspension of physical order to the annulment of the meaning of language. André Gaudreault, in his article *Méliès the Magician*, analyses the editing techniques that support Méliès’ phantasmagoria. The famous disappearances directed by him were made by the technique called stop-camera, which consisted practically in interrupting the filming and resuming it at a later time of the action. Gaudreault notes that Edison also used this technique in his films, so it was familiar to early film directors. However, Méliès did not use it in his famous *Escamotage d’une dame chez Robert-Houdin*, as this was made before he discovered it and put it into practice.

Méliès’s refinement of the stop-camera technique consists precisely of the fact that this procedure is used in his work for its magical effects; it is made to produce appearances, disappearances and conjuring tricks. Therefore, it’s part of the “magic show” cultural series. As in *The Execution of Mary, Queen of Scots*, no ellipse occurs, but this time the operator does not use any tricks simply for convenience. With Méliès, interruption became a true *signifier*.⁸

⁸ André Gaudreault, “Méliès the Magician,” *Early Popular Visual Culture* 5:2 (2007): 171.

Gaudreault believes that Méliès has always worn a magician's coat under that of director, and that Méliès' way of making films is a language in itself that communicates to the viewers things beyond the action captured in the images. Unlike the Lumière brothers, who recorded and showed to the public a reality, the theatrical and magical character of the stories told visually by Méliès involved a metalanguage. The play with dimensions is thus double: on one hand, the presented world is unreal, and on the other hand, the way that it is created communicates messages at a conceptual level that are to be interpreted. Viewers are therefore invited to decipher a universe in which images can take the place of words and vice versa. Gaudreault also introduces a surprising vision, considering any film montage an act of disappearance. The magic of editing is also highlighted by Tom Gunning in his writings about early cinema, as an expression of playing with optical illusions, with images that appear and disappear in front of the viewers. Similarly to *Escamotage d'une dame chez Robert-Houdin*, one frame replaces the other, precisely, a skeleton replaces a lady. This also happens in *Le portrait spirite*, where the lady disappears and is replaced by a full-scale picture of herself.

One thing is clear, in the case of the stop-camera technique being used for magical purposes: the transition from one image to another is really a form of conjuring because – and this is a discontinuity factor – an image (*or rather a part of its content*) pushes away another. Completely opposite is then the editing found in the narrative paradigm, which – and this is a factor of continuity – is based on the sequence of the footage, on its *suture*.⁹

This is how André Gaudreault makes the connection between editing techniques and cinematographic genres, correlating non-narrative films with elliptical editing, and narrative ones with linear editing, in which images are welded together.

Méliès's *Voyage dans la lune* is a masterpiece of early cinema editing, in which the stop-camera and the elliptical editing techniques prevail. The conjuring, as Gaudreault calls it, through its discontinuous character, ensures in this film the free movement of the characters between the human planet and

⁹ Ibid., 172.

the mysterious moon inhabited by fantastic beings and strange tribal societies. In the expedition to the lunar realms, Méliès makes a doubling of the moon appear, by introducing some pieces of decoration that embody other moons. Thus, there is a moon on the moon as well. The landscape somewhat resembles the appearance of Earth, and the sky seen from there is similar to the one observable from Terra, a major difference being that it is populated by imaginary creatures, which we do not know if they are real or not, up until the point when the group of explorers wake up from the heavy sleep following their journey in the capsule.



Fig. 14: Georges Méliès, image from *Voyage dans la lune* (1902),
<https://djayesse.over-blog.com/le-voyage-dans-la-lune-georges-melies-1902.html>
(accessed 29.03.2022)

Even though it is difficult to place into a genre, Gunning attributes this film to the cinema of attractions, taking into account the multitude of tricks and the special effects which were amazing for its era. Refusing a teleological vision, Gaudreault considers that film is part of the cinematographic technology's process of development, leading to the emergence of the narrative style. Indeed, Méliès' masterpiece narrates a much more complex adventure than the other film productions of its time. The screenplay inspired by the novels *De la Terre à la Lune* by Jules Verne (1865) and *The First Men in the Moon* by H. G. Wells (1901) stars Professor Barbenfouillis, president of the Astronomers' Club, who proposes a trip to the moon. He reveals to his colleagues an ingenious way to travel to the moon, showing them the workroom in which the space capsule, shaped like a projectile, is already in the making. Eventually, the capsule is launched with a huge cannon and remains embedded in the lunar soil. The spectators discover a personified moon, with a human face, obviously disturbed by the projectile that crashed into its eye. This cult image from the history of cinema, interspersed within the footage, makes the transition between terrestrial scenes and those that take place in the fantasy world, functioning as a recursive technique. Explorers are greeted by seven stars representing Ursa Major, and then by a double star, Saturn and Phœbé. Set on her new moon, the goddess Phœbé sets off a snowstorm that wakes the explorers and makes them hide in a crater full of giant mushrooms. The appearance of the Selenites follows, a population on the moon that captures the scientists and takes them to their king. The conflict is resolved by the comic escape of the earthlings who defend themselves with umbrellas and finally manage to embark back in their capsule. Still, their return to earth is hailed by everyone, and the heroes of the experimental journey receive honours. The reversibility of situations is also present here, as in many other Méliès films; what once vanishes, miraculously reappears, the space-propelled scientists return, and the magic works in both directions, just like in the escamotages of previous films. The disappearance is therefore a temporary absence for Méliès, a time when the protagonists are elsewhere. Even in *Le Portrait Spirité*, the lady does not disappear completely under the spell of the magician but is rather embedded in a photograph, after which she returns to the usual physical space. The passage between the worlds becomes possible for this filmmaker, by

means of superimposed or interchangeable images, which, although different from a visual point of view, show a certain level of equivalence. Méliès' fantastic world is fundamentally based on juxtaposing or replacing parts of the images filmed with others in order to amaze the viewers with their coexistence. The extraction of these fragments of fiction and their manipulation through editing ends up creating the parallel worlds that the director imagines. The shadow of reality is barely felt in the phantasmagoric universe of his films, and when it is made visible, is done so in a comic manner. Undoubtedly, Méliès' art, similarly to that of photographers of spirits and ectoplasms, lies within the technical juxtaposition of elements that belong to parallel worlds that end up creating incredible views, and at the same time, that are desirable for an audience that loves the extra sensorial.

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“The hard task of the resurrected body in Leos Carax’s *Holly Motors*. A baroque organs’ space poetry in film”, (*Ekphrasis*, 2014), “A woman’s 69 looks. Cindy Sherman’s *Untitled Film Stills*” (*Ekphrasis*, 2011), “The Photographic Treatment of Emotion in Front of a Stage. Bill Henson: *The Opera Project*” (*Ekphrasis*, 2009) *etc.*

*Body, Voice and Noise:
Acting for Sound Films as Debated
in the Interwar Romanian Press*

Delia ENYEDI¹

Abstract: Sound cinema arrived on Romanian screens in 1929 to a moderate response. Critics and artists alike pondered over their status as an altered version of silent cinema, filmed theatre or a new art form. All three alternatives were further confronted to the status of the actor, as delineated by theatre, in an attempt to clarify the uncertain future of the film actor who used both his body and voice. This paper conducts a survey of articles on these issues published by Romanian interwar newspapers. Their authors reached various conclusions, from predicting the imminent failure of sound cinema and, thus, the disappearance of the spoken film actor, temporarily subjected to enacting on celluloid a shadow of his defining stage performance, to examining solutions that conciliated spoken dialogue with the sound dimension of film.

Keywords: acting, sound cinema, sound film, spoken film, silent cinema, theatre, Romanian press, interwar period.

On 27 April 1929, *The Jazz Singer* (Alan Crosland, 1927) premiered at the Trianon cinema in Bucharest. Newspapers included it in the ordinary program of silent films to be screened in the cinemas of the Romanian capital.

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However, audiences enjoyed a special Saturday evening film screening judging by the fact that it hosted tenor Arnoldo Georgewsky, alongside a choir and an orchestra, and featured the technical support of the Pantophone sound system. This alternative to the unavailability of the Vitaphone did not bother the only journalist who reported on the event. Having initially questioned the purely cinematic value of a film dependent on a sound device, he was left impressed by what he valued as “a new affirmation of the silent art.”² By the fall of the same year, *The Singing Fool* (Lloyd Bacon, 1928) was being advertised in the press in special highlighted sections as a sound film. The spectators who attended the premiere gala, on 27 October, in the same Trianon cinema, had been asked to wear formal attire.



Fig. 1: The Bucharest premiere of *The Singing Fool* advertised in the *Viitorul* newspaper, 27 October 1929

In a more relevant shift, the sound era of cinema started to be critically addressed. Articles published around the time *The Singing Fool* was distributed in Romanian cinemas operated a firm recognition of silent cinema as an art form, along theatre, as both were confronted with the assault of the “talkies”. A first attempt at predicting their future invoked the previous confrontation of silent films with theatre that revolved around the power of the spoken dramatic text. From the standpoint of cultural journalist and translator Vasile

² L. H., „Premierile săptămânii,” *Curentul*, April 28, 1929, 4.

Timuș, a decisive argument in this matter derived from the already proven inability of silent cinema to discrown the Word, despite its impressively perfected cinematic instruments such as on location *mise-en-scène*, detailing of the action by means of framing or visual effects. Even by taking into consideration future improvements to sound systems that would capture and restore the human voice in all of its tones and modulation, and even the ambient noise, Timuș concluded that sound cinema could achieve perfection and rightful success. But it would still remain “a wonder of lifeless mechanics”³ forever unable to equal the actor of the alive theatre.

A few weeks earlier, the pages of the same *Rampa* newspaper hosted journalist and future screenwriter Nicolae Kirițescu who took a harsher stance on films in general, and sound films in particular, despite not having had the opportunity to experience the latter up to that moment. In his opinion, sound cinema represented a direct effect of capitalism, in a quest to redress the inherent decline of the silent cinema industry. Kirițescu’s further arguments concerning the superiority of theatre to film coincided to a large extent to those formulated by Timuș. Thus, the sound film spectator’s task would not only remain that of contemplating “the acting of photographs”⁴ instead of the theatre actor’s physiognomy, but also listening to the gramophone instead of the human voice uttered on stage. As the frequency of articles on the subject started to increase, it became obvious that the broader question did not limit itself to interrogate the differences between the cultural experiences provided by the stage or the silver screen. Instead, it also addressed the status of the actor when he was to approach them both through his craft.

“Theatre cannot die; sound film cannot live”

Despite the delay in the projection of sound films in Romania, cultural journalists were soon eager to educate their readers with informed and detailed articles⁵ regarding the history and development of sound cinema, as well as

³ V. Timuș, “Cinematograful a vorbit și la București,” *Rampa*, October 30, 1929, 1.

⁴ N. Kirițescu, “Cinematograful vorbitor,” *Rampa*, 4 October, 1929, 1.

⁵ I. D. Răducanu, “Istoricul filmului vorbitor. Chinetograful,” *Rampa*, 7 June, 1930, 2.

the effect it had on the American and European star system. A journalist signing with the pen name C. Henry wrote an instructive series called "A Brief History of Cinema" that followed the steps taken by the film industry towards the accomplishment of synchronized sound. Simultaneously, special columns titled *Echoes*, *New Production* or *Letters from Hollywood* gathered news on the international world of cinema, including films already in the production stage. Various opinions on the future of sound films expressed by renowned artists complemented this up-to-date overview. For example, one could find in the pages of *Rampa* contradictory predictions belonging to international playwrights, directors and actors. A similar debate among Romanian intellectuals became more articulate beginning with 1931.

In July 1931, playwright and professor Traian Gheorghiu wrote a series of articles for the *Opinia* newspaper, polarizing the crisis of the theatre and the development of sound cinema. In them, he underlined the financial aspect of the crisis rather than an exclusively aesthetic one, as the economic recession of the era left no financial endeavour unaffected, whether theatre tickets or books sales. But Gheorghiu also saw a culprit in the success of spoken films that generated profit in spite of unfavourable odds. In trying to explore the clash between the decline in theatre audiences and the growing interest of the public for films, all four articles in the series gradually built an argument for silent cinema as a fading art form to be deplored.

Referencing psychoanalysis in a non-sexual interpretation, as well as the importance of storytelling during the formative years of the child, Gheorghiu associated silent cinema to a limitless expression of the spectator's repressed desires of his daily existence. "Cinema was and should remain the rendering of tendencies through images, adopting by this the process of dreams."⁶

C. Henry, "Un mic istoric al cinematografului. Cum s-a ajuns la filmul sonor," *Rampa*, 14 June, 1930, 2.

C. Henry, "Un mic istoric al cinematografului. Filmul sonor. Primele experiențe practice. Aspecte tehnice," *Rampa*, 15 June, 1930, 2.

Henry, "Un mic istoric al cinematografului. Primele filme vorbitoare. Al. Jolson – Între Europa și America," *Rampa*, 16 June, 1930, 2.

⁶ Traian Gheorghiu, "Cinematograful și criza teatrului. (1) Filmul mut și sonor. Asemănarea cu visul. Exagerările lui Freud. Poveștile și sufletul omenesc. Anomalia filmului sonor," *Opinia*, 21 July, 1931, 2.

Therefore, cinema, that he restricted to silent cinema, became a complementary art to that of theatre, as theatre represented the artistic rendering of life by means of the actor, namely his pantomime and voice. In this equation, the spoken film fell short, an intruder with no place. Not even the possible task undertaken by film of saving memorable acting performances from oblivion, by recording them on celluloid, could save it from the status of "pseudo-theatre".⁷ Since the actor's art, his performance on stage, could not be separated from his being at that moment of specific connection with the audience, a recorded memory of it would be reduced to a noisy shadow. To sustain his demonstration, Gheorghiu felt obliged to provide several answers to the reasons behind the success of sound cinema. Admitting he had fallen to its curiosity several times, he added to this effect on audiences two more attributes of spoken films. First, he indicated their fast pace, in accordance with that of the daily rhythm of the modern spectators, and second, there was the comfort provided by light content, such as the adaptation of a novel for the screen. "Theatre cannot die; sound film cannot live"⁸ was Gheorghiu's abrupt conclusion.

By the end of 1931, D.I. Suchianu revisited his own similar sombre verdict. In "Funeral Oration for the Sound Cinema" the reputed film critic expressed his regret over having been right in predicting that "the spoken film falls, collapses lamentably, irremediably."⁹ In keeping with the caustic title of the article, Suchianu admitted the merits of sound cinema to have demonstrated the audiences "all that cinema is not, cannot do, and will never be."¹⁰ Once more, the main argument in this respect invoked the specificity and purity of silent cinema. In order to better illustrate the opposing nature of sound cinema, he resorted to an indicative example:

⁷ Traian Gheorghiu, "Cinematograful și criza teatrului. (3) Între artă și film vorbitor. Cauzele succesului inițial al filmului vorbit," *Opinia*, 23 July, 1931, 1.

⁸ Traian Gheorghiu, "Cinematograful și criza teatrului. (3) Între artă și film vorbitor. Cauzele succesului inițial al filmului vorbit," *Opinia*, 23 July, 1931, 2.

⁹ D.I. Suchianu, "Discurs funebru pentru cinematograful vorbitor," *Realitatea ilustrată*, 10 September, 1931, 22.

¹⁰ Ibid.

(...) we have a film in which the main idea is jealousy, or disillusion, or the struggle, or whatever it would be. The fundamental feeling decomposes artistically into facts, into events. The hero leaves, or instead he does not leave, or gets upset, or the opposite, he gets a hold on himself (choosing the facts depends on the talent and good taste of the filmmakers). But let's assume all these facts have been found. The hero must not leave howsoever, but strictly cinematographically. For this we will make him – I don't know – clench his fists, or button and unbutton his shirt, or grind his teeth – we will demand a movement from him, or more, as short as possible, manifold and more *other* than the previous ones. We cannot limit ourselves to printing letters on the screen "Then X leaves for the countryside", nor show him only getting on and off the train, first in New York, second in the small station of his ranch; it would be too deficient; the audience would not be satisfied; we would have to figure out hundreds of small movements indirectly evocatory, small arrangements of people or things, that would symbolize leaving, a toilsome leaving, or a desperate one, or an exciting one, in accordance with the requirements of the film. (...) But today, these innovations are useless. For the heroes feel cosy in their armchairs and explain in more or less literary words what is happening.¹¹

What Suchianu decried was an imbalance between movement and the spoken word. The first would be subordinated to the latter, depleting the cinematic composition specific to the silent film of its autonomous complex meaning. Thus, the film critic and historian saw as inevitable the return to silent cinema in a quest to achieve visual poems such as *City Lights* (Charlie Chaplin, 1931).

Although subsequent opinions on the fate of sound cinema became more nuanced, its downfall was still being predicted as a certainty. In a short article dated 10 January 1932, film critic Alex. Calistrat praised the photographic image as the defining instrument of film, as long as it remained black and white. He dismissed all colouring processes subsequent to filming as inappropriate substitutes to the preferred natural colours of reality. To this quality of the image, he added the significant role played by orchestras in accompanying silent films, to operate a distinction between sound films and spoken ones. All these elements came together in defence of the black and white cinematic

¹¹ Ibid.

image, accompanied by live sound, to encapsulate the essence of cinema. At the other end of the spectrum, he placed the film whose characters spoke. He argued that by speaking actors stole declamation from the theatre, instead of remaining faithful to pantomime. Sceptical about the future of sound cinema, Calistrat described a possible solution that would reassess the artistic possibilities of the actor who spoke on screen in accordance with the defining features of silent films, solution inspired by the films of Anatole Litvak. If the actor's lines, reduced to the minimum, were to only substitute the intertitles, and if the music were to dominate the acoustic landscape by never stopping, thus partially covering the dialogue, then the spectator would identify only changes in tone that supported the actions of the character.

The case of the first sound and spoken Romanian film

A promotional short article¹² from 1931 recommended cinemagoing as an efficient solution for preventing... arteriosclerosis. In a humorous note, the ad described the program and facilities of a newly inaugurated cinema destined for sound and spoken films. Instead of an afternoon siesta, Bucharestians could benefit from the healthier alternative of attending one of the eight daily film screenings that started at 14 o'clock. They could arrive directly to the cinema by tramway, and once there, air ventilation provided the needed comfort for a July afternoon spent at the movies. Despite Suchianu's harsh disapproval of American audiences¹³ that he evaluated as superficial in their interest in sound cinema, such an ad proved that Romanian audiences displayed a similar positive reception. Furthermore, by 1930, the first Romanian sound and spoken film had been produced.

An adaptation of the novel *Ciuleandra*, written by novelist Liviu Rebreanu, the first sound and spoken Romanian film was anticipated¹⁴ to be a triumph, but turned out to be a fiasco. As a German-Romanian co-production,

¹² Opinia, "Ecouri," 4 July, 1931, 4.

¹³ D.I. Suchianu, "Discurs funebru pentru cinematograful vorbitor," *Realitatea ilustrată*, 10 September, 1931, 22.

¹⁴ Rampa, "Primul film sonor și vorbitor românesc," 24 October, 1930, 1.

it enlisted German director Martin Berger to direct a cast of Romanian actors, it was filmed in both Romanian exterior settings and Berlin studios, and benefited from two versions of dialogue, in both languages. On 23 October 1930, film correspondent B. Cehan telegraphed¹⁵ the editorial office of *Rampa* delivering the news that the film had been screened privately to the members of the Romanian legation and community in Berlin, anticipating a great success. Three days before the scheduled Bucharest premiere, the producer of the film, D. Max Schloss, gave an interview¹⁶ detailing elements of the film that were expected to reward the Romanian spectators with a memorable experience.

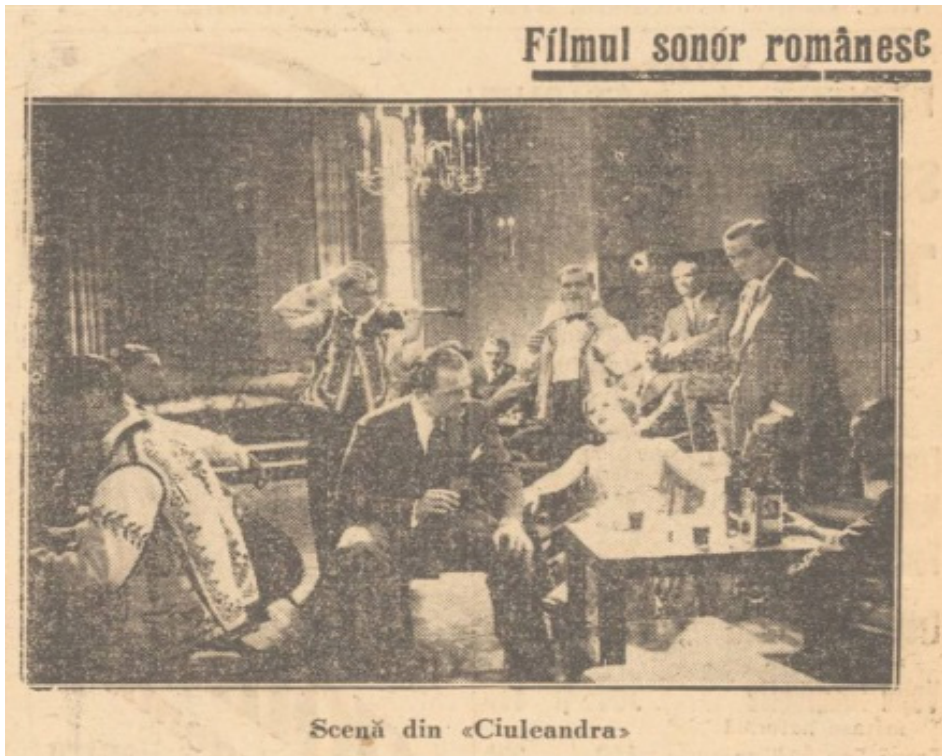


Fig. 2: Teaser scene from *Ciuleandra*, *Rampa*, 29 August 1930

¹⁵ Cehan, "Ciuleandra a fost proiectat la Berlin," *Rampa*, 23 October, 1930, 1.

¹⁶ *Rampa*, "D. Max Schloss, directorul soc. germano-române de producție ne vorbește despre *Ciuleandra*," 27 October, 1930, 1.

Primul film sonor și vorbitor românesc

«Ciuleandra», primul film sonor și vorbitor românesc, este desigur așteptat cu nerăbdare de publicul bucureștean.



Jeana Popovici-Voina

În curând acest film, care deschide largi perspective filmului românesc, va fi prezentat pe ecranele cinematografele Roxy și Capitol.

Scenariul filmului e bazat pe cunoscutul roman al d-lui Liviu Rebreanu, și a fost filmat de regisorul Martin Berger în țară și în studiourile berlineze.

Versiunea românească a filmului (căci are și o versiune vorbită în limba germană, destinată străinătății, care astfel va face cunoștință cu realizările noastre), este interpretată de d-nele Jeana Popovici-Voina, Elvira Godeanu, Alice Sturdza, Thinelles Anys și d-nii N. Bălășescu, Petre Sturdza, D. Sireteanu, Hans Stüwe și Eugen Rex.

Jeana Popovici-Voina joacă rolul Mădălinei, Elvira Godeanu este vampa filmului.

Aceste artiste sunt bine cunoscute publicului bucureștean, care le-a aplaudat de multe ori pe scena Teatrului Național.

D-ra Thinelles Anys e încă necunoscută publicului românesc.

Sub acest pseudonim se ascunde o frumoasă concetățeană, care a jucat în multe filme germane.

«Ciuleandra» este primul film sonor în care joacă.

Muzica filmului este în mare parte pur românească și e interpretată de cântăreți români, dintre care s'a relevat mai ales studentul Coste. Muzica de dans e compusă de Artur Guttman, care o și interpretează.



N. Bălășescu

Autorul dialogurilor este d. Aurel Constantinescu.

Sistemul de înregistrare sonoră este Signose-Breusing.

Fig. 3: Article promoting *Ciuleandra* as the first sound and spoken Romanian film, published days before its premiere, *Rampa*, 24 October 1930

The premiere of *Ciuleandra* (distributed internationally as *Echo of a Dream*) took place on 29 October 1930, at the Roxy cinema, in front of an audience that included members of the Romanian royal family. An exalted review¹⁷ of the film praised the Romanian scenery, music and traditional costumes, but subtly hinted at a certain awkwardness of the actors, excused as inherent to any first type of experience. But commentaries¹⁸ published by the *Cuvântul* and the *Curentul* newspapers during the following days casted light on the actual extent of the indignation the film had caused. Readers were informed that the committee of a society dedicated to the preservation of Romanian traditional dance and music was planning to address the authorities, demanding they prohibited the distribution of the film and calling for a public report on the funds that the Romanian state had invested in its making. The reasons of this outrage varied from a deficient representation of the beauty of the Romanian countryside, or the questionable morality of some characters, to ethnographic inaccuracies in the representation of traditional dances.

The unnamed critic of the *Patria* newspaper, that was published in the city of Cluj, learned¹⁹ that the scandal surrounding the film prompted some scenes to be altered and some to disappear altogether from the copies distributed in the cinemas across the country. In all possibility, such actions could do little to adjust the technical shortcomings of the sound component. In a vicious review, that included personal attacks damaging the reputation of both the director of the film and the writer of the novel it adapted, journalist Ion Dimitrescu described, most likely in an exaggerated manner, how:

the recording of the voices is appalling: some seem to speak from their bellybutton, others seem to have displaced their speech between the oesophagus and the bowel. One character, gifted with the vernacular name of Mirinescu, speaks a Westphalian Romanian, a peasant from the court, clad in

¹⁷ Criticus, "Cronica cinematografică. *Ciuleandra*," *Dimineața*, 2 November, 1930, 3.

¹⁸ *Curentul*, "Filmul *Ciuleandra* și milioanele contribuabililor," 3 November, 1930, 8.
Curentul, "Protest împotriva *Ciuleandrei*," 5 November, 1930, 8.

Cuvântul, "În jurul filmului *Ciuleandra*," 5 November, 1930, 2.

¹⁹ *Patria*, "Informațiuni. *Ciuleandra*?" 14 November, 1930, 4.

native apparel, sings Prussian hit songs and speaks his native language in the undecipherable dialect of Saxony. The honourable P. Sturdza, in the character of an officer of state, seems damned to purr his voice from the viscera.²⁰

In a more amusing account of the narrative of *Ciuleandra* and report on its premiere, the film critic of *Rampa* noted²¹ that, strangely enough, the only actor who spoke Romanian accurately was the German Hans Stüve. Not only did the technical system deteriorated the lines spoken by the actors, but the German director seemed to have imposed an unnatural rhythm to the Romanian pronunciation. The same film critic detailed the benefits of this “enunciation in instalments”²² as lead actor Nicolae Bălățeanu took long enough pauses between the words of the sentence “Good afternoon, father!” for him to leave for the foyer, grab a meal at a restaurant nearby and still return on time in the cinema to catch the last syllabus. By all accounts, the undeniable failure of *Ciuleandra* derived, at least partially, from an inadequate demonstration of speech rendered on screen.

The lead actress in *Ciuleandra*, Jeana Popovici-Voina, had addressed the particular aspects of performing in sound cinema in a interview²³ prior to the premiere of the film. Being at her first experience of this kind, she envisioned the artist performing in spoken films as being similar to that of the theatre artist, in the sense that an actor with perfect articulation was superior to others, as the acoustic system amplified all errors. To this quality, she considered the photogenic appearance as still remaining essential in front of the camera. Regarding the fate of those actors who had built a career in silent cinema, but were confronted with imperfect declamation, she identified as a viable solution their casting in roles demanding reduced dialogue, avoiding sounds that would alter the euphony.

²⁰ Ion Dimitrescu, “*Ciuleandra*. Dansul milioanelor, cu duetul Berger-Rebreanu,” *Curentul*, 3 November, 1930, 2.

²¹ Sell, “Maidan cinegrafic,” *Rampa*, 1 November, 1930, 1.

²² Sell, “Hors d’oeuvre,” *Rampa*, 2 November, 1930, 1.

²³ *Rampa*, “Primul film vorbitor românesc. De vorbă cu d-na Jeana Popovici-Voina,” 27 August, 1930, 1-2.

Balancing sound and words

In discussing *The Jazz Singer* and *Ciuleandra*, Romanian critics operated a distinction between sound and spoken films, under the broader concept of sound cinema. A sound film was described as featuring music and ambient sounds, while a spoken one included uttered words. A chronological survey of relevant articles touching on the art of acting in these two types of films reveals the debates spanned from 1929 to 1932 and enables tracing a more tolerant perspective on the possibilities of the art of acting in spoken films, mirroring the opinions expressed by Jeana Popovici-Voina.

In 1929, a *Rampa* contributor signing as B. C., most likely Cehan, estimated²⁴ that only two Bucharest cinemas were financially capable of implementing the Western-Electric sound system. The films to be projected were presumed to restrict themselves to two or three dialogues at most, in favour of the main attraction that was represented by the musical score. But in his opinion, minor sounds such as steps, applause or sobs were to complement it as the true revelation of sound films. A similar composition formula was supported by engineer and founder of a film production company, A. Ștefănescu, who referenced “spoken actualities”²⁵ such as the funerals of French marshal Ferdinand Foch as indicative of an impressive and efficient blending of the sound of marching troops and military music with the orders given in a low voice.

The paradox of the spoken film actor was highlighted by the already mentioned C. Henry. By being selected from the theatre stage, the first silent film actors had been forced to abandon vocal expression in their quest to develop another type of artistic language. The effect of words was translated into refined gestures and pantomime carrying the meaning of the character’s feelings. At the peak of this perfected art form, the same actors were demanded to speak once again, this time on camera. Henry illustrated his argument with the example of famous German actor Emil Jannings who in his roles “was silent, but his movements spoke.”²⁶ If he were to perform in a spoken film, Henry speculated

²⁴ B. C., “Vom avea filme sonore în România?” *Rampa*, 5 September, 1929, 2.

²⁵ *Rampa*, “În marginea ecranului,” 13 September, 1929, 2.

²⁶ C. Henry, “Interpreții în filmele vorbitoare,” *Rampa*, 30 March, 1930, 2.

that the audiences would feel a certain lack in his acting style, similar to “a ladder missing a step”²⁷ due to the attention he would feel obliged to assign to his voice. Instead of a conclusion, the author of the article asked himself whether there would ever be spoken film actors capable of resolving the dilemma of which weapon they should charge better, the word or the physical acting.

A question that did find a response concerned the future of spoken films confronted with the language barrier was envisioned in 1931. Resorting to the success of films made by René Clair, Josef von Sternberg and Ernst Lubitsch in cities all around the world, a journalist for the *Universul* newspaper declared their films “perfectly international, just as before, during the silent film era.”²⁸ In his opinion, the primal condition for a spoken film to achieve success among foreign audiences was to apply the principles of silent cinema, treating the dialogue as the least important element, a mere noise among the other sound manifestations. A fellow journalist for the *Dimineața* newspaper adhered²⁹ to this conclusion, praising the resonant aerial fight scenes in aviation films as eloquent for the possibilities provided to filmmakers by sound cinema.

From 1933 onwards, critical stands on sound and spoken films were replaced in the Romanian daily press mainly with interviews of artists discussing their development. On occasion, critics published commentaries on such perspectives they found stimulating or controversial. In 1935, Cehan addressed³⁰ an article published by Hungarian writer and stage director Ferenc Molnar in the *Wiener Journal*. Envisioning a future of sound cinema conciliatory towards theatre, Molnar saw “the film of tomorrow; the perfect film”³¹ with sound, in colours, available to be watched at home by means of television. “I see the future of theatre, its splendid and unimaginable future, in the evolution of the film”³² with halls filled with millions of spectators able to watch filmed theatrical achievements from all corners of the globe.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ M. B., “Poate fi internațional filmul vorbitor?” *Universul*, 14 June, 1931, 5.

²⁹ Ion Golea, “Filmul de aviație,” *Dimineața*, 19 January, 1932, 6.

³⁰ B. Cehan, “Un eretic,” *Rampa*, 31 May, 1935, 1.

³¹ Quoted in B. Cehan, “Un eretic,” *Rampa*, 31 May, 1935, 1.

³² Quoted in B. Cehan, “Un eretic,” *Rampa*, 31 May, 1935, 1.

Regardless of Cenan's reaction to Molnar's text, bringing it into requisition subtly signalled a certain flexibility regarding sources, arguments and case studies involved in the Romanian critical exploration of the future of sound cinema that was underway.

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The Rhinoceros and The Regime Posthuman Bodies on Stage and Screen

Alina Gabriela MIHALACHE¹

Abstract: Ever since its first representation on stage, Ionesco's play *Rhinoceros* became a mirror to the anxieties haunting the societies that it was held up to. Back in the 1960s, it would symbolize (Neo-)Fascism and Far-Right dangers in the Western countries, while subversively pointing at Communism and Far-Left ideologies in the Central-East European cultures. The text's versatility was highly praised by the literary and theatrical criticism, and allowed for its re-enactment in shows and films produced over the globe, in the most diverse social-political contexts. This study aims to revisit some of the first play stagings from the current perspective of post-theatre, pointing out how the early post-War productions are contributing to rewriting of the performative code in the language of posthumanism and post-drama.

Keywords: posthumanism, performative body, postdramatic theatre, Eugène Ionesco, *Rhinoceros*.

“Unusual, very unusual the destiny of my work!” – that’s how Eugène Ionesco contemplated his debut on the French stages, and this thought prophetically extends over his entire writing career. According to the legend,

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the first mise-en-scènes at Huchette and Lancry in the mid Fifties have made the famous dramaturg Arthur Adamov to enthusiastically declare: “No one on stage, no one in the audience, what a perfect illusion!”, but nothing announced the extraordinary success of Ionesco’s plays once they entered the repertoire of the prominent theatre companies, nor the amazing dynamics of their spreading across several continents in just a few years. By the end of the same decade Ionesco was signing his first international contracts for staging *Rhinoceros* - the play that made him universally known to significant theatre audiences. Düsseldorf, Krakow, Paris, London, New York, Toronto, Buenos Aires are just some examples of the stages that experienced the trophic regress of the last human being, the survivor of conflagrations, adulations and ideologies.

The interest this strange comedy would cause among producers, performers and audience far exceeds the seductive power of the irrational *The Bald Soprano*, the melancholy of *The Chairs*, or the erotic vampirism of *The Lesson*. *Rhinoceros* spreads rapidly, stirs up controversy and triggers earthquakes. On stage it conquers everybody, reveals vulnerabilities, awakens consciences and dormant wraths, questions ethics and the cultural constructs born in the eras of humanism and the Vitruvian Man. The several dozens of theatrical stagings in the decade of its debut left deep traces in the public’s conscience and created a series of discourses on corporeality as an act of presence and materiality.

The play fundamentals have been provided by its author in various contexts: the autobiographic character, anchored in the Bucharest experience of the ‘30s, the anti-Nazi message and the correspondence between the Logician (the only rhinoceros wearing a hat) and a charismatic philosophy teacher, which was affiliated with the Legionary State and had an unfortunate influence over an entire generation of young intellectuals. These are further emphasized in subsequent memorialist essays on the genesis and symbolism of the play. Basically, the dramatic text develops, in its three acts, a short story of autobiographical inspiration, published by Ionesco in 1957 in the magazine *Les lettres nouvelles*², which was further brought into the spotlight for a wider audience, following its reading on a Parisian radio station³.

² No. 52, September 1957.

³ This recording is preserved in the audio section of the *Gallica* digital library of the National Library of France.

During the approximately thirty minutes of the reading, the author's voice, with its unmistakable monochord and blasé timbre, was only occasionally accompanied by special effects (a few rhinoceros' roars could be faintly heard, highlighting the whispered, theatrical linearity of the performance). The spontaneous appearance of animals in the middle of the city is the pretext for the development of a *supernatural* philosophy, an absurd existential doctrine. The novel's core is the paradox created around the syllogisms of the Logician – a character with a consistent appearance in the source text, namely the debate about the various species of rhinoceros – one-horned or two-horned, African or Asian – that are taking over the city, occupying its streets, its newsrooms, and the thoughts and personal space of its inhabitants. Therefore, the emphasis is on questioning, in a parodic key, the superiority of reason in the discourse of race, and the anthropocentrism, challenged and debased by the still smoking ruins of the Second World War.

Like the two protagonists (*mon ami Jean et moi*), who, confined in their own apartments, experience and understand differently the proliferation of pachyderms, the listeners must have been distressed by the terrible roaches that invaded their homes when turning on their radios. A year later (August 20, 1959), the same text could be heard by an even wider audience on BBC Radio.

Further developed in the form we know today, with spectacular metamorphoses on the ramp and hordes of rhinoceros invading every corner of the stage, the play becomes an opportunity to experiment with non-human corporeality, with its movement towards the fluid zoo-/anthropomorphic suggestions of ultra-contemporary performances.

On one hand, the play success is due to the high-temperature osmosis of several imperatives of the post-war theatre (the appeal to the recent historical trauma, the adherence to the neo-avant-garde of absurdist essence – very popular in theatre in the second half of the century, and the text placement in authenticity). On the other hand, to the potential for resignification in the area of those topics that are opening the era of post-performance and post-drama.

From the very beginning, Ionesco's text is interpreted as a political allegory, a fable that incorporates identity questions, staged through the discourse of traumatic corporeality.

The polymorphism of performances also derives from a technical difficulty. In the second act, the main character slowly transforms, in front of the audience, into a rhinoceros, adopting a new “philosophy”, a new ideology.

Throughout the 60s the metamorphosis of the rhinoceros-men, the ones bearing the metatextual meaning, is approached in a sensorial manner, through two types of effects: one scenographic and one choreographic. Much of its impact on the audience is given by the way the animals are bodily, psychologically or symbolically integrated into the stage space. As we shall see, in the mentioned decade the avatars of the play's many stagings highlight a variety of representations and symbolizations of the rhinoceros, the harmful animal the audience is called to confront. Some of them describe *avant la lettre* “these composite bodies – so called human as well as non-human composites, bonded in a non-binary constellation”⁴, on which the first theories of post-humanism are developed.

From the very first productions several directors recognized the identity theme, which the French-speaking Romanian playwright, matured in the midst of two cultures and deeply marked by the metaphysical duality of his own existence, has invested into the metaphor of the rhinocerised city. Thus, the symbolic load of the play reaches several levels of significance through the figure of the rhinoceros: ideologically speaking – it is portraying the political danger/evil, perceived differently from one country to another; typological – it is depicting the foreigner or the stateless, in search of a utopian space of humanitarianism without borders.

In his conversations with the director and protagonist of the first Parisian production, Jean Louis Barrault⁵, Ionesco insisted on the necessity of playing with masks. In the language of the neo-avant-garde, this type of prop assumes the adoption of a specific stage discourse. In the same period, when the director Ariane Mnouchkine brings the mask back to the experimental stage of the French theatre, in order to represent the theme of emigration, this announces a crisis of both the individual and the society. The mask is not a make-up. It

⁴ Christel Stalpaert, Kristof van Baarle, Laura Karreman (ed.), *Performance and Posthumanism. Staging Prototypes of Composite Bodies* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2021), 8.

⁵ Jean Louis Barrault, *L'acteur: “Athlète Affectif”* [The Actor: “Affective Athlete”], *Cahiers Renaud-Barrault*, (Paris: René Julliard, no. 29, February 1960), 85.

subordinates its bearer. The actor must yield to it, for the mask will never yield⁶. Applying Mnouchkine's message to the Ionesco space, the act of dominance of the rhinoceros mask over the face it takes possession of/reconstructs, reduces the whole meaning of the play to a symbolic image.

However, although this accessory recommended by the playwright was meant to easily solve the most delicate aspect of the mise-en-scène, only a couple directors attracted by the rhinoceros city resorted to it.

Düsseldorf, 1959, Schauspielhaus

Paradoxically, the absolute premiere of *Rhinoceros* takes place at the Schauspielhaus in Düsseldorf. The Wall had not yet been erected in Berlin, but Karl Heinz Stroux's staging already places, ideologically, here and there, the contaminated city and the viewing audience, beyond the conventional boundaries of the stage and the unconventional ones of directorial intent. In the second act, the body contorted in metamorphosis merges chromatically with the entire mise-en-scène, it is covered, as in an epiphany, by a ritual cloth, embroidered with details of animal inserts matching the surrounding decor, meant to hide the act of transformation. The German director chooses to dissolve the metamorphosis of the man-rhinoceros into scenography elements. Hints of horns, hooves and massive corporeality are found in every detail of the set and contaminate the character's movement. The relationship between the setting and the desire-aspiration of its resident cannot be dissociated, they build the character's behavior and amplify it as a social act⁷.

Ultimately, Stroux's rhinos are barely perceptible in the scenic movement, and the anguish they are causing shifts into the confrontation between the performers and the audience, who supervise each other through a polyphonic scenography element – a moving frame, the door-window-lens of the room in which the metamorphosis occurs.

⁶ Josette Féral, *Întâlniri cu Ariane Mnouchkine* [*Meetings with Ariane Mnouchkine*], translated by Raluca Vida (Oradea: ArtSpect, 2009), 38.

⁷ Christel Stalpaert, Kristof van Baarle, Laura Karreman (ed.), *Performance and Posthumanism. Staging Prototypes of Composite Bodies*, 85.



Fig. 1: Schauspielhaus, Düsseldorf, 1959, director: Karl-Heinz Stroux, set designer: Mario Chiari, photo: Roger Pic



Fig. 2: Schauspielhaus, Düsseldorf, 1959, director: Karl-Heinz Stroux, set designer: Mario Chiari, photo: Roger Pic

Paris, 1960, Odéon Théâtre/1965

The Parisian premiere, directed by Jean-Louis Barrault, takes place on January 22, 1960, at the Odéon Théâtre, and is well received by the media and the public⁸. Although *Rhinoceros* already had a first staging, Barrault's production represents a *zero degree* in the history of the play's mise-en-scènes, being probably the closest to the writer's original intention. This staging is the expression of the long meetings between the two good friends, the playwright Ionesco and the director-performer Jean-Louis Barrault, to whom, among others, the play is dedicated.

Here the inherent Ionesco's contradictions converge towards a surprising homogeneity. The director is determined to shape an ideology of survival in the post-War world. In fact, he had reserved for himself the main role, thus illustrating his vision of the "last man" and his revolutions.

The scenography conception belongs to Jacques Noël, a mature creator, familiar with the Ionesco's space and the territory of the neo-avangardists. For Noël, *Rhinoceros* seems to be the occasion for a conceptual revision. A short foray into the scenographer's workshop reveals his preference for decors with a Baroque air, of old-time atmosphere, based on the contrasting dimensions of the stage plans⁹.

This time, however, the set seems created in a museum-like style. Particularly the exterior – the city, built in perspective and maintained as a animated setting throughout the play, is treated in an impressionistic manner. The rhinocerised Paris is an anthropophagous city. The close-up accurately reproduces the author's directions: the grocery store with a floor and generous windows through which he carves out a tumultuous life, the cafe terrace with its chairs and tables, the dusty tree, are all accessorizing a recognizable space, staging a natural extension of the daily routine for the audience at the Odéon Théâtre. But in the background opens a cyclorama city, created by stage lighting at the limit of an optical illusion. The performers and the

⁸ Niels Thores, *Rhinocéros (Analyse approfondie)* [*Rhinoceros (In-depth Analysis)*], (e-book, 2015), 40-43.

⁹ Nancy Huston, Geneviève Latour, Victor Haïm, *Jaques Noël. Décors et dessins de théâtre* [*Jaques Noël. Theatre Decors and Drawings*], (Paris: Actes Sud, 2007), 20-25.

audience theatrically look at the clouds of dust that cover the cardboard Paris from the distant plane, after the animal's first raids¹⁰. There, behind the scenes, the contagious beast seems to nestle, from the very beginning, like a fault from the past.

With the second act Noël is getting closer to the manner that established him in the interior scenography. The chamber of metamorphosis and of last man's agony is gradually becoming the occasion of phantasmal resizing of the playing space. Here the presence of the animal is abundantly represented. Not only masks, but also fangs, horns, hooves, a whole unleashed horde takes the stage in the second act, while the protagonist faces the onslaught of beasts with a weapon in hand, a symbolic pose for the identity construct of revolutionary France. With bated breath, the audience could watch him heroically defending a gray, ruined Paris, in an image that echoes Delacroix's famous romantic fresco *Liberty Leading the People*. Proliferating horizons of heads and horns are accompanying the protagonist's agonizing waiting for the irreversible mutation. All the while, the rhinos march across the Odéon stage to the upbeat rhythms of the Wehrmacht¹¹, evoking painful memories of the Nazi occupation during World War II.

As I stated on another occasion¹², Noël had even imagined a metamorphosis of the stage objects - the sink, the bed and the coat hanger were supposed to transform, as the city was conquered, into animal fetishes, but this malformation of the inanimate was partially abandoned in the show, perhaps also because of implementation difficulties.

But there is an incongruity of vision between director Barrault and set designer Noël. The resistance to the irrational horde, contained by this elaborate setting, is parodically countered at the character creation level. From the first head-on encounter of the hero with the rhinos, the fear dissipates. The visit of the endearing pachyderms, whose disguise with puerile masks leaves the

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 25.

¹¹ Niels Thores, *Rhinocéros (Analyse approfondie)* [*Rhinoceros (In-depth Analysis)*], (e-book, 2015), 40-43; Jean Vigneron, *Bérenger contre les robots* [*Berenger against the robots*] (*Croix de Toulouse*, February 21, 1965).

¹² *Rhinos Go on Stage. Animal Allegory Behind and Beyond the Iron Curtain*, in *Posthumanism in Fantastic Fiction* edited by Anna Kérchy (Americana e-book, 2018), 193-208.

impression of a farce, but also the protagonist's metamorphosis, a kind of gaudy gymnastics with silent film effects, end up provoking hilarity among the audience. Barrault does not opt for terrible metamorphoses, for serious political allegories. His rhinoceroses are too human or too theatrical to be fully identified with the ideology of evil that Ionesco had in mind.

A series of scenes abound in props, they seem created for a child's imagination. The *rhinocerisation*, which had stunned German audiences in Düsseldorf, is diverted into a farce with Guignol effects. The contagious beasts have the posture of rigid marionettes, seem to descend from the small wooden stages of the Luxembourg Gardens, distort reality like caricatures, but do not frighten. Partially following the author's instructions, the director seems to interpret the play in the spirit of a universal humanism, importing into the space of this black utopia the techniques of the *gag* and the puppet theatre.

The first reviews greeted either warmly or with jovial irony the author's journey from "the unusualness of the banality" to the "banality of the unusual", categorizing *Rhinoceros* as a "thesis play"¹³, which promotes the values of a universal humanism, such as freedom of thought, nonconformism, individuality. These did not overlook either the slide into an overly explicit symbolization¹⁴, nor the parodic effect implied by the redundancy of symbols from the animal world, and placed Barrault's staging in the realm of the *fantastic*, noting in the background, as a subliminal message derived from the fears of the Bucharest youth of the author, the political allegory¹⁵. Jacques Lemarchand, the most ardent supporter of the play and the staging, shifts the interpretation focus from the overly clear, albeit allegorical, message of the play to its heart-moving sensibility, capable of touching the deepest layers of man, as a singular, free and moral being, thus giving it back much of the meaning the author had intended¹⁶.

Therefore, although the first Parisian staging of *Rhinoceros* is not devoid of ideological views, the historical-political context is rendered in the style of mannerism. The audience never identifies with the bizarre creatures

¹³ Bertrand Poirot-Delpech, *Le Monde*, January 25, 1960.

¹⁴ Jean Vigneron, *La Croix*, February 1960.

¹⁵ Robert Kanters, *L'Express*, January 1960.

¹⁶ Jacques Lemarchand, *Figaro Littéraire*, January 30, 1960.

seen on stage. In the hall of the Odéon in Paris, Ionesco's play sets off just an innocent laugh, doubled by a philosophical reflection on the subject of the human condition and its chance of surviving when confronting the imperative mechanisms of history.

A few years later (enough for decantation, comparisons, revisions), in 1965, a television production of *Rhinoceros* is released. The producer Roger Iglésis, in collaboration with the "Madeleine Renaud-Jean-Louis Barrault" Company, retains a good part of the cast and of the original scenography conception. The new production amplifies, with the technical means specific to television (or, as Ionesco would say, with its own language, which makes famous characters no longer simple abstract figures¹⁷), certain effects, and emphasizes, in some places too much, the political theme. It imposes the show in the consciousness of the French public as an artistic event of the year.

Although he confesses he did not watch his play on the small screen (out of a superstition the playwright used to observe even for the final rehearsals or the premieres), the television experience is revelatory for Ionesco. Here the imaginary world is rewritten, the phantasms take on a new dimension, the alternation of panoramas and close-ups creates new faces of illusion. Even if Iglésis used only small elements of cinematic trickery (the footage was recorded on tape and broadcast live to the audience in front of the TV screens), *Rhinoceros* now conquer a new, further refined form of expression.

The press reserves ample space to the analysis of the television production, interviews with the author, the performers, the director and even with the home viewers are published, the production from Odéon is brought back into the spotlight, going as far as giving it a new reception, in the already extensive context of the various stage versions which *Rhinoceros* had enjoyed in the meantime. Critics point out in unison the potential for resignification and the universality of the play's message, restoring its political-historical meaning, even if still diluted in the broader and more abstract philosophy of the human condition. Some of the chroniclers who had chastised the play's childish allegory in 1960, return with a new, deeper interpretation, anchored in the play's immediate and certainly more sensitive reality:

¹⁷ Clément Ledoux, *Entretien avec Eugène Ionesco dont Le Rhinocéros est présenté mardi* [Conversation with Eugene Ionesco whose *Rhinoceros* is released on Tuesday], *Le Monde*, April 27, 1965.

A few weeks ago, the whole world was leading Churchill to his grave. Churchill, the man who in the House of Commons, on June 4, 1940, shouted against the Nazi infection: "We shall never surrender!" This historical statement is the first meaning of *Rhinoceros*. Ionesco wanted it this way. The deafening foot strikes of the angry beasts represents the trampling sound of the marching legions, and the accompanying music, the most famous Nazi war march! But, beyond this historical symbol, we must see in Ionesco's play the fear of massification, the revolt against the aberrant conformism that conditions man and prevents him from keeping a unique, irreplaceable and personal soul – that's the lesson of *Rhinoceros*.

Contrary to the performance in Düsseldorf, for the Parisian audience – this time not only the selective one of the theatres, "Ionesco's easiest play" (Jean-Louis Barrault, *Tribune de Genève*, February 20, 1965) remains a brave demonstration of vitality, a triumph of humanist values, not just because the last man never surrenders, but above all because the audience, either "in pink outfits, tuxedos and generous necklines" or in front of the small screens, has countless opportunities to laugh, to wonder and to be disgruntled.



Fig. 3: L' Odéon Théâtre de France, 1960, director: Jean-Louis Barrault, set designer: Jacques Noël, photo: E.B. Weill; performer: Jean-Louis Barrault



Fig. 4: L' Odéon Théâtre de France, 1960, director: Jean-Louis Barrault, set designer: Jacques Noël, photo: E.B. Weill

New York, January 1961 to 1974

On Broadway, under the direction of Joseph Anthony and the scenography of Leo Kerz (also the show's producer), the *Rhinoceros*-men experience more of an anamorphosis. Through the deforming magnifying glass of comedy, the famous actor Zero Mostel, "Ionesco's comedy star" (Howard Taubman, *The New York Times*, January 10, 1961), subjects his Rubensian body to a hilarious exhibitionism. Anatomical effects are shifted towards the area of the grotesque body. The director abandons any artifice of props in the representation of rhinos. No animal symbols appear on the stage, only a strange, contagious frenzy with *sitcom* flavor takes hold of the performers. At first the effect is comical, but gradually the virtuosity of the interpretation creates a moment that compares in intensity with the atmosphere of a frightening ritual. A body "that becomes almost mute, sighs, cries and makes animal sounds is the symbol of a mythical reality beyond

the human drama”¹⁸, will affirm Hans Thies-Lehmann, in his attempt to frame the pulsating dimensions of corporeality in the post-drama.

From the first reviews, we note:

Zero Mostel grows from a rotund dilettante, all buttoned and slicked in the mold of fashion and the glass of form, into the ugly, snorting hulk of rhinoceros. (...) you'll think you're at the zoo.¹⁹

The dynamic polymorphism of this type of stage choreography anchors the viewer into a visceral representation of animality. Constantly doubled by the comic, the metamorphosis is emptied of both psychologism and symbolization. The rhinoceros is a huge living body, in compulsive movement, a representation of what Erika Fischer-Lichte, in the footsteps of well-known anthropologists who interfered with the theatrical environment, called “a liminal body”, a labile existence “betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention and ceremonial”²⁰.

In the end, the allegorical meaning of the animalization is difficult to recover, the two snapshots – “the last timid human”, devoid of any trace of the heroism the playwright invested him with, and the beast, with its “Gargantuan baby face” – reduce this duality to a single trait and bring down the play's meaning at a basic level.

Following a record number of performances (two hundred and forty), the production remains in the media history as “cleverly crazy” (*News*), “a big evening in the theatre” (*Journal-American*), “a joyous revelation” (*The New York Times*).

A few years later, in 1974, *Rhinoceros* reaches the American television studios. The director Tom O'Horgan keeps some of the original cast from the Broadway production and some set elements, while adding details meant to anchor the play in the country's new political reality. It was the year of president Richard Nixon's abdication after his impeachment following the Watergate scandal. In the metamorphosis room, among the many objects reminiscent of

¹⁸ Hans-Thies Lehmann, *Postdramatic Theatre*, translated by Victor Scoradeţ, (Bucharest: Unitext, 2009), 298.

¹⁹ Kevin Kelly, *The Boston Sunday Globe*, February 19, 1961.

²⁰ Erika Fischer-Lichte, *The Transformative Power of Performance*, translated by Saskya Iris Jain (London & New York: Routledge, 2008), 175.

the scene from the 60s, a wall bed accidentally slides, revealing a painting of the president in the background. In the most intense moments of the grotesque metamorphosis, the protagonist seems to discover this painting for the first time, looks at it with adulation, kisses it, his body relaxes - the transformation is, finally, complete. Before giving in the "last man" will resignedly reply, rewriting Ionesco's line, "I don't agree with you at all". Throughout the animal choreography the viewers can hear in the background the typical camera sound, suggesting the theme of constant observation/ surveillance by unseen and prying eyes – a reminder of the Watergate scandal. The rhinoceros-man is a follower of the right (here associated with Nixon's politics), while the one who faces *rhinoceration* remains a solitary representative of eternal humanist values. Under the lens of the camera the transformation remains in the area of physicality, none of the effects specific to the cinematic environment, with the exception of the preferred close-up in key moments, comes to increase the body-sign, which has already become iconic, of the performer. If on stage this choreographic approach creates a distortion effect, on screen the same act, with the camera focused on capturing in detail the various face expressions, becomes a manifest choice of maintaining the staging in the area of verisimilitude.



Fig. 5: Longacre Theatre, New York, 1961; director: Joseph Anthony; set and lighting designer: Leo Kerz; Friedman-Abeles Photograph Collection, New York Public Library Digital Collections



Fig. 6: Longacre Theatre, New York, 1961; director: Joseph Anthony; set and lightning designer: Leo Kerz; Friedman-Abeles Photograph Collection, New York Public Library Digital Collections; performer: Zero Mostel

Moving at ease between various cultural imaginaries and production media, Ionesco's *Rhinoceros* open, since their very first symbolic "invasions", an insufficiently explored area of representation – the body between realms, totemic-ritual choreographies and anatomies of a dystopian environment, the uncertain, *anamorphised* body, in search of a post-human identity. *Rhinoceros* staging, with all its props, effects and moods, intended to rewrite several centuries of civilization through an atavistic form of human existence, thus joins the quotable mise-en-scènes in the post-drama era.

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Intimate Tragedies: Body Politics and Narrative Interruptions in Contemporary Rewritings of Shakespeare's Richard III

Dana MONAH¹

Abstract: When they set Shakespeare's Richard III into one night and eliminate most of the male characters, Italian actor and playwright Carmelo Bene's *Richard III or the Terrible Night of a Man of War* (1977) and Flemish dramatist Peter Verhelst's *Richard III* (2004) turn Richard's story into an intimate, private tragedy. This article argues that, influenced by ideas and concepts developed by the theorists of the historical avant-gardes, both practitioners condense, fragment, atomise the story they borrow from Shakespeare, shifting the focus from the events themselves to the characters' perception of the events, and foregrounding the image of the suffering or disabled body.

Keywords: Richard III, rewriting, body, narrative, the avant-garde, women.

Spectators expecting to enjoy the adventures of the Duke of Gloucester/King Richard III when attending a performance of Carmelo Bene's or of Peter Verhelst's contemporary takes on Shakespeare's historical drama might be a little surprised, as nothing really happens (or nothing happens for real) in

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these rewritings. Condensed in one night, set in an intimate space, and turned into a private tragedy, Richard's story seems to unfold with difficulty, as characters frequently stop in order to reflect on the events. With both Bene's *Richard III or the Terrible Night of a Man of War* (1977) and Verhelst's *Richard III* (2004), the prince is essentially surrounded by women, not particularly interested in his warrior exploits, but very strongly attracted to/repulsed by Richard himself, an able-bodied man who now and then morphs into a monstrous figure. The story, that both Richard's stage partners and modern audiences are (supposed to be) familiar with from Shakespeare's play, is constantly interrupted, reiterated or atomized – associated to a performance that the women comment. Thus fragmented, manipulated, disorganized, the dramatic events become a means of telling other stories, at the same time casting new lights on Richard's monstrosity. These manipulations, which involve a new relation with the audience, are informed by theories and concepts developed by the historical avant-gardes, especially by Marinetti's 1913 Variety Theatre Manifesto and by Maeterlinck's static drama.

The issue of the specificity of the theatre, already present in the reflection of the avant-garde theoreticians of the 1920s and 1930s, acquired new forms and meanings in the theatre of the 1960s and 1970s. According to Italian performer, director and dramatist Carmelo Bene, once a performance starts "everything has already happened"², and everything we are left with are oral fragments of a scenic palimpsest. Indeed, one of the features of the Italian avant-garde, as Dorota Semenowicz argues, is "the shift in emphasis from text to that which is happening onstage"³. Richard's story "has already happened", it is already known in these contemporary rewritings, and seems to be taking place for a second time, as if in a theatrical representation, providing characters with the time to muse on the dramatic events.

Bene's 1977 rewriting, *Richard III or the Terrible Night of a Man of War*, is set into a strange funeral chamber reminding of a theatre dressing room, where the protagonist and the women of Shakespeare's history play (Elisabeth,

² Quoted in Dorota Semenowicz, *The Theatre of Romeo Castellucci and Societas Raffaello Sanzio*. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 4.

³ Dorota Semenowicz, *The Theatre of Romeo Castellucci and Societas Raffaello Sanzio*. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 4.

Margaret, Lady Anne, Mrs. Shore and a chambermaid whom Richard calls Buckingham) grieve over King Henry VI, whose corpse is exposed in a coffin in the middle of the room. Bene's Richard is an able-bodied dandy figure, "an elegant in black"⁴, who will try to set himself apart from the mourners, to attract their attention in order to tell his story and become the monster we know from Shakespeare. The events happening on Bene's stage are not new, they are part of a sort of ritual reiterated every evening, and his Richard becomes a reflection on the status of the actor.

It is interesting that, although repudiating any association with the avant-garde, Bene seeks inspiration for the constitution of his Richard-figure in the theories of the Futurists, and especially in Marinetti's *Teatro di Varietà* manifesto. In this respect, Franco Quadri observed that "whole passages of the Variety Theatre Manifesto find with Carmelo Bene their first practical application, fifty years later"⁵. Thus, for almost a quarter of an hour, the protagonist will attempt to pronounce his "sadly famous soliloquy" (p. 15) – "Now is the winter of our discontent" – but the women, hardly impressed with his attempts, constantly silence him. However, when Richard stumbles, when he accidentally loses his balance, his stage partners start considering him with much more interest, and finally allow him to deliver his speech. The protagonist will soon understand "the arousing effect male physical weakness and infirmity have on women"⁶ and start faking his accidents, enjoying the effects of his acting technique.

Later on, in the famous "wooing scene", Richard will refine his seduction techniques, by putting on fake prostheses, monstrous hands and funeral bandages. Every time he becomes different, every time he falls or puts on a

⁴ Carmelo Bene, *Richard III ou l'horrible nuit d'un homme de guerre*. Traduit de l'italien par Jean-Paul Manganaro et Danielle Dubroca, in Carmelo Bene et Gilles Deleuze, *Superpositions*. (Paris: Minuit, [1979] 2004). Subsequent quotations from this text will be referenced within parentheses. Unless otherwise mentioned, all translations from French are mine.

⁵ Franco Quadri, "Du théâtre au théâtre. L'itinéraire de Carmelo Bene vers un langage non littéraire du spectacle", in Carmelo Bene, *Dramaturgie*. (Paris: Centre international de la dramaturgie, 1977), 9.

⁶ Mariangela Tempera, "Looking for Richard: Two Italian Versions of *Richard III*", in Martin Procházka and Ondřej Pilný (eds.), *Time Refigured. Myths, Foundation Texts and Imagined Communities*. (Prague: Litteraria Pragensia, 2005), 324.

deforming accessory, Anne turns into a tamed, subdued young girl in love: she helps poor Richard to his feet and unconsciously uncovers different parts of her body. Richard's non-Shakespearian falls elicit in Anne non-Shakespearian reactions, which can be interpreted as moments of oblivion of the role she has given to herself, but also as moments when the actress playing Anne, bewitched by the actor playing Richard, forgets the Shakespearian part she is supposed to perform. Richard's fake slips are not without recalling Marinetti's recommendations to "systematically prostitute all of classical art" by soaping "the floorboards of the stage to cause amusing pratfalls at the most tragic moments"⁷. These grotesque, clownish moments, when the actor playing Richard is detached from Richard the tragic hero, interrupt Shakespeare's story and enable the emergence of a second, fragile story, where the actress playing Anne is seduced by the actor playing Richard. During these brief moments the protagonists continue to recite their Shakespearian lines, so a clash emerges between the visual level of the performance and its aural component, between the speeches uttered by the protagonists and their gestures.

Marinetti enthusiastically mentioned, in his *Variety Theatre Manifesto*, the café concert performances, which turn the classical masterpieces into mere attractions, by parodying them, by stripping them of their solemn apparatus. Just like a malicious director, Bene either imposes to his characters, throughout the "wooing scene", gestures that clash with the tragic situation, undermining the tragic, or allows them to perform the gestures suggested by Shakespeare, but deconstructs their significance in his strange stage directions. Thus, Richard does not hesitate to "embellish" himself by borrowing funeral gaze from Henry's corpse, while a hysterical Anne almost breaks down the king's coffin in her attempt to express her rage at Richard's crimes. Richard will kindly help her put the body together again, but unfortunately, he cannot be very efficient, given the deforming accessories he has pared himself with. When offered the sword, Anne is really tempted to kill Richard, just as in Shakespeare's tragedy. However, Bene stipulates in the stage

⁷ F. T. Marinetti, "The Variety Theater (1913)" in Lawrence Rainey, Christine Poggi and Laura Wittman (eds.), *Futurism, An Anthology*. (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2009), 163.

directions that Anne is not mad at Richard – it is the beauty of the sword which really attracts her, and that she would like to kill him “just like at the end of turbulent nights of love” (p. 40). She will finally ask the duke to commit suicide, but while fixing her hair.

“Put life into the works of Beethoven, Wagner, Bach, Bellini, and Chopin, by inserting Neapolitan songs into them”⁸, Marinetti recommended, and Bene could not but agree with his compatriot: he interrupts Richard’s story and introduces different fragments with Neapolitan songs. Thus, after the sequence corresponding to Richard’s encounter with the women in Act I Scene 3, the mourning becomes even more tedious and somber, Anne falls asleep on Henry’s coffin, and Bene announces that “a Neapolitan serenade off-stage swells and distracts from the interior [...] It evokes restaurants and ‘oyster shells’ [...] and the first ideas for a possible *Richard III*” (p. 27). Mariangela Tempera argues that this surprising auditive intrusion might have been triggered by the context where the Italian director conducted the rehearsals for his production: “the adaptation of Shakespeare’s gruesome tragedy must have been discussed by actors mellowed by wine and food at the end of an open-air meal by the sea”. She considers that apart from disrupting the solemn atmosphere of the wake, the Neapolitan serenade foregrounds “a culture which, with its emphasis on family ties and motherhood, can generate the most moving theatrical moments and the most embarrassingly maudlin songs”⁹. Richard steps out of his Shakespearian role during this musical interlude, just as an actor taking a break during an exhausting performance.

Music imposes its presence in Bene’s play, it changes rhythms and introduces variations, distances the narrative frame, suggesting that the interest of the adaptation is to be found beyond the dramatic events, in the ever-changing play of speeds and intensities. “At the opera, it is musicality which matters, not meaning, Carmelo Bene argued. And the villains are

⁸ F. T. Marinetti, “The Variety Theater (1913)” in Lawrence Rainey, Christine Poggi and Laura Wittman (eds.), *Futurism, An Anthology*. (New Haven and London: Yales University Press, 2009), 163.

⁹ Mariangela Tempera, “Looking for Richard: Two Italian Versions of *Richard III*” in Martin Procházka and Ondřej Pilný (eds.), *Time Refigured. Myths, Foundation Texts and Imagined Communities* (Prague: Litteraria Pragensia, 2005), 323.

those who have the most beautiful songs”¹⁰. At the end of his encounter with Lady Anne (the scene is placed at the end of the first part of the adaptation) Richard has finally learned how to make himself irresistible to his fellow mourners, how to inspire both awe and unconditional admiration. He thus finally succeeds in pronouncing his famous soliloquy, “in a musical crescendo”: of course, there will be no trace of bitterness in his voice, the performer becomes “more and more euphoric” as he progresses with his speech.

The clownish or the musical interruptions, the gestures and the diction which undermine the sober atmosphere, the overcharge of the stage (loaded with coffins, white and red roses, mirrors), all these elements, partly inherited from the Futurist aesthetics, relegate the Shakespearian story into the background, drawing the spectator’s attention to the making of the performance. Indeed, the Italian director conceived the dramatic text as a score, which is reinvented, every night, within the performance. When directing classical works, written by great authors (Shakespeare, Marlowe), Bene compares himself to composers or avant-garde directors (Verdi, Prokofiev, Meyerhold, Artaud) who put these works to music: “the spectator will certainly not go to the opera or to the theatre in order to ecstasy himself on the value of the libretto – that he can read at home”¹¹.

Flemish dramatist Peter Verhelst also sets his take on *Richard III* in an intimate, mostly feminine space. However, whereas Bene’s rewriting is made of intensities and variations, with Verhelst there is very little action, as characters limit themselves to delivering long poetic speeches, seemingly addressed to the spectator, speeches where they confess their most intimate feelings and comment upon facts and events in the source text, but take no moral stand towards the protagonist’s crimes. The prince’s physical deformity and moral villainy are displaced in Verhelst’s rewriting too, as Richard is an able-bodied man. Far from descanting upon his deformity, he becomes a strange Christ figure, whose aim is to create a new, pure world, by destroying the old, vulgar, impure one. In this context, killing those who separate him from the throne become steps in delivering the world from the evil.

¹⁰ Carmelo Bene, *Polémiques et inédits*. In *Œuvres complètes III*. Préfacé et traduit de l’italien par Jean-Paul Manganaro. (Paris : P.O.L., 2012), 333.

¹¹ Carmelo Bene, *Polémiques et inédits*. In *Œuvres complètes III*. Préfacé et traduit de l’italien par Jean-Paul Manganaro. (Paris : P.O.L., 2012), 333.

A strange mixture of strong body presence and disembodiment governs this play, where the actual events and characters in *Richard III* are heavily cut and reported to Verhelst's spectator by an offstage voice. It is as if Shakespeare's story were turned into a performance, a remote, de-dramatized one, performed on another stage, which is not accessible to Verhelst's spectators. This offstage story inhabits the secondary one, in a ghostly, hollow way, as now and then bits and pieces of the actual events in Shakespeare's tragedy intrude in the world created on stage.

Thus, the actual dramatic events in Richard's story are atomized, reduced to short factual announcements made by the disembodied voice: "Clarence, Richard's brother, is arrested and brought to the Tour", "Loyal enters Clarence's cell", "Clarence has been found dead in his cell" ¹²). This voice acts like a chorus, guiding the spectators through Richard's intricate story, narrating what would otherwise remain hidden, as in a radio broadcast of Shakespeare's play (as rewritten by Verhelst). The violence of the announcements – addressed at the audience members – clashes with the pervasive lyrical atmosphere of the adaptation. However, now and then the voice does not shy away from explaining to the audience the character's real intentions, hidden behind their metaphoric language, or from commenting the action, in the manner of an omniscient narrator. For instance, when Richard tries to persuade the young prince that it would be better to head for the Tower, the voice intrudes: "For his own good, says Richard, the crown prince is taken to the Tower. Richard means by that: for my own good" (p. 19). The often lapidary or fragmented information provided by the narrative voice functions like the visible part of an iceberg, as it frustrates the spectators and asks them to reconstitute the initial stories by relying on their former acquaintance with Shakespeare's play, but also on the accounts delivered by the Shakespearean characters that the Flemish dramatist preserves in his version of the play.

Indeed, with Verhelst, the characters, whose main role seems to report what is happening "on the other stage" and to reflect on facts and actions in the source text and on their own destinies, foreground what appears as an

¹² Peter Verhelst, *Richard III*. Traduction du néerlandais par Christian Marcipont. Unpublished text, 12. Subsequent quotations from this text will be referenced within parentheses. Unless otherwise mentioned, all translations from French are mine.

important feature of the adaptation: they provide time to think over the mechanisms of fiction-making. According to Christel Stalpaert, contemporary Flemish Shakespeare adaptors, of which Verhelst is an important representative, are informed by Maeterlinck's "static drama, where the narrative comes to a standstill": just as the works of the famous symbolist, Verhelst's adaptations are characterized by "a feverish state of inaction, a condition of waiting or sleeping on behalf of the characters and a language filled with holes of silence"¹³. Maeterlinck claimed that "the play has to be above all a poem"¹⁴. Indeed, Verhelst's characters do not seem to be involved in any type of action – Richard, the Duchess or Lady Anne occupy the stage for long periods of time and address the audience directly, in soliloquies with a postdramatic flavour, telling their own versions of the story, justifying their actions, exposing their hopes and fears in beautiful, lyrical soliloquies. What keeps returning in these "stage poems" is the striking corporeality of the characters' reactions to the events scripted by Shakespeare, as Richard's violent acts are deeply inscribed into their bodies and minds.

Thus, the play starts with a soliloquy pronounced by Richard's mother, the Duchess of York, who recalls the birth of her son, through cesarian section, and her own very mixed feelings, of love, culpability and hatred, for her monster-child. In an almost obscene display of her intimate feelings, the ageing Duchess relives, in the present, the physical and moral pain that Richard caused her as a fetus and as a new-born. This speech, distanced from the speaker¹⁵, is interrupted twice: it continues half-way through the adaptation and ends it. As a privileged witness of this intimate confession, the spectator is placed in an uncomfortable, intermediate position, in-between reality and fiction, at the same time entering into some sort of relationship with the fictional character, detached from the dramatic situation. This device is not without recalling Bene's strategy, who also interrupts the Shakespearian story in order to

¹³ Christel Stalpaert, "Something is rotten on the Stage of Flanders: Postdramatic Shakespeare in Contemporary Flemish Theatre". *Contemporary Theatre Review*, Vol. 20 (4), (2010), 438.

¹⁴ Hans-Thies Lehmann, *Postdramatic theatre*. Transl. by Karen Jurs-Munby. (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), 58.

¹⁵ In Ludovic Lagarde's 2007 production of the play at the Festival d'Avignon the actress wore a microphone and delivered her lines in a detached manner.

provide the grieving Duchess with the opportunity to sing a strange lullaby to her agonizing Edward – consisting of some lines from two poems by T. S. Eliot (*Gerontion* and *Ash Wednesday*), on the disillusion and regret associated with death. With the Italian adaptor the discourse is doubly detached, both from the speaker (the stage directions indicate that the actress must exaggerate the expression of pain) and from the addressee (in a way, the Duchess lends her voice to her son, as the poetic *I*, in both poems, is a tired old man). This short moment, when the “Shakespearian” character speaks with the words of Eliot in the name of her dying son, constitutes a hole, a retreat from the dramatic action, a poetic moment to be enjoyed for its own sake.

As opposed to the source text, the wooing of Lady Anne has a very physical dimension in Verhelst's adaptation. Richard delivers a speech where he evokes his encounter with an unnamed young girl, who seduced him with her pure voice, with her frail hands, reaching for the sky, and also the death of the girl in what looks like an explosion. Meanwhile, in a stage action seemingly detached from Richard's discourse, Anne undresses, takes Richard's hand and places it around her neck, which seems to frighten him. Later on, Anne will provide to the audience her own perspective on this scene: she will recall how Richard seduced her with his voice, with his dream of purity, how she undressed and forced him to touch her. What Anne remembers from her amorous encounter are Richard's eyes, the eyes of a child vainly longing for a caress, of a child treated with violence. Anne knows that by authorizing Richard to love her, she also exposed herself to his inherent violence, she let herself caressed to death. As stated by Matt Cater¹⁶, in Shakespeare's tragedy it is Richard who gives Lady Anne power over his body by offering her his sword and instructing her to revenge Henry's death. Richard is fully conscious that the possibility that she might kill him are scarce: “If thy revengeful heart cannot forgive,/Lo, here, I lend thee this sharp-pointed sword,/Which if thou please to hide in this true bosom/And let the soul forth that adareth thee”, *Richard III*, I.2.159-162). With Verhelst it is Anne who grants Richard power over her body, although she is fully conscious that the caress will turn into a

¹⁶ Matt Carter, “Embodiment and Disability in 3 *Henry VI* and *Richard III*”. *SEL Studies in English Literature 1500-1900*. Volume 61, Number 1 (2021), 38.

punch, that Richard will eventually murder her. As with the Duchess of York, Richard's and Anne's bodies seem to be made of words, but words which foreground the very intimate, corporeal perception of the events by the characters.

With both Carmelo Bene and Peter Verhelst, Shakespeare's story, that audiences and characters alike are supposed to be familiar with, turns into a sort of present-absent performance, happening elsewhere but ghosting the world of the rewriting, reduced to some key moments that characters stumble to perform (Bene) or that are reported to the spectators by a disembodied voice (Verhelst). In both rewritings, the importance given to de-dramatized, lyrical moments, combining violent and tender images (such as the Duchess reflecting on her relationship with the monster-child) suggest that the adaptors are interested in the intimate side of Richard's story, in the family sphere, as a tool for approaching the politic. *Richard III* becomes a private tragedy in Bene's or Verhelst's rewritings, a tragedy that unfolds according to the model of a secondary performance, of an event happening in the here and now of the stage, which both modifies and provides time to reflect upon Shakespeare's script.

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INTIMATE TRAGEDIES: BODY POLITICS AND NARRATIVE INTERRUPTIONS IN
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Developing Street Theater on Human Rights in a Multilingual Country: An introspective article

Dana RUFOLO¹

Abstract: This article looks at different approaches to staging Street Theater about Human Rights in a multilingual environment. Theater on the streets intended to convince passers-by to stop and watch a short skit needs to attract with visual and theatrical techniques, but since Human Rights are conceptual, the actors need to get their message across using words audience members can mull over. How can a maximum number of passers-by be reached in an urban environment where there are three, even four, national languages? Research is ongoing.

Keywords: street theatre, mime, amateur actors, Amnesty International, human rights.

In light of the fact that I am resuming leadership of a Street Theater group focused on presenting Human Rights issues for Amnesty International Luxembourg (AIL) after a 15 year hiatus, this article is my attempt to take stock of lessons learned in the past so as to launch an even more convincing and theatrical Street Theater project in 2023. I did not train as a Street Theater director, and so it has been learning by doing; each Street Theater skit is an “experiment” in how to best reach an audience of passers-by.

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Do our skits arrest people in their path, because – like a Venus flytrap – they manifest enough of those quintessentially spectacular qualities that provide an attracting appearance? Once stopped, do our passers-by start to think about the messages about Human Rights² they are presented with; do our passers-by acquire a newly awakened critical faculty? Do these entertaining skits leave a lingering afterthought in these passers-by; do they qualify as a form of *Lehrstück*?

Message-driven Street Theater depends on entertaining the eye but also and perhaps more importantly the ear. Even if we have caught an audience of passers-by with our on-street (as opposed to on-stage) antics, if they can't grasp what's being said, then the message will never be more than a message in a bottle, forever floating on the high seas.³ So, in this article I am looking at three Street Theater performances from the past – 15 years ago – which were consecutive attempts to tackle the challenge of reaching multilingual passers-by.

I am fortunate to be resuming Street Theater projects in 2023 and will continue to research – with the participation of Amnesty International Luxembourg members, none of whom has been trained in the performance arts – on ways to rapidly and attractively dramatize messages in public spaces about the sanctity of Human Rights. The appeal of such theatre research is that our objective will be to find dramatic methods that reach out to a mixed, multilingual audience.

² See <https://www.ohchr.org/en/human-rights/universal-declaration/translations/english>

³ This is an over-simplification in that the actors are invariably Amnesty International paying members who are amateurs in the world of performance. They have joined the Theater Group as people who agree with Amnesty's letter-writing campaigns and its non-aggressive research-based way of attempting to free people who have been tortured or imprisoned for expressing their beliefs; the participants implicitly concur with how AI values Human Rights. Nonetheless, by staging a skit that examines one or the other human right the actors are themselves gaining insight and knowledge about that Human Right. So, the goal is twofold: to reach the passers-by but also to offer the actors a chance to identify more closely with the ethical values of AI and to evolve their own personal thinking on ethical matters.

Skit experience 1

Trafficking of Women. An attempt to bypass language by use of mime

In Luxembourg, there are three official languages: Luxembourgish (Lëtzebuergesch), French, and German. Luxembourgish was added as an official language in 1984. However, since Luxembourg houses a multitude of European Union (EU) institutions, with the expansion of the EU in 2004 to include Cyprus, Malta, and eight Central and Eastern European countries, and with the UK at that time still a member state; English became an important vehicular language. Additionally, there has been a large Portuguese and Italian population living in Luxembourg since the mid-twentieth century: initially they were brought in as workers in the construction and steel industries and their spouses but by now are multi-generational communities. Spanish, Polish, Swedish, Finnish, Romanian, and Russian are frequently heard. As of 2022, people from 175 different nationalities reside in Luxembourg. Fifteen years ago, the range of nations represented was similar although their numbers were fewer.

The initial Theater Group at Amnesty International Luxembourg (AIL) was comprised of AIL members in the now- defunct English section who met regularly to write letters in English for the perennial letter-writing campaign of Amnesty International's (AI). When we began, I realized that the county's multilingualism was a challenge. Logically, I thought to avoid the problem by avoiding words altogether. We would stage a mime about the trafficking of women! Voilà! Problem solved!

Or was it?

The pantomimed skit about the trafficking of women was performed repeatedly during a two-hour period at a corner of the Place d'Armes downtown Luxembourg city on a Saturday morning when many of the passers-by would be heading for the open air market around the corner. I intended to have the stereotype of the trafficking narrative on-street staged as a series of inevitable occurrences. First, a man woos a girl; then he takes her to a foreign land. At the border, the man asks his girl to give him her passport for safekeeping. Once over the border, he refuses to surrender the passport and, illegally in the country, she has lost all rights to autonomy and self-determination. All of these steps were converted into easily recognizable

actions: they meet, they become amorous, he takes up a small suitcase and points forward, they walk forward and arrive at a long rope lying on the asphalt of the Place d'Armes which delineates the point of transference where the woman surrenders her passport (and hence her liberty) to the boyfriend shepherding her across the rope and symbolically into a foreign country. When she surrenders her passport, her male partner pulls twine out of his pocket and attaches her to him. She has not only lost her passport but also even the chance of escaping. All is mimed and physical; there are no spoken words.

The young and earnest actors were inexperienced; I was inexperienced as a Street Theater director – but I can't be sure that these factors were to blame for the fact that passers-by causally strolled through our on-street pantomime time and again! Never before exposed to Street Theater, not given a sign that some kind of stage or enclosure representing a stage was before them, and with no dialogue to draw their attention to the action, no passers-by stopped and gathered, and our performance dropped into the bottomless pit of the unremarked!

No! We had not solved our problem!

Skit experience 2

Freedom of Speech. Presentation in three languages

Article nineteen of the Human Rights Act states that “everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers”. Amnesty International takes this Human Right very seriously.⁴ The Street Theater skit in which the right to freedom of expression was the theme was my next attempt at attempting to catch the attention of the public.

I directly addressed the issues that were problematic in our first attempt. This time, AIL arranged for us to perform on a raised platform (about 20 cm off the ground, low enough to be near the street level) in the

⁴ See <https://www.amnesty.org/en/what-we-do/freedom-of-expression/>.

middle of the Place d'Armes. We were integrated into an AIL campaign event that included speeches by the chapter's president, so we were announced ahead of time. The skit had dialogue in it adjusted to the multilingual audience.

This Street Theater skit on the right to free speech is a brief poetic and danced work in which a neutral protagonist bandages the faces of the "people" (3 dancing AIL volunteer actors) – in particular, their mouths – with long strips of medical gauze which effectively prevents them from speaking. As poetic images of nature are evoked, delivered by the protagonist and by actors speaking the lines in alternative languages, the protagonist frees the bandaged actors by removing the extremely long roll of bandage that had interconnected the actors, giving them the opportunity to speak again and offering the hope of a kinder future.

Not surprisingly in that I frequently stage dramatizations of narrative poems I have written, the words the actors say are poetic. The lines are short but full of imagery. For instance, there is a line that says where there is suppression of free speech, then words are silenced but the thoughts that lead to words can never be eradicated; this chain of events was likened to the fate of Torrey Pines in my hometown of La Jolla, in southern California. These trees grow almost exclusively in that region of the world, and although they are wind battered, threatened by salt spray, and subject to drought, they continue to survive as beautiful if stunted specimens. The use of a nature-referencing non-aggressive metaphor for how freedom of speech cannot be extinguished forever avoids triggering politicized thought-reactions in the audience that might make them inured to the image of the gauze being wrapped around and then removed from the gently swaying actors on stage.

Most important of all is the fact that every single line was spoken in three different languages by three different actors. Since all Luxembourgish speakers also know German, which is the first language of instruction in Luxembourg primary schools, the languages selected were German, French, and English.

Additionally, to prevent boring the spectators and passers-by with a talky and static skit, the dialogue was delivered during the lengthy flowing movements when the actor playing the role of the protagonist moves around the platform encircling the heads and mouths of each of the softly swaying other actors with an extremely long (pre-prepared) strip of gauze. Then,

when transformed into the liberating protagonist, she removes the gauze. The image of each of the bound actors (three in number) interconnected by a billowing white medical gauze strip is very striking, and the performance was compelling enough for it to be written about in a local newspaper, thus further disseminating its influence.⁵

vendredi 27 juin 2008 **4** **LaVoix**

Journée internationale de soutien aux victimes de la torture, hier à Luxembourg

Ne pas taire les traitements cruels

Aux longs discours, *Amnesty International* Luxembourg a préféré une représentation théâtrale aux gestes symboliquement forts et aux paroles poignantes pour attirer, hier sur le temps de midi, l'attention du grand public sur le thème de la torture et des traitements cruels. Une action qui s'inscrit dans une lignée de manifestations tenues hier par *Amnesty International* aux quatre coins de l'UE dans le cadre de la Journée internationale de soutien aux victimes de la torture.



Sur la place d'Armes, les militants d'*Amnesty International* ont sensibilisé le public aux actes de torture et au problème des victimes réduites au silence (Photo: Michel Brumat)

■ «Certains sont prêts à torturer et à tuer pour faire taire la liberté. Mais là où il y a un mot, il y a aussi une pensée humaine. Nous pouvons torturer jusqu'au silence tous les mots qui existent, mais les pensées qui ont fait naître ces mots ne pourront jamais être supprimées par toute la torture du monde...» Ce texte, interprété hier sur la place d'Armes par quelques militants d'*Amnesty International* et né de la plume de l'auteur Dana Rufolo (du *Theatre Research Institute of Europe*), dénonce les actes d'oppression et de torture mais se veut également un appel au grand public à ne pas rester muet lorsque les droits humains ne sont pas respectés.

Lors de cette manifestation, Frank Wies, le président d'*Amnesty International* Luxembourg, est également revenu sur certaines pratiques telles que les détentions secrètes: «Les Etats européens ne doivent pas fermer les yeux sur les arrestations, détentions ou transferts de personnes qui se font en dehors de toute légalité, notamment dans le cadre de la guerre contre le terrorisme.» Dans ce sens, les passants étaient invités à signer des cartes postales incitant les Etats européens à ne pas soutenir des actions internationales qui vont à l'encontre des droits humains. Ces cartes sont destinées au chef de l'Etat français, Nicolas Sarkozy, car son pays assumera la présidence de l'UE à partir du 1^{er} juillet.

■ BB

Fig. 1: Article in *La Voix*, 27 June 2008

Performing in a designated street space using multiple languages was successful.

⁵ *La Voix*, 27 June 2008.

Skit experience 3

Torture. Presentation in English with actors inserting words and monologues in their own languages

Article five of the Declaration of Human Rights specifies that “no one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.” In 2008, when Amnesty International was focusing on the inhumanity of torture, I directed a skit of mine for AIL that describes how torture is institutionalized through public indifference.⁶

In the film of the Street Theater skit *Torture*, to which a link is provided in endnote five, the actor playing the role of the victim of torture – the consequence of him having participated in a public demonstration protesting the government’s actions in some unidentified way – is a Syrian refugee who had recently arrived in Luxembourg and who was a member of AIL. Although the skit was delivered in English, he stepped forward in one scene and made a speech in his native Arabic where he emotionally denounced torture. Similarly, an actor who came from an African country delivered a speech against torture in her native dialect (I am unable to recall with certainty what country she had emigrated from). It is a more psychologically complex way of approaching the multilingual complexity of Street Theater than in the *Freedom of Speech* skit, in that it centred more on the actors involvement with the message of the skit, giving them the opportunity to express strong feelings in their mother tongues and therefore inserting a certain psychodramatic element into the performed skit. It was a directorial choice that I didn’t even reflect upon, because it was apparent especially with the Syrian actor/AIL member that he was deeply steeped in memories of the war crimes he’d seen in his country, and it seemed imperative that he be given some public way to give vent to his emotions without requiring him to “act” these out in English.

In the film of *Torture*, the scenes where these two actors spoke in their native languages were edited out. You only see sections where the dialogue is in English.

⁶ See a film of the Street Theater skit against torture at the website of Theater Research Institute of Europe: <https://www.theater-research-institute.eu/amnesty>.

It was appropriate to use one dominant language, given the dramatic rather than the poetic form of this skit; it would have seemed stilted if the action stopped in order to repeat the lines in other languages. In the dreamy *Freedom of Speech* skit where time is drawn out and abstracted from the rhythms of daily life, the repetition of lines in three languages is tolerable because the performance style permits an intuitive understanding that language is sounds to which a meaning has been affixed. The dance and poetry created willingness in the audience to perceive language as sound and to therefore sense the musicality of the lines in the one or two languages used which they did not necessarily understand.

There are two elements of spectacle introduced in *Torture* that increase its attractiveness as performance. One is the visual element of each actor carrying a full-length paper cut-out of himself or herself as a character: the victim of torture, the actor representing confused public opinion, the actor representing a prison guard, and the actor representing a mother whose son was tortured. The actors were given an alternative self, a role to play; unlike in *Freedom of Speech*, they do not play themselves. I hate to reference the *Verfremdungseffekt* here, but in effect that is a bit what the mechanism was and might explain why especially for the Syrian actor it was easy for him to address his audience passionately in Arabic.



Fig. 2: TRIE Justice and Amnesty International scene from Street Theatre on Torture, rue de la Poste, Luxembourg

The second element of spectacle is the prison guard's song that he initiated and that then all the actors sung: "Oh, I'm just doing my job, doing what I'm told, Keeping myself alive. I believe the man in charge knows his job and that's why I'm just doing my job, doing what I'm told, Keeping myself alive. Keeping myself. Keeping myself. Keeping myself alive".

Other theatrical attributes are the protagonist's red nose and her *commedia dell'arte* manner of presenting herself and the use of cue sheets to encourage the public to sing along with the prison guard's song.

Despite these extra elements which mean the skit is likely to seize the attention of passers-by, *Torture* does not necessarily resolve the problem of reaching a multilingual audience. In conclusion, in my renewed mandate to create Street Theater for AIL, I need to develop a form of presentation that combines the rhythms of a poetic skit with the comedic elements of a fast paced and theatrical skit. The messages about the value of Human Rights must be not only simple, direct, and immediately graspable for the audience of passers-by but also comprehensible since it is the message (as opposed to money in a hat) that is the whole reason for performing Street Theater on Human Rights.

Let the research continue!

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Besides engaging in Street Theater, Rufolo enjoys giving workshops on the art of contemporary theatre and performance criticism that teach participants how to write critiques themselves. She uses her training as an Art Therapist specialized in Drama Therapy (DESS from Paris V and Luxembourg University) to engage in theatre-based peace and conflict resolution projects.

Redefining Biological Horror: The Aesthetic Evolution of an Infected Body in HBO's The Last of Us

Flavius FLOARE¹

Abstract: The post-apocalyptic genre has seen a resurgence in 2023 due to HBO's *The Last of Us*, a television adaptation based on Naughty Dog's video game of the same name, where the society has collapsed due to an infection that causes human bodies to gradually mutate and become violent. There have been debates on whether the infected humans should be called "zombies", as the word was banned on the production set and the creative director of the video game has refused numerous times to use the word when labeling the infected bodies. In this article, I am taking a closer look at the infection presented in the series, its impact on the human body, the mutation and transformation that precedes it, and the question of zombification in relation to an existing and real-world infection, as in the case Cordyceps fungus. Moreso, I will discuss the validity of considering analyzing *The Last of Us* through the body horror filter, due to the exploration of an infection that happens in stages, and the different anatomical and aesthetical changes it provokes to the human body.

Keywords: horror, television, video game, body horror, adaptation.

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Introduction

From a collective point of view, horror has always been perceived as being concerned with showcasing a monster as its central asset. Contextually, the monster interacts with the characters, resulting in tense and anxiety-ridden situations that take by surprise both the characters involved and the viewers as well. However, the danger only affects the former of these sides. The moviegoers are left physically unharmed, while psychologically, they present behavioral changes related to a higher surrounding awareness brought forward by certain brain activities.² In other words, the monster represents the threat that elicits the thrill. Ultimately, we, as horror spectators, seek the thrill. We are addicted to it. It does not harm us, yet it opens a world of unexplored psychological possibilities that we learn from, but also adapt and employ in our lives. In this regard, the monster, and its interference with horror, acts as an endurance test: are we capable of withstanding repulsive bodies that are enacting acts of explicit violence and cruelty? Probably not at first, but in time, yes.

However, horror is an exhaustively potent genre. While the monster, a menacing entity on its own, causes anxiety and fear at the mere sight, there are multiple other methods to induce a frightening state in the spectator. Psychological horror seems to master the art of subtle menaces: the monster becomes a secondary trait in the anatomy of the film, whereas the setting, the atmosphere, and their relation to the characters become the main facilitator of terror. In psychological horror, one tends to question anything, because everything enables fear. A dimming light in a room does not offer comfort, nor does it a bright sunny day in the middle of a flowery summer field. Moreso, one often finds casual characters in a position to be doubted and even feared, because they are narratively built to be psychologically ambivalent: are they a threat or a friend? We do not know, so we are left with our own devices to interpret their motivations. Thus, the lack of trust becomes the backbone of psychological horror. Doubt becomes the ever-present monster. It is both uncanny and effectively terrifying.

² Matthew Hudson et al., "Dissociable neural systems for unconditioned acute and sustained fear," *NeuroImage*, 216, August 1, 2020, <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1053811920300094>.

Biological horror or more commonly known as body horror,³ borrows this concept, the lack of trust, to great effect. As its name suggests, this horror sub-genre focuses on the body as the enabler of monstrosity. The body becomes the monster that inflicts violence and suffering, physiologically and psychologically alike, on the characters. In the former regard, the individual suffers from a variety of health conditions: diseases, infections, mutations, and fungal infections that biologically transform the body and often culminate in death or, even more terrifying, a gradual and often conscious loss of bodily autonomy.⁴ In the latter regard, the lack of trust in one's body's diseased transformation evokes intense feelings of disgust, and it plays upon the anxieties of losing all physical prowess.⁵ In many ways, body horror resembles gory slasher films with a psychological horror sensibility: the violence scares but it becomes overwhelming due to its proximity and its unavoidable nature. Biology cannot be tamed, and it does not discriminate. It is a volatile and incredibly ruthless killer. It becomes such an intense threat that we are often left with nothing but the chance to surrender to its evolutionary metamorphosis.

Such biological metamorphoses are explored in HBO's *The Last of Us*, a post-apocalyptic drama where the world is ravaged by a fungal infection that turns its human hosts into violent and brutal killers.⁶ Adapted from Naughty Dog's eponymous video game, *The Last of Us* takes a unique approach to the body horror concept of "zombification", even though the showrunners insist that it is not a "zombie show".⁷ Partly, I tend to believe them. The

³ Ronald Allan Lopez Cruz, "Mutations and Metamorphoses: Body Horror is Biological Horror," *Journal of Popular Film and Television*, 40, no. 4 (2012): 160–168, doi:10.1080/01956051.2012.654521.

⁴ Peter Hutchings, *The A–Z of Horror Cinema. A–Z Guides 100* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2009).

⁵ Davey Davis, "The Future of Body Horror: Can Our Art Keep up with Our Suffering?" *The Rumpus*, January 26, 2017, <https://therumpus.net/2017/01/26/the-future-of-body-horror-can-our-art-keep-up-with-our-suffering/>.

⁶ Kyle Hill, "The Fungus that Reduced Humanity to *The Last of Us*," *Scientific American*, June 25, 2013, <https://blogs.scientificamerican.com/but-not-simpler/the-fungus-that-reduced-humanity-to-the-last-of-us/>.

⁷ Zack Sharf, "*The Last of Us* Crew Was Banned From Saying Zombie On Set: We Weren't Allowed To Say The Z Word," *Variety*, February 14, 2023, <https://variety.com/2023/tv/news/the-last-of-us-crew-banned-saying-zombie-set-1235522423/>.

infected in *The Last of Us* is not the classical zombies found in horror films. They are the result of a biological evolution that exists in the real world, but cannot yet infect humans, much for our sake. However, the video game and its HBO television adaptation theorize a scenario where the evolution of the Cordyceps fungus has happened and humans are its victims. Moreso, the infection happens in stages: there are no more than four versions of infected bodies in the TV adaptation of *The Last of Us*, and no more than six versions of infected bodies in the video game. Aesthetically, they all represent different types of monsters found in the body horror subgenre.

In this paper, I will take a closer look at the way biological horror is explored through infected bodies in *The Last of Us*. For the sake of this article, I will only discuss the HBO television adaptation, although, I will closely link it to its source material, Naughty Dog's *The Last of Us* video game. My main intention is to showcase how the different stages of the fungal disease impact the aesthetic of the infected body, while the second most important issue that I will be discussing in this article is the concept of zombification and the question of its consideration in *The Last of Us*.

Uncanny biology – the premise of *The Last of Us* and its narratological development within the body horror genre

In an excellent display of free adaptation, HBO's *The Last of Us* begins its very first episode with a subtle threat: fungal infections are entirely different biological beasts compared to bacteria or viruses, and – if the world were to gradually experience an increase of temperature, say climate change – the human body would not be able to withstand them. This premise is thoroughly explained by an epidemiologist, especially emphasizing the fact that there is no cure nor an effective treatment in case it would ever happen. Some decades later, it happens. The evolution of fungi is taking place and humans immediately become ravaged by it, on a global scale. Most of the population becomes infected, but instead of dying, they become parasitic hosts that violently seek to spread the infestation. The premise of *The Last of Us* would fall into the post-apocalyptic narrative: society collapse followed by desperate attempts to restore whatever order is there to be restored. But it can also be analyzed through the body horror filter.

Post-apocalyptic worlds and settings are often brought forward by violent incidents of biological nature. If we take a close look at it, *World War Z*, *The Walking Dead*, *28 Days Later*, *Dawn of the Dead*, *The Road*, or *Station Eleven*, all present a world brought to ruin by a certain virus that behaves violently and erratically. All the examples feature zombified bodies born out of an unexplained virus, engaging in cannibalistic behavior to survive, thrive, and infest, and aside from *Station Eleven*, where the virus just kills, all these examples end the same: a gone world, and the few left alive struggling to survive. Zombification, however, is never explored and explained in detail, or at least, the scientific reason has diminished importance enough to reconsider these examples as part of body horror. Ultimately, the zombified bodies become the monsters, the physical threat, unequivocally aimed at one thing: annihilation.

However, body horror rarely resorts to immediate violence to violate or transform the body.⁸ It seeks to question body autonomy, body integrity, and body unity and then it inflicts psychological torture on its characters before finally making them succumb to whatever parasitic motivations biology stands for. When this final process occurs, the body experiences biological transformations. All the transformed bodies lead to the collapse of society. In *The Last of Us*, even when society is ruined, biology continues its evolution. It continues to mutate the body into new forms: more violent, more potent, and more efficient to spread the infestation everywhere. It not only kills the human, but it also uses it to create a new consciousness, or as the television adaptation calls it, a fungal “network” that accurately resembles a mycelium.⁹

In this regard, *The Last of Us* exists in the body horror genre in an equal manner to the post-apocalyptic genre. Contrary to the examples that I mentioned earlier, in *The Last of Us*, the human body does not stagnate to a single form when the infection happens: it gradually suffers from a continuous metamorphosis until it becomes mature enough to infest. After infestation occurs, the human body becomes a surveillance point in the fungal network.

⁸ Peter Hutchings, *The A–Z of Horror Cinema. A–Z Guides 100* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2009).

⁹ A mycelium (or mycelia) is a fungus structure with a root-like appearance, consisting of a mass of branching hyphae. It can grow to expand on acres of land, according to M.D. Fricker, L. Boddy and D. Bebbler D, “Network organization of filamentous fungi” in *Biology of the fungal cell*, ed. RJ Howard, Nar Gow (Berlin: Springer-Verlag, 2007), 309 -330.

The fungus also grows underground. Long fibers, like wires, some of them stretching over a mile. Now, you step on a patch of Cordyceps in one place, and you can wake a dozen infected from somewhere else. Now they know where you are, now they come. (Tess, *The Last of Us*, Episode 2: Infected, dir. Neil Druckmann)

Body transformation is one of the strongest arguments in favor of including *The Last of Us* in the body horror genre. Infected beings do not simply kill, but they also act together and move together per their biology. Moreso, they are always evolving and, in their evolution, they become far more dangerous, as they develop new anatomical forms. They also become perfect archetypes of body horror monsters. One would argue that they were innately monstrous, or just biology expanding and defending their territory. In *The Last of Us*, the latter seems to be more appropriate.

The video game and its television adaptation emphasize the uncanny trait of biology. Not only this exact infection exists in the real world, but the theory of humans being susceptible to it due to global warming transforms it into an even greater and almost urgent threat. We are just some evolutionary steps away from experiencing it. Further, we can also recognize the remnants of human biology in the infected bodies: fungus is tearing apart the skulls to make their way outside, and scales made up of fungal parts are enriching and feeding on a human body, similar to the real world fungal symbiosis. In many ways, the uncanny biology is the driver of unrelinquished anxiety in *The Last of Us*. Much like cosmic horror, body horror represents the uncanniest of fears. It happens in our vicinity; our bodies are involved in it and we have no control over it.

Fatal biology – The aesthetic and anatomic metamorphosis of an infected body in *The Last of Us*

An infected body constitutes the most dangerous threat in *The Last of Us*. It is a body of unpredictable nature, an erratic and cannibalistic behavior, a parasite in human form with no tracks of empathy, emotions, or consciousness of its own. It is a former human body infected with a mutated version of

Cordyceps and it gradually suffers from an active anatomic transformation. Depending on the time of the infection, an infected body will evolve over the years into more lethal forms. Per their stage of evolution, in *The Last of Us* universe, these bodies are colloquially known as Runners, Stalkers, Clickers, and Bloaters, while in the video game adaptation, two more forms are encountered, the Shamblers and the Rat Kings.¹⁰ They are all different and their behavior, while still the same, proves to be more efficient at spreading infestation as evolution occurs.

A Runner¹¹ is the first stage of the infected body. They usually turn in approximately two days after the initial infection. They are described as being physically weak, but fast and their behavior is hesitant: in the video game, they are seen as being psychologically distressed, like crying, after attacking. It is suggested a Runner's psychological state is still intact, and psychologically, it is still a human mind. However, from an anatomical perspective, the human body cannot resist the infection, thus compelling it to act violently and erratically. In the television series, the first stage of the infection triggers muscle spasms, as seen in the character of Nana, an elderly woman, who violently attacks members of her family. Aesthetically speaking, a Runner has minor to no anatomical changes initially. It has tendrils coming out of its mouth as a means to spread the infestation via biting, but it retains the human body, although it suffers transformations as physical trauma is inflicted upon it. Later, as the infection is taking hold, more anatomical changes happen: the eyes and skin become yellow, because of jaundice, a condition caused by the lack of liver functionality, while fungus becomes more present on the surface of the skin.

¹⁰ In a nod to biological horror, a Rat King is a real biological phenomenon. It is a collection of rats whose tails are tied or bound together in some way. There is no conclusive theory on why it happens, some scientists agree that one of the explanations could be the need for a nest and warmth during the colder seasons.

¹¹ The name Runner is not officially mentioned in the television adaptation of *The Last of Us*. In the adaptation, this infestation stage does not have a colloquial name, it is only mentioned as the infected. However, in Naughty Dog's *The Last of Us*, this stage of the infected is called a Runner and, per *The Last of Us* Podcast, the name Runner was used in interviews and on-set.



Fig. 1: A runner in HBO's *The Last of Us*

A Stalker¹² is the next stage of the infection. Taking place over several years after being infected, the body of a stalker is severely changed and mutated to a degree where fungi have sprouted over it. Anatomically, its skin and eyes are yellow and fungal masses cover the head and parts of the body. Usually, the eyes are destroyed in the process, as Cordyceps takes hold. There are remnants of a former human, but the fungi have slowly incapacitated these remnants. Both anatomically and aesthetically, a stalker is a human body taken to its limits, in a pure body horror fashion.¹³ The television series has not explored the anatomical capabilities of a stalker in-depth, but aesthetically, it seems to possess abilities that would make it even harder to face in combat. As in the scene with Tess, the stalker seems to know when someone is infected and it behaves accordingly, adding the victim to the fungal network. But it does so in a tender manner, almost abandoning all

¹² Similar to the Runner, the Stalker is not officially mentioned in HBO's adaptation. In the adaptation, this infestation stage does not have a colloquial name, it is only mentioned as the infected. However, in Naughty Dog's *The Last of Us*, this stage of the infected is called a Stalker and, per *The Last of Us* Podcast, the name Runner was used in interviews and on-set.

¹³ Matt Cardin, *Horror Literature Through History: An Encyclopedia of the Stories That Speak to Our Deepest Fears*, (Santa Barbara, California: Greenwood, 2017).

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violence in favor of savoring the victory of infestation: tendrils are coming out of its mouth, engulfing the victim with a lethal kiss. Aesthetically, a stalker is no longer a human, but not yet entirely a monster. It is the perfect embodiment of the uncanny.



Fig. 2: A stalker in HBO's *The Last of Us*

A Clicker is the third stage of Cordyceps infection. It is no longer human, neither in psychology nor in anatomy and, while it resembles a human form, the fungal evolution exists in an animalistic territory. The clicker is extremely dangerous, incredibly ferocious, and lethally skilled in hunting its prey. In a single confrontation, it managed to bite and inflict wounds on both Ellie and Tess, the latter ultimately dying because of it. Anatomically, the

fungal masses are covering all its body. The face is unrecognizable, the Cordyceps maims the head, destroys the eyes, and renders its host completely blind. It uses echolocation to hunt through its clicker sounds and shrieks. A veritable display of biological evolution, the clicker is a true body horror monster: it is disfigured and mutated, pushing the human body to an extreme limit, crying, and shrieking in tortured screams, motivated purely by the desire to infect, and spreading the infestation.



Fig. 3: A clicker in HBO's *The Last of Us*

A Bloater is the fourth stage of the Cordyceps evolution. Similar to the Clicker, this type of infected body is a rare sight in *The Last of Us* universe. Its mutation precedes that of the Clicker, and it takes a great amount of time for the evolution of this kind to happen. The Bloater is enormous as seen in episode 5. It is also slow, and it cannot run to such a speed as the other infected, but it is also the strongest infected body. Anatomically, they are an amalgam of fungal masses sprouted all over the human body, erupting into carcasses sort of armor, that offers its host a protective skin resistant to many firearms. They possess incredible strength capable of inflicting fatal violence on anyone near it. In a display of pure horror, the Bloater manages

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to easily rip and tear limbs of non-infected humans. Aesthetically, they are the perfect embodiment of a body horror monster, a fungal-infected Frankenstein, large and disfigured. Covered in Cordyceps, they have a thick and yellow shell resembling scales, and their metamorphosis emphasizes a crude and exaggerated transformation of the human body.



Fig. 4: A bloater in HBO's *The Last of Us*

The HBO's adaptation only features these 4 stages of the infection. However, in the video game, two more forms are encountered, which emphasize the argument of considering *The Last of Us* as part of the body horror genre. The Shamblers and the Rat Kings are distinct forms of Cordyceps mutation which are dependent on certain biological circumstances. The Shambler is infected that thrives near water settings and it can release spores to infest the environment, while the Rat King is a monstrous infected organism made up of several infected brought together by the Cordyceps fungi. The former is like a Runner, while the latter is larger than a Bloater and far more dangerous.

The biology featured in *The Last of Us* is dangerous and fatal to the characters of this universe. It not only causes a global collapse, but it also proves to be the subject of continuous evolution, an organism that increases its threatful

nature with each form. But despite its many monstrous versions, ultimately, the Cordyceps is just natural biology. It does not shape, nor manipulate reality in such a way other similar works of fiction would – Jeff VanderMeer’s the Southern Reach Trilogy comes to mind. But it is also not imaginary biology, as in other works mentioned earlier in this article, and its evolution is very dependent on real circumstances of space and time. These mutated bodies have been transformed due to several conditions being met, conditions that are based on and exist in our pragmatic reality. One would argue that *The Last of Us* could present a possible scenario of fungal evolution,¹⁴ and we often rest assured that a Cordyceps fungus can’t infect humans,¹⁵ but the exact type of fungi presented in *The Last of Us*, does exist. It makes biology uncannier.

The issue of zombification – Is *The Last of Us* a zombie show?

There has been a debate on whether the infected bodies on *The Last of Us* make it a zombie show or not,¹⁶ and even the video game’s creator, Neil Druckmann, has refused many times to label the infected bodies as “zombies”. The word has become so forbidden, it has even been banned from the production set,¹⁷ and it is keenly avoided in interviews, podcasts, or any other similar contexts.

¹⁴ Allison Parshall, “Could the Zombie Fungus in TV’s *The Last of Us* Really Infect People?,” *Scientific American*, February 10, 2023, <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/could-the-zombie-fungus-in-tvs-the-last-of-us-really-infect-people/>.

¹⁵ Robert Hart, “*The Last Of Us* Zombie Infection Is Real - Here’s What Scientists Say About The Threat To Humans,” *Forbes*, January 16, 2023, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/roberthart/2023/01/16/the-last-of-us-zombie-infection-is-real-heres-what-scientists-say-about-the-threat-to-humans/>.

¹⁶ Cindy White, “Is *The Last of Us* a Zombie Show or Not?,” *AV Club*, February 21, 2023, <https://www.avclub.com/the-last-of-us-tv-show-hbo-zombie-debate-1850130814>.

¹⁷ “We weren’t allowed to say the Z word on set. It was like a banned word. They were the Infected. We weren’t a zombie show. Of course, there’s tension building and jump scares but the show’s really about our characters; The Infected are an obstacle they have to deal with.” Hugh Hart, “*The Last of Us* Cinematographer Eben Bolter on Episode 4 & more,” *Motion Picture Association*, February 6, 2023, <https://www.motionpictures.org/2023/02/the-last-of-us-cinematographer-eben-bolter/>.

The reluctance to label *The Last of Us* a “zombie” show might come from the idea that a zombie narrative would not make justice to the quality of the story. *The Last of Us*, the video game, has been trying to avoid the survival horror label, that similar video games, such as *Resident Evil*, have gotten in the past, by avoiding making any reference to the concepts of zombie or zombification. In part, it worked, even though, there have been some critics calling the infected “not zombies”¹⁸ in a cynical approach to the struggle of avoiding zombification at any cost. By any means, Naughty Dog's *The Last of Us* is often referred to as one of the greatest video games ever made. Contributors to publications such as IGN, USA Today, Esquire, Polygon, The Irish Times and many others all agree the game brought an authorial and cinematic aspect to the medium, while its story, characterization, depiction of loss, tragedy, and love, and the philosophical subtexts of morality are highly regarded by critics. But almost all the reviews also treat the narrative through the lens of zombification and while dozens of critics agree it is not a story centered around zombies, one cannot ignore the concept.

There might be several theories on why the showrunners avoided labeling the adaptation as a “zombie” show. One central reason is that zombification would have diminished the story. The focus on surviving a zombie apocalypse would have been larger than exploring the story of the characters. In the video game, zombification provides action, and action is needed when the gameplay is involved – in fact, zombies are an instrument of ludology, an obstacle to overcome to unlock new rewards. Translating so many action scenes involving infected from the video game into television would have taken away the necessary space to develop the story of Joel and Ellie properly. And along with space, the label would also shift the attention to zombies, creating expectancies hard to build on a medium, such as television. Another personal reason why I tend to believe the label of zombification has been avoided is its ability to trivialize the story. In the past 20 years, a lot of similar series and films have been avoiding the word “zombie” because it has been used in a parodic manner. The popularity of zombie narratives such as *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* has shifted the cultural meaning of the word

¹⁸ Gabriel Aikins, “The Last of Us Makes Players Feel Really Bad – and That’s Great,” *Wired*, October 15, 2022, <https://www.wired.com/story/the-last-of-us-makes-players-feel-really-bad-and-thats-great/>.

in a comic terrain. Nowadays, the collective opinion often finds the word infantilizing.

Now, is *The Last of Us* a zombie show? Yes and no. It all depends on how we approach it. I tend to believe it is not a zombie show. I would label it a biological horror by the way of Garland's *Annihilation* (based on Vander Meer's Southern Trilogy books) and a body horror by the way of Cronenberg's filmography but seemingly rooted in pragmatic science. In many ways, I would even label it as a psychological horror, because the uncanny biology of this universe is enough to unsettle us and makes us wonder if we truly are in danger. In other ways, I would label it a "prestige HBO"¹⁹ a drama that tackles hard subjects of loss, tragedy, and coming of age and depicts beautiful friendships and romantic love stories that left so many of us in awe.²⁰

Do I look at zombies when seeing infected bodies in *The Last of Us*? Tentatively, I would say yes, but this is only because collectively we associate any kind of "aggressive human that bites" trope in fiction as being automatically a zombie. However, if we take a closer look at the history of film, starting with *Night of the Living Dead*, to *The Walking Dead*, and *Dawn of the Dead*, all the creatures known as "zombies" are narratological described as dead, and aesthetically they are portrayed as decayed and rotting creatures. However, in *The Last of Us*, the infected humans do not die, their consciousness might be gone or faded, as it is never stated, but their bodies are alive. Not only thriving with life but evolving as well, in a body horror manner. The Cordyceps kills the weaker bodies eventually²¹, while the strongest of them evolve and push the human body to its limits. The infection is an evolving biology, to begin with. They are not decayed, nor rotting, but biologically metamorphosed.

¹⁹ Monica Marie Zorrilla, "*The Last of Us* is a Zombie Show Without That Many Zombies – and That's a Good Thing," *Inverse*, February 20, 2023, <https://www.inverse.com/entertainment/the-last-of-us-fewer-zombies-hbo>.

²⁰ Episode 3 of *The Last of Us*, *Long Long Time*, is a case study of free adaptation where the series deviates from the story of the video game. The episode centers around a couple, Bill and Frank, and their romantic relationship in a post-apocalyptic world. The narrative deviates from the video game, where the characters are romantically involved there too, but the end of their relationship is far more tragic than the one portrayed in HBO's adaptation. Critics called the episode one of the best TV moments in history, and it was well-received by the public.

²¹ Kyle Hill, "The Fungus that Reduced Humanity to *The Last of Us*," *Scientific American*, June 25, 2013, <https://blogs.scientificamerican.com/but-not-simpler/the-fungus-that-reduced-humanity-to-the-last-of-us/>.

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It would be unfair to call them zombies because they are not. They are not entirely dead; they are transformed by biology, and they are brought anew to an animalistic life that evolves and thrives outside of the human consciousness.

Conclusions

The Last of Us stands as one of the many works of post-apocalyptic fiction that focuses on transforming the human body into a monstrous hunger-led creature that revels in cannibalistic practices. Its unique approach to an existing fungus that decimates humanity based on biological evolution, makes it a work with an unparalleled uncanny characteristic. Adding to this particular sentiment is also the evolution of the infected body. All the creatures and their versions are intrinsically tied to body horror: they were human once, and they still are, but unrecognizable, dangerous, and insatiable for infecting others. Their behavior is unlike anything the creatures from this kind of fiction would behave. They are tied together, they act together, and if Episode 2 would tell us anything, is that they also sense when someone else is infected. These arguments alone would label The Last of Us as a body horror work of fiction. Ironically, it redefines the genre of biological horror, by redefining (or rather, deconstructing) the concept of zombification: the infected are not zombies, but they are not something very different from them either. They still bite, they still infect, they still spread the infection and ultimately, they still bring the world to the brink of collapse.

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In-Between Worlds: *A Complex Transmedia Universe about Myths, Creatures and Traditions*

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Abstract: The *In-Between Worlds* Transmedia Universe started out as a blank whiteboard. Sixteen students, three coordinators and multiple contributors and collaborators created this Universe together, during one full semester (from October 2022 until February 2023). The project culminated with an exhibition that lasted one week, with the opening on 11 February in the Ethnographical Museum of Transylvania located in the heart of Cluj-Napoca city, Romania. The project revolves around the subject of mythological creatures, myths and traditions from the territory of Romania. The exhibition was meant to showcase the ephemeral parts of this project, such as: several interactive installations, projections, photography exhibition, Virtual Reality experience, but also the more permanent parts of the project, such as: the feature documentary and the card game. It is important to understand what exactly means the domain of the Transmedia, what are the elements and components that build a Transmedia Universe and how exactly this project encompasses each one of those, in order to achieve a complex and complete structure, and to also understand the reasoning behind each artistic product.

Keywords: transmedia, storytelling, myths, creatures, exhibition.

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What is Transmedia?

Usually, when I define it in class, in front of my students, I describe transmedia with the help of a simple definition where I state that transmedia represents the process where *a story, a subject or a theme gets dispersed across multiple delivery channels, with the purpose of creating a unique entertainment experience that is unified and coordinated.*² A more visual definition would have you imagine a puzzle formed from three, four or more pieces – when experimenting a transmedia universe, each piece of this puzzle represents a different medium in which part of a certain story is told: you can experiment only one piece of this puzzle and the story will still make sense (for example, a movie about Batman), or you can search for the rest of the pieces and use your own knowledge to put together the whole puzzle (the comic books about Batman, the games about Batman, the animated series and so on). When succeeding in putting together all the pieces and creating the whole image of the story, having all the information that was initially scattered throughout multiple delivery channels, you actually experiment a Transmedia Universe as a whole.

The concept is represented by a compound word, consisting from the Latin prefix *trans*,³ which means on or to the other side of, across, beyond and the common noun *media*,⁴ which is represented by the main means of mass communication, like the internet, publishing or broadcasting, regarded in a collective manner. Merged together, the prefix and the noun – transmedia – can be viewed as a way of transcending the known platforms, in order to bring something more to a certain message that is trying to be disseminated.

To conclude this brief explanation, in my eyes transmedia represents a form of artistic expression mixed with the complex technique of giving life to a comprehensive and integrated *universe* that does not end when the screen turns black or the audience leaves the building – the tackled subjects have now the chance to become fluent, with no defined beginning or sudden end, and with the purpose of giving the audience a chance to participate

² Henry Jenkins, "Transmedia Storytelling 101," *Pop Junctions*, March 21, 2007
http://henryjenkins.org/blog/2007/03/transmedia_storytelling_101.html.

³ Merriam-Webster Dictionary, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/trans>.

⁴ Cambridge Dictionary, <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/media>.

actively, to create something inside this *universe*, to try keeping alive the characters, to re-experiment it whenever they feel like, to interact freely with the artwork, to become co-authors, to use their knowledge and imagination in order to put together the different pieces of the story.

What is a Transmedia Universe?

The concept of Transmedia Universe is found in Aino-Kaisa Koistinen's, Raine Koskimaa's and Tanja Valisalo's book *Constructing a Transmedia Universe: The Case of Battlestar Galactica*, where it is explained as being "not limited to the narrative worlds and diegetic contents, but encompasses the production and marketing issues, as well as the consumption."⁵ So, in a Transmedia Universe the focus should not only be on a sole product, but the whole process should be in the focus, from shaping the idea, creating it, disseminating it, advertising it, until it reaches the audience, and either archiving it or in an ideal case, perpetuating it for as long as possible. Most of the *transmedia products* are usually meant to be more than just a one-time meeting with the audience – they were meant to continuously live with the help of the audience, with the implication of the communities based on co-authorship, sharing and also *consuming* the products more than once, in different ways, finding different parts of the story.

One of my colleagues specialized in Transmedia, PhD Ioana Mischie, likes to compare a Transmedia Universe with a successful Tetris game, with a Russian Doll or even with a family tree.⁶ All these comparisons do make sense when you spread a Transmedia Universe and its elements into a visual map, but as I mentioned earlier, my favorite visual comparison is a puzzle game. This way, the player (meaning the audience) can choose in which order

⁵ Aino-Kaisa Koistinen, Raine Koskimaa and Tanja Vålisalo, *Constructing a Transmedia Universe: The Case of Battlestar Galactica*, 2021, preprint version, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/356987182_Constructing_a_Transmedia_Universe_The_Case_of_Battlestar_Galactica.

⁶ Concepts from Ioana-Maria Baican-Mischie, "Impactul Transmedia asupra cinematografiei: O nouă avangardă imersivă contemporană" (PhD diss., Universitate Națională de Artă Teatrală și Cinematografică „I. L. Caragiale”, 2019).

should the puzzle pieces come together, in what way and especially, how much time they want to dedicate building this puzzle. Also, they can create their own pieces which they can later bring into this already shaped Universe.

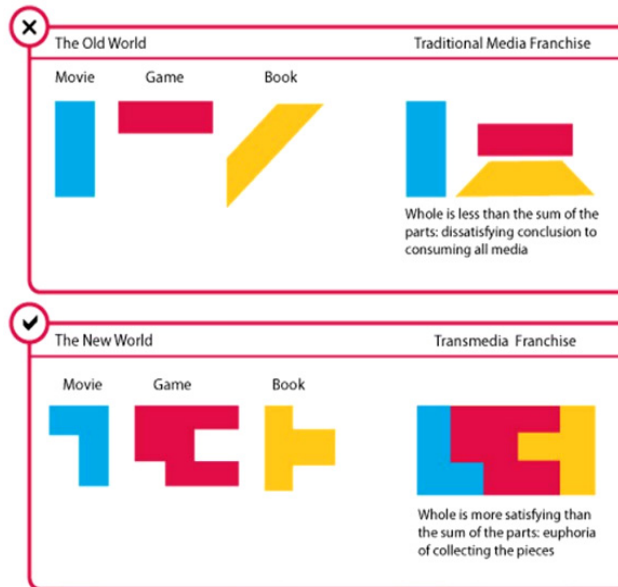


Fig 1: Illustration on how Transmedia works compared to Traditional Media⁷

Because shaping a Transmedia Universe is not a game of guessing, but rather a process in which there are essential elements and fundamental components that need to be part of the finished product in order to for this product be considered a Transmedia Universe, I will briefly mention these elements and principles.

There are four essential elements in a Transmedia project, as follows: *Multi-Dimensionality* of the project/work and of its exploration methods; *Trans-Disciplinarity* – merging art with technology or/and science; *Pluri-Perspectivism* regarding a certain subject; *Long-Term Configuration* of the project. And there are four more fundamental components of a Transmedia Universe:

⁷ Robert Pratten, *Getting Started in Transmedia Storytelling. A Practical Guide for Beginners* (Create Space Independent Publishing Platform, 2011), 3.

The Infinite Narrative Paradigm (infinite conceptual structure); *Homo Immersionis* (immersive spectatorial structure); *Auctorial Network* (collaborative auctorial structure); *Interface* (the Transmedia bridge between all the semiotic categories, or in a more simple manner, the connection between the artistic concept and the technological way of displaying it).

The Infinite Narrative Paradigm, which has the purpose of transforming a seemingly normal and common subject into a complex transmedia universe can be implemented through simple methods such as: changing the classical, linear narrative structure (beginning-middle-end) format to one that can be experimented in multiple ways without a rigid form; letting the audience or a minority share their own point of view, in order to access *pluri-perspectivism*, rather than have a unique point of view which usually belongs to the author or to a majority; creating a form of equilibrium inside the story with the purpose of replacing conflict with harmony; creating multiple levels of understanding the project, based on the context in which they are experienced, on the audience and other factors, in order to switch the general attitude towards the project from an attitude based on fast results and answers to an attitude that is centered around dialogue, questions, multiple perspectives and evolution process and in order to achieve an extended impact, one that is spread on social, artistic and educational domains; acquiring the *multi-dimensionality* element by combining multiple universes or different characters from different dimensions/worlds/universes, thus acquiring multiple dimensions to one project rather than having a singular one.

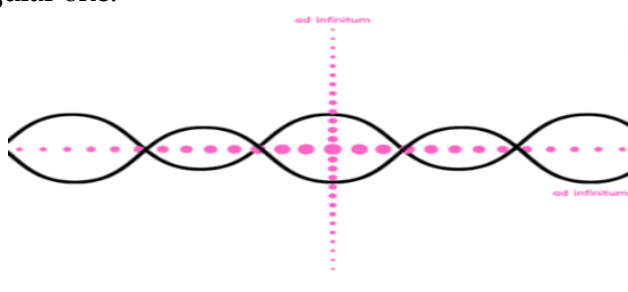


Fig 2: Illustrative depiction of The Infinite Narrative Paradigm⁸

⁸ Ioana-Maria Baican-Mischie, "Impactul Transmedia asupra cinematografului: O nouă avangardă imersivă contemporană" (PhD diss., Universitate Națională de Artă Teatrală și Cinematografică „I. L. Caragiale”, 2019), 129.

The second fundamental component, *Homo Immersionis*, is referring to the immersive spectatorial structure of a transmedia universe. This *Homo Immersionis*, represented by the neo-spectator, can be seen as the individual that is not only watching a story, passively, waiting for it to end, but the spectator that is actually present in the story, choosing different angles every time, addressing questions every time, deciding to be part of the artwork. With the development of different technologies, the classical spectatorship typology, in which the artwork was placed in the center while the public was marginally idolizing it, became redundant and now, the spectators are surrounded by the artwork, being sunken into it, learning how to explore it, navigate it and optimize it to their own liking. Both the contemporary cinematographic world and the new immersive technologies that dominate the artistic world – extended realities, augmented reality, virtual reality, and mediated reality – are based on immersivity and are helping this new paradigm of spectatorship to become the new norm.

The Auctorial Network is a concept that encourages the existence of multiple individuals contributing to the same project, that can identify their roles as initiators, continuators or evaluators, but in the end they will all be regarded equally, as creators. A transmedia universe encourages the existence of multiple authors, of collaborating creators and of co-creationism, because the whole purpose of creating such a complex world is not only to generate an artwork, but to also optimize it, archive it, document it and, if possible, perpetuate it.

The *In-Between Worlds* Transmedia Universe

The main course I am teaching in the Babeş-Bolyai University, Faculty of Theatre and Film, Cinematography and Media Department, is called Creative Transmedia Project. Each year, during one full semester, the master programs Documentary Filmmaking and Digital Interactive Arts second year's students are collaborating together, trying to conceive a Transmedia Universe. This year was even more special because a total of four Erasmus students joined our course: two girls from Spain, one girl from Italy and one

girl from Germany, all with different backgrounds. After learning the basics of what Transmedia is, the categories of Transmedia projects, the essential elements and fundamental components of a Transmedia Universe and the methods in which these can be implemented, they go on with the practical approach of building such Universe. This year, after we got to know each other, after we watched and experienced some other relevant examples in the field, we went on with the pre-production and the production per se. Keeping in mind that we had very limited time at our disposal, we set our deadlines and proceeded to find a theme of common interest among the students in which they can all be involved. The main goal is not to create a perfect project, but rather to bring together two very different programs together, to guide everyone towards using their own set of skills as best as they can, to understand and apply new paradigms regarding storytelling, spectatorship, authorship and to experiment as much as they can with the new technology and the innovative ways of approaching a certain subject.

I was pretty surprised to find out that the subject my students want to approach is 'mythological creatures' and the myths around them. We knew we had to heavily research this topic, so we started doing so, not limiting ourselves to a certain geographical territory, because we would have liked to create a map of the whole world and to insert the most interesting creatures and to try and identify connections in the myths from different countries and continents. Unfortunately, we soon realized that this work would take several years and we only have a couple of months to finish this project, so we decided to concentrate only on mythological creatures and the myths around them from the Romanian territory.

After meeting with a few specialists in the subject, we decided on a few possible products we want to include in our Universe: a feature-length documentary movie, a card game created by us, several interactive installations to exhibit at the opening day, a photography exhibition that would be created with the help of the community and a website, displaying information about the team, the project and a part of our research on the mythical creatures, synthesized.

The Documentary Filmmaking students, coordinated by their most experienced colleague, Horațiu Curuțiu, proceeded with the production of the feature documentary. They took two different field trips in the Petroșani area, in the south-west part of Romania and met with different people that

were very involved within the myths and stories that were surrounding that certain area. They started recording interviews with different people: specialists in the domain, such as Associate Professor Claudiu Turcuș, Professor Ioan Pop-Curșeu, the director of the ethnographical museum from Cluj-Napoca, geography teacher and director of the tourist information center from Uricani; common people from the Petroșani area, common people from Transylvania, the founder of tinutulmomarlanilor.ro and so on.

In the meantime, some of the Digital Interactive Arts students were preparing the card game, trying to set up the gameplay, the style, the rules, and drawing the illustrations. It was not at all an easy task, creating a card game from scratch, but what helped was reducing the number of the mythological creatures we want to include in this game and based on that number, which was around 20 creatures, we made some groups of creatures – the “love group”, the “blessing group”, the “evil group” and the “trickster group”. In these groups, we included creatures such as: strigoi, moroi, Zburătorul, pricolici, solomonari, Sf. Duminiță, ielele and so on, while also trying to avoid the stereotypical creatures such as Count Dracula. These groups helped give the whole project a different structure because we also focused our research on these specific groups and creatures. After many failed attempts to create a game totally from scratch, we decided to adapt the *Mafia* card game (also known as Werewolf), combined with the rules of the online game *Town of Salem* and based on these two, we succeeded in finally creating our product: *In-Between Worlds – The Card Game*.

While working on the project, we were lucky enough to have Associate Professor Horea Avram join us, my colleague teaching Visual Storytelling for Digital Media, by agreeing that the practical works that a few of the students from Digital Interactive Arts are preparing for his course, to have the same theme as our project and to be presented in the same time and at the same place as our opening. Basically, we agreed on integrating these works into our Transmedia Universe, thus gaining three more products:

- *Dragons, Giants, Citadels* – an audio-visual installation that explores Romanian mythology regarding dragons, giants and the citadels they’ve built, as well as some explanations extracted from the folklore, regarding the geomorphology of the Apuseni Mountains (West Carpathian Mountains in Romania).

The installation uses raw drone footage of different locations from the Apuseni Mountains, footage which has been compiled through an Artificial Intelligence (AI) filter named deepdream.com and afterwards processed through the EBSynth application. The soundscape features a sample from Ioan Pop-Curșeu, expert in cultural anthropology. This installation was created by Toma Bărbulescu, master student at Digital Interactive Arts program.

- *Fragmentation* is an audio-video installation that uses spatial depth and irregular frame ratios as an artistic means to influence visual perception. The installation consists of a video montage of scenes from various films and footage woven together in a seamless and fragmented manner. The found footage technique gives the film a raw, intimate, and personal feel, as if the footage has been pieced together from various sources and is being shown to the viewer for the first time.

The project serves to explore the story of “strigoi” and their mythological archetype. It serves as a meditation on the transience of life and encourages the viewer to contemplate the nature of existence by juxtaposing these ideas with the classic “strigoi” story. This installation was created by Lucia Codreanu, master student at Digital Interactive Arts program.

- *Mythological Homage* is a Virtual Reality (VR) installation about the mythological belief about the soul travelling towards the *World Tree*, transposed under the Digital Storytelling umbrella. Inside this installation, the audience will find themselves in the middle of a mythological story, where they are invited to explore the immersive space by embodying a soul placed in the in-between worlds, which roams its own life experiences towards the final meeting with the “Pasărea-Măiastră”.

A mythological homage is a representation or a reproduction of some characters, legends or myths from different ancient cultures. This type of homage can be consisted from a story, a painting, a sculpture, a musical piece or any other form of art. Also, it can be used as a way of bringing back into the public attention certain characters or myths that were lost into forgetfulness. This Virtual Reality experience was created by Adrian-Florin Marc, master student at Digital Interactive Arts program.

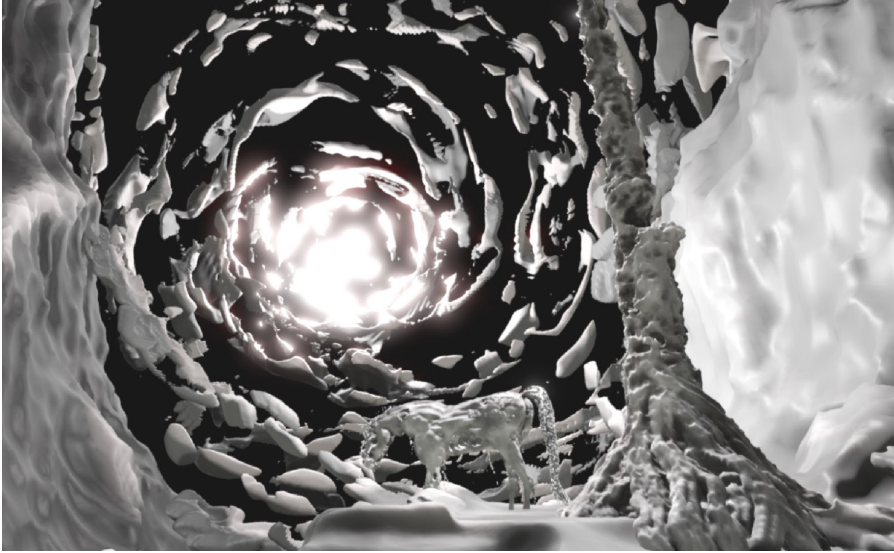


Fig 3: Image from the Virtual Reality installation
Mythological Hommage by Florin-Adrian Marc

The students also prepared a fourth installation, that was not part of the course Visual Storytelling for Digital Media, but it was a collective effort between the Digital Interactive Arts students. The installation was called *In-Between Worlds: Skies* and it was meant to conceptually explore the mythological motive of the “overlapping skies” and the fantastic beings that are inhabiting them. The graphics of the animation was generated by Artificial Intelligence using the website deepdreamgenerator.com. The technical part of this installation was rather a simple one, using a projector, a speaker, a laptop and a Microsoft Kinect, and the public could interact with the piece by moving left or right. When the audience performed some movements, the animation from the projection would also move, revealing some of the conceptualized “overlapping skies”, which refers to the *Seven Heavens*, a concept that appears in religious or mythological cosmology, referring to seven levels or divisions of the Heavens – it is found in the ancient Mesopotamian religion but also in Judaism, Christianity and Islam, and even in some other religions such as Hinduism. The students visually conceptualized the beliefs around the *Seven Heavens* and turned it into an interactive installation.

All these four installations were well integrated into the whole exhibition, scattered through other products such as the feature documentary, the card game or the photography exhibition. The public's journey started with a welcoming area, where they could hang out, drink some beverages and experiment the card game – we had two tables prepared for the audience who wished to give it a try and play the game – then they would descend and interact with the interactive installation *In-Between Worlds: Skies*. After that, they would find themselves in a big room where the photography exhibition was displayed and also the audio-visual installation *Dragons, Giants, Citadels*. From the big room they could take on two different paths: either enter a smaller room which contained the *Fragmentation* installation, either descend further into an even bigger room, where chairs and a big projection screen would wait for the public who wanted to attend the live screening of the feature documentary. In the last room of the exhibition space we prepared the most immersive experience of the whole event, the Virtual Reality installation *Mythological Homage*, where only one participant could enter the experience at a time, but the whole journey was broadcasted on a screen for the rest of the audience.

The interactive installations were meant to be the ephemeral part of this project, while the card game, the feature documentary and the website were meant to be the permanent elements of this Transmedia Universe. The photography exhibition falls somewhere in the middle of these two categories, because we could exhibit all the works in that particular environment in that special evening only once, but they can also be seen and admired online. For the photography exhibition we prepared an open call, with the purpose of including the community in our project, to have them contribute with their own ideas, artistic touch and knowledge upon the subject. We launched the call online, almost a month prior the exhibition, in a dedicated Facebook group called Fotocluj, which reunites more than five thousand members, either professional photographers or amateur ones from the city of Cluj-Napoca, Romania. We received more than one hundred submissions from which we finally chose 16, we printed them in high quality fine print and exhibited them in our opening space. All the submissions we received were very interesting, the majority of them respected the theme, but the final 16 that we chose were the most accurate representations of our general subject. One of the most curious facts about the final selections is that 15 out of the 16 images contain

a live subject – a person, either in the moving or in a static pose, most of them being shot in a very dramatic scenario, using make-up, costumes and sometimes even props or décor, trying to embody a mythical creature, or some of them, the idea of myth, dream, fairy, illusion, magic.



Fig 4: Poster of the *In-Between Worlds: Myths, Creatures, Traditions* exhibition

The final element prepared in this project is the most accessible and permanent product – the website. There was a lot of debate and preparation regarding the aspect and the functionality of the website, but we had to decide on the best formula based on the student's skills and also based on the little time left to prepare this product. What we knew from the beginning was that we had to integrate all the 12 characters inside the website. We haven't prepared only illustrations for the characters, but in the meantime we also researched each one of them and prepared a text where the public and the users of the website will find out about fundamental information about each character. The texts are not very long, the point of them is to synthetize the most important information about each mythical creature, they are both in English and Romanian and at the end of each text we included a few references in case the users want to read further about a certain character. Our own references in formulating the information about each mythical creatures were books (for example: *Mitologie română* by Romulus Vulcănescu or *Mitologie română – Dicționar* by Ion Ghinoiu), online articles, popular knowledge and part of the interviews we prepared for the feature documentary.



Fig 5: Three of the illustrated characters (Iele, Moroi and Strigoi)

When accessing the website, the users will find most of the relevant content and information on the main page – they are greeted with a very short excerpt of the feature documentary and with the question „What myth am I living?” and a short description about the project, under this, there is a button that can access the feature documentary. The documentary is subtitled in English and it lasts just under one hour. After this section, we have another

description about the teams that made this project come alive and about the products that are contained into this Universe. Underneath this, the next section depicts 3 of the installations described above: *Mythological Tribute*, *Fragmentation* and *Dragons, Giants, Citadels* – each one of them can be accessed through a button and the public can find out more about the installations, as well as images or videos related to the artistic concept. Scrolling further, the users will see the 12 illustrations depicted one by one, and also some buttons that can sort the characters into the main groups: Love, Blessing, Trick or Evil. Each group contains 3 characters: Love – Ielele, Sânzienele and Zburătorul; Blessing – Ursitoare, Pasăre Măiastră and Saint Sunday (Sfânta Duminică); Trick – Moroi, Joimărița and Solomonar; and finally, the Evil group – Strigoi, Pricolici and Samca. Each group have a different coloured background – pink, yellow, purple or dark blue – that can help the user to identify the different groups more easier during the card game. As I mentioned earlier, when clicking each mythical character on the website, the public will access a page with information and references about the chosen character. At the end of the main page, there is information about how to pre-order the card game and finally, information about the date and place of the exhibition.

The website contains two more important pages – an About page with a description of the project and a Team page where all the students involved in the project can be found, with their own photo and their names, and myself, as a coordinator. The last page found in the website is a 'Contact' page that will lead the user to the Digital Interactive Arts' official Facebook page.

Conclusion

The *In-Between Worlds* is a complex project, and although some elements might need a little more attention (the website needs to be updated, the rules of the card game need to be revised), it is one of the most completed Transmedia Universes that I have experienced up until the present times. It is pretty unusual for such a project to have both digital and analogue elements, especially to prepare all this 'puzzle pieces' in a few months. Luckily, the students believed in this project, they worked extremely hard to finish all the products in time, and their passion shone bright through every little thing they have prepared.

We made sure, together, coordinators and disciples, that the public and the users will be attracted into this Universe and mesmerized by all the new knowledge they will gain and all the concepts that were merged together so well.

In my opinion, this project ticks all the essential elements and the fundamental components: we have *multiple dimensions* in our work thanks to the many platforms we were able to use and the many ways in which we depicted one subject; you can find *pluri-perspectivism* about the topic only by watching the feature documentary, in which multiple characters have completely different opinions about the same subject, but you can also find several different point of views about the topic also in the photography exhibition or even inside the interactive installations; the *trans-disciplinarity* element is checked by merging digital with analogue, art with technology, but also by bringing together so many different students' skills – we combined the skills of Digital Interactive Arts master students' with the Documentary Filmmakers, with Erasmus students that came with background in theater, music, journalism, making this project really *inter-* and *trans-disciplinar*; and finally, for the last essential element, the *long-term configuration*, we always kept in mind the importance of perpetuating or at least, the importance of keeping this project alive for as long as possible, keeping in mind that when the students finish the semester, they will have no further interest in dedicating their time and energy towards this, so this is exactly why we designed some elements that can be permanent – such as the card game, the feature documentary and the website, which can also integrate some more ephemeral elements – such as the installations and part of the photography exhibition.

Regarding the fundamental components explained above, we can easily discover them one by one in the *In-Between Worlds Universe*: the *interface* part is already quite obvious – we used all kinds of different interfaces in order to connect artistic concepts and ideas with technologies and with various dissemination techniques, therefore we have multiple different products that can be experimented by the public both online and offline; we created an *auctorial network* by bringing together many students with different specialties, and their coordinators with different experience and different points of view, but we also managed to bring complete strangers to participate in this project with the help of the photography open call, thus having so many co-creators that also had different roles throughout the whole process – some of them

initiated, some of them evaluated, some of them documented it; I also believe we managed to *immerse* the public into the subject of the *Universe*, because we gave them so many different products to experience and so many approaches to the same topic – we could see the public in the exhibition being curious, wanting to experiment it all, wanting to touch everything, asking questions, trying out the game, experiencing the Virtual Reality installation, watching the movie and interacting with the rest of the installations; the last, but in my opinion, the most important component of a *Transmedia Universe*, the one that really sets out the tone for the whole project, the foundation on which we had to build from the beginning, the *Infinite Narrative Paradigm* was achieved firstly by knowing that this is not going to be a simple, common project, it will not be just a documentary, or just another interactive installation, we knew that we have to join forces, work together and create something new, both for ourselves and for the public, and we did so by leaving behind the characteristics of a classical story – fixed formats, unique author, the need for entertainment, the need for conflict and resolution in a story, the need for an ending and a conclusion – and we built in the opposite direction, achieving a story without the beginning-middle-end, achieving harmony in the topic, integrating complex characters with many nuances, focusing on co-creationism and working together even when our skills and ideas did not match.

In conclusion, it rarely happens for a transmedia project to integrate every single essential element and fundamental component, but this time we managed to create a unique, complex and complete Universe – the *In-Between Worlds* project. I would like to mention the rest of the coordinators that helped bring this project alive, Associate Professor Horea Avram and Professor Rodica Otilia Mocan, and of course, the ones who dedicated their time, energy and creativity for months in order to build this Universe, the Digital Interactive Arts students: Lucia Codreanu, Filip Iustin, Florin Adrian Marc and Toma Bărbulescu, the Documentary Filmmaking students: Horațiu Curuțiu, Aida Ilie, Alexandru Popa, Patricia Toma, Anna Lorincz, Raul Petrușe, Marton Varga, Octavian Șaramet, and the Erasmus students: Selma Bohmelmann, Lucia Goni Muniz, Marina Martinez Mora and Clarissa Silvestrelli. I am very grateful towards everyone for having the chance to work together and I invite the readers to access the intre-lumi.ro website, if they want to experience at least a small part of this complex Universe on their own.

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The Decline of Significance in Today's Digital Media Formats

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Abstract: Does modern digital media reconfigure the film's message? The ubiquity of interactive screens alters the social and emotional human interactions. Through the advent of digital media within the film workflow, the ontological referentiality of the analog support becomes obsolete. The medium digital support can influence the meaning and structure of the message, which gradually starts losing its primary meanings due to the shallow, inattentive film viewing. Starting with the aesthetic approaches and visual codes, the movie's distribution begins to replace some disputable values which the film as an art has preserved within its DNA, emotion and empathy. How much of the iconic stage of a sign is still embedded within a support without an ontic representativity, expressed today through mathematic algorithms and digital codes?

Keywords: intermediality, transmediality, analogue format, digital media, ontic values.

How can the ontological dimension of picture support trigger the viewer's subconscious reactions? Lately film scholars have addressed a valid question about film medium specificity due to the digital media convergence.

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The appearance of feature films has passed through a long conversion from all long established celluloid base to present day digital codes capture. This transition had to be as smooth as possible but, the need of control and globalisation norms imposed a quick and full transfer to digital movies distribution.

We'll try to explain if, through this transfer from analogue to digital, the meaning of the film and the viewer's connection with the pro-staged filmic space remains the same and how our senses are engaged through the visual, sound and haptic watching experience. The ontic link between medium and message, as stated by McLuhan, is weakened today through digital media convergence. The hypermediacy and hyper-abundance of global markets forced the consumer to adapt to a fast-forward lifestyle which also applies to the cultural domain, theatre, film, video installations, painting, opera etc.

In his essay *The Implosion of Meaning in the Media* Baudrillard asserts:

Finally, the medium is the message not only signifies the end of the message, but also the end of the medium. There are no more media in the literal sense of the word (I'm speaking particularly of electronic mass media) - that is, of a mediating power between one reality and another, between one state of the real and another. Neither in content, nor in form.²

In Baudrillard's opinion, digital media, which also includes movies on-line streaming platforms, suddenly changes the established film paradigm which we've been experiencing for more than a century.

The visual message has been at the base of movie storytelling since its beginning. Through the digital media convergence, which includes the film's distribution, the human being's perceptual values have been reconfigured. Bypassing some of the everlasting support references, the digital medium starts to lack some intrinsic "film" specificities including the corporeality of the support. The visual corporeal references are easily implied with ease by the appealing of paintings, sculptures, analogue photography and analogue film, but what does it mean? The texture given by light falling on clay, marble, painted canvas, aquaforte or oil paint have been assimilated by the

² Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation* (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1995), 82.

film grain transfer to an analogue support (celluloid film base). Accepting the mechanical reproduction as the core of film and photography specificity, we're still within this ontological realm played by the film mimetic representation. All its intrinsic specificities have vanished through digital approximations and interpretations mediated by capturing codecs. The film's analogue support derived its own specificity from physically embedded values which have been used to mimetically capture a diegetic reality. This ontological support has been the media reference for most forms of art throughout history.

For example, if we think of the medium as the material stuff out of which artworks are made, then painting comprises several media: oil paints, watercolors, tempera, acrylic, and others. Also, in this rather unambiguous sense of media, sculpture comprises a wide range of media, including at least: bronze, gold, silver, wood, marble, granite, clay, celluloid, acrylic (again), and so on.³

Aesthetic references and narrative visual keys have been "adjusted" according to the digital capture codes, electrical values which impoverishes the emotional structure of the movie. Aside from this, the movie's immutability is ruined by today's digital on-line distribution through which we can adjust or change its structure, decided by its creators. Usual features like selecting a chapter, freeze frame, fast-forward or back-word change the basic meanings of film as a work of art. The viewer can become a content creator by simply browsing, shuffling the movie or watching it on improper devices. The main perceptual codes, established from the beginning of movie history, are easily lost today through the distractive viewing on smartphones, lap-tops or TV screens and in inappropriate viewing spaces (offices, subways, living rooms etc.).

If we agree with what Rodowick says about the medium, we should start with the assumption he made regarding the picture support, therefore the analogical image is defined as "a transformation of substance isomorphic with the originated image regardless of scale."⁴ Is that condition enough to

³ Noël Carroll, *Engaging the Moving Image* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2003), 5.

⁴ David Norman Rodowick, *The Virtual Life of Film* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2007), 31.

define the medium or “a medium should be distinguished from its physical support and channel of transmission, even if they share the same substance or material?”⁵ Rodowick tries to define the film medium’s specificity throughout its entire workflow, from the shooting stage to the distribution. Even so, today’s on-line streaming distribution companies, tries to induce an unsustainable theory within which fulfilling the screening experience on similar levels as those found in cinema halls is mainly based on the medium’s spatial resolution value (4K, 4096 lines horizontal resolution according to Netflix requirements).⁶ Beside its physical values, the medium has to have some specification which, nowadays mainly refer to resolution. Is that enough to make a great movie or is there something else to consider to? The film strip, celluloid or nitrate base as used before the digital revolution, was the container on which we used to capture and screen movies from. Despite the capturing format, 8mm, 16mm or 35mm, filmmakers used the medium according to their intentions: experimental, film essay, documentary or feature films. When the analogue projection was replaced by digital technology in theatrical distribution, the main argument was the poor 35mm print spatial resolution and the lack of it on the cinema screen. According to image scientists this photo-chemical print resolution projected on a cinema screen can drop under 1K (1024 lines horizontal resolution), which is certainly disappointing for the viewer. Beside this scientific fact, the perceptual realm is built on physical and psychological values together and the poor spatial resolution wouldn’t influence the overall watching experience, complimented with haptic and hearing dimensions. The viewing experience is different when we watch the movie on a TV screen sitting comfortably on a sofa in our living room compared to a cinema hall. The film’s medium, as Rodowick mentioned is defined by all the stages it’s been through to the final distribution support, nevertheless the film’s own specificity also relies on the screening space as well. We cannot split the meaning and the strength of the support ignoring the power of a public audience screening. A partisan of this, Rodowick insist’s on:

⁵ Ibid., 32.

⁶ Netflix capturing formats requirements, <https://partnerhelp.netflixstudios.com/hc/en-us>, (accessed 02.02.2023).

holding on to the specificity of theatrical viewing, because for me, intuitively, electronic images and screens are not “cinema”; that is, they cannot produce the social and psychological conditions of a certain pleasurable spectating.⁷

On the same topic of medium specificity, Noël Carroll investigates the relevance of the support and the phrase “artistic medium” as an ontological reference for film. For more than a century now, the motion picture as a medium, had a physical support for both sound and image, the celluloid strip. Nowadays the digital technology changes this referentiality to matrices of numbers decoded by algorithms on viewing devices (laptops, smartphones, TV screens), each of which acts like a small computer. Therefore, Carroll approached this topic to express his theory about medium specificity:

If we think of the medium on the basis of the materials from which cinema images are made, our first impulse might be to say that the medium is obviously a film strip bearing certain photographic emulsions. But flicker films, like Kubelka's *Arnulf Rainer*⁸ (1960) can be made by alternating clear and opaque leader, sans photographic emulsion. And one can paint on a clear film strip and project it.⁹

The cited movie is a great example of what digital technology can do to change the psychological perception of an image. The analogue celluloid print strip, with its subtle artefacts (grain, scratches, frame leader and gauge instability) creates an imaginary space with a visual support for the message. Therefore, the same movie being recently digitised (*Arnulf Rainer*¹⁰, 2018), lost all the photochemical references which, on the original version, composed a totally different meaning for the viewer. This physical support, sometimes used just as a base for random images (see Stan Brakhage's *Mothlight*, 1963) is enriched

⁷ David Norman Rodowick, *The Virtual Life of Film* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2007), 33.

⁸ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vfy1cdRrAFU>, (accessed 02.02 2023).

⁹ Noël Carroll, *Engaging the Moving Image* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2003), 6.

¹⁰ <https://vimeo.com/300995861>, (accessed 02.02.2023).

by its own materiality, the grain, the transparency and density given through the mechanical registration, captured by the lens and projected onto the photochemical surface. Picture message specificity of the support has played an important role in film theory. The film as a form of art has been identified with the analogical, indexical celluloid support from its very beginning. Nevertheless, we find recent film studies where the ontic structure of the film medium doesn't stand anymore for its referentiality:

(...) after years of upheaval brought about by the proliferation of new technologies producing and disseminating moving images, the challenge of the so called "post media age" can also be identified in the fact that there seems to be an effect of uniformization among the different forms of the moving images.¹¹

Despite what Pethő says, this inherent uniformization does quite the opposite. It creates a space dichotomy where digital technology makes a deep separation between medium and message, McLuhan's theory has to be readjusted according with the digital medium specificity, especially for on-line movie distribution. With the advent of Internet's hyper-mediacy anyone can readjust the structure of a movie, from its final form as intended by the creators, to a totally new one, a merry-go-round video installation where the viewer can easily create another version of *the oeuvre*. The movies intermediality specificity has been used stylistically through film diegesis, one example of this being the "mise en abyme" which was used to address and define a stylistic or dreamlike narrative approach, a visual structure easily understandable by the viewer during the analogue times (interchanging film structure through format, grain, color and size; 8mm, 16mm, 35mm).

Even if the results are close to the analogical picture referentiality, the digital code record and simulate reality, through the capture device's algorithms interpretation, which gives a new meaning to the Aristotelian mimesis theory. Being a mechanical projection on a photochemical layer, the analogue support

¹¹ Ágnes Pethő, *Cinema and Intermediality. The Passion for the In-Between* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2011), 27.

adds some of its inlay physical dimensions like film grain randomly spread inside the photosensitive gelatine, which is floating in a three-dimensional space moulded on a celluloid base.

Being an image simulacrum, this mimetic reality is mediated by the digital format which doesn't interfere with the apparatus that mediates this electronic registration. The digital recording is a "transparent" reproduction of the reality, the double mimesis concept doesn't apply to it because the capture parameters depend on the viewing device, the display itself with its characteristics reinterpreting the containers digital information and showing it accordingly. Because of the viewing conditions and the displays' performances, the picture we see on different screens differs from each and every one of it. The perceptual and emphatic experience of watching a movie on a smartphone, lap-top, TV or in a cinema gradually increases from the smallest (smartphone) to the biggest screen (cinema hall). Beside the aesthetic and visual norms which had to be readjusted for the small screens, the viewing environment can destroy and denature directorial narrative intentions. Laura Mulvey also approached the movies vanished immutability through digital paradigm in *Death 24x a Second* where she says:

(...) digital spectatorship also affects the internal pattern of narrative: sequences can be easily skipped or repeated, overturning hierarchies of privilege, and setting up unexpected links that displace the chain of meaning invested in cause and effect.¹²

The only way of keeping untouched the movie's entirety is by watching it in a cinema environment where the intervention of selecting chapters, pause or fast-forward is impossible. This simple fact of viewing a film inside a proper screening space, makes the spectator deliberately involved in the process, to have an immersive experience while watching a movie.

The motion picture transmediality can be experienced through all the current distribution mediums like cinema screen, DVD's or on-line streaming. Does it make any difference for the viewer, though? Rodowick thinks so, after

¹² Laura Mulvey, *Death 24 x Second: Stillness and the Moving Image* (London: Reaktion Books, 2006), 27.

appraising the digital technology's advent on film industry, the author comes to a more subtle appreciation of medium references. Analysing the medium's specificities for Godard's movie *Eloge de L'amour* (2001) we're confronted with a stylistic anachronism: the accustomed meaning of visual supports which Godard uses for his movie are surprisingly overruled by the new ones. The story is structured on two parallel threads, present and past, and the key visual approach is based on two different supports; black&white analogue and colour saturated video. With the successive use of intermediality of paintings and by appealing to B&W essentiality, Godard invite the viewer to reconsider the image corporeality through his new aesthetic statement. The black&white 35mm film is used for today's visual stylistic approach while the colourful video format, the flashbacks, stand for the past. The meaning and the aesthetic opposition of those two references gives Godard the opportunity to a phenomenological examination of his movie support, foto-chemical and digital-video. As Rodowick comments in *An Elegy for Film*:

curiously, the conceptual force of Godard's aesthetic choices is not completely lost when presented digitally; nonetheless, the perceptual density of the evidence of our senses is sharply attenuated. In even this well-mastered DVD, not only is resolution lost in the black-and-white sections, but the video images appear less color saturated and somehow more "natural". In the DVD version, the edges of two extremes are reduced to a happy medium: video color finds its home on the television monitor, while film is uprooted to a land where it will always rest an uneasy immigrant.¹³

Therefore, this transmediality is fully express when viewing the two versions of *Eloge de L'amour*, the digital video and the 35mm printed one. This exercise revealed Godard's intention to face this visual dichotomy, one of the last allegories on the present virtual life of film and the appreciation of the support corporeality. An impossible marriage between two mediums, a DVD version viewed on a TV and the 35mm print screened in cinema. In that respect we confront the current reality when "video may be the future of

¹³ David Norman Rodowick, *The Virtual Life of Film* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2007), 90.

cinema, but, ironically, the color palette achieved in the second part of the movie is best accomplished when video is printed on film.”¹⁴ To enrich this transmedia theory, a different approach for this support specificity is taken by Chris Marker in *La Jetée* (1962) a movie within which the director plays with different visual paradigms to build a contiguous storyline. Marker uses the photography (paper prints) with all its corporeal dimensions for this time travel narrative structure. The prints’ surface has been scratched, punched and peeled to add a different time dimension to the future that protagonist experiences. The whole *La Jetée* diegesis is film based oriented using mere film language: editing, zooms, dissolves, cross dissolves and so on. The voice over control and build the mood for the viewer except for the only “motion pictures” shot when the women, accompanied by an ambient sound, blinks several times. That is the most impressive part of Marker’s “movie” because of its sudden contradiction with the established visual style, that of a still photos. Therefore, Marker’s *cineroman* specificity has been denied by the motion picture specificity, the shot with the women coming to life. Carroll had a comparative study regarding the ontic dimension of a character imprinted on film or photographed:

(...) is a deep difference between a film image of a character, say from our imagined version of *La Jetée*, and a slide taken of that character from *La Jetée*. For as long as you know that what are you watching is a film, even a film of what appears to be a photograph, it is always justifiable to entertain the possibility that the image *might* move.¹⁵

Nevertheless, a different emotion is felt when we watch, or more appropriately read, *La Jetée* in printed version (Princeton University Press, 1993), supposedly a perceptual expression far from the experience of watching the same slide show on a film base projection. This paper printed edition is similar to a comic strip or a comic book version of the movie. Even compared to today franchise approach when we are used to seeing comic books adapted for the big screen, Marker’s intention was to add an extra diegetic dimension to the story. The motionless visual triggers can widen the viewer’s imagination which enrich

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Noël Carroll, *Theorizing the Moving Image* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 64.

the whole story with complimentary plots and meanings. The photographic stillness is the norm in printed books, therefore we're not caught within a film diegetic values of scene length and transitions. We can look at the pictures, browse and stay on certain ones as long as we need to. The viewer is transmuted into a different paradigm, an exhibition hall or a museum. In this environment, subliminal aesthetic analogue codes can easily express universal meanings which on digital support have faded. In Marker's case, the negative fog value, film scratches, photographs with long exposure time, blurry edges and the photography paper surface has been used to underline and express the main character's emotions.

We assume that Marker's movie, like many other, being digitised will lose the creator's touch expressed through tactile, haptic remediation of texture and layers which in the digital realm are flattened, the digitising process not being a mirror of analogue structure but an interpretation of data on a mathematic matrices.

Remediating the analogue to the digital doesn't necessary means equalising and a full transfer of the intrinsic physical values of analogue into a digital signal. Digital referentiality aspires to mimic the real through the media's own stakes, computational images. The software interface through which this new reality is achieved seek for mimetic imitation, resemblance of recognisable items from the surrounding reality. Recently, even more transparent and simulated reality have been exposed as a narrative, fictionalised reality. The film's immediacy has been reconfigured by nowadays' digital technology through the AR and VR environments, within which the viewer loses his sense of space and direction as known into a 2D feature film. The claim of digital media remediation lost his goal since the digital technology became a medium itself. As Bolter and Grusin assert:

(...) digital media that strive for transparency and immediacy (such as immersive virtual reality and virtual games) also remediate. Hypermedia and transparent media are opposite manifestations of the same desire: the desire to get past the limits of representation and to achieve the real.¹⁶

¹⁶ Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin, *Remediation: Understanding New Media* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2000), 52.

Is it a human perceptual barrier which blocks perceiving the VR environment as a real one, or are the mediated reality cues too abstract for the viewer to connect with them? Scholars insist on highly mimetic stages achieved through 3D and VR spaces which don't respond to any viewer's expectations. Therefore, from a popular highly affordable type of show (cinema screening) nowadays we're currently facing a different approach to a trained and specialised spectator going to 3D and VR shows. The usual 2D triggers don't fit into this space anymore, attention and action continuity are broken, pro-scenic comprehension is hardly achieved by untrained viewers. The Albertian window ideal is ruined within a maze of technicalities, action cues and gyroscopic references.

Bolter and Grusin advance this theory and try to find a visual bridge to explain the Möbius strip paradox, "that hypermedia could ever be thought of as achieving the unmediated."¹⁷ Addressing a 3D and VR space they name a second paradox where "hypermedia strive for immediacy, transparent digital technologies always end up being remediations, even as, indeed precisely because, they appear to deny mediation."¹⁸ So, the human perceptual Holy Grail is denied by digital technology through which all the communication codes are rewrite in a totally reconfigured messages with the advent of Internet gimmick's. The multiple facets of support are melting down into a digital ocean with no hope of remediating or mimicking reality, digital finding itself in a distant realm without connections to a real person's feelings. The remediated analog support specificity makes sense for film aestheticians, which appraise within the classical motion picture approach; how a scene is shoot, how close or far to a simulated reality is and which are the used film tools; narrative's analytical approach, changes of sizes and shooting angles, the use of editing and so on.

The question is: Does the message organically adhere to the support, despite of its ontic structure? Seems like in today's digital convergence, the message changes its appearance and meaning every time we shift to another support. The film's immutability is untouched only when we see it in a cinema's

¹⁷ Ibid., 53.

¹⁸ Ibid., 54.

environment, every other support changing the movie's structure and message through the viewing device's interactivity, the medium's interference (on the movie's sound atmosphere) and the screen size. Nevertheless, the human perceptual threshold limits (visual and audible) are reached when we watch a movie on inappropriate environment with poor screen sizes, compared with the human optimal field of view (120°). The editing rhythm, the in shot perceptual time flow and frame sizes are seen differently based on the device we watch the movie on. The most relevant triggers for the viewer to engage with the story, the point beyond which spectators' immersion is guaranteed, are missing on interactive screens: empathy and full engagement with the story. The support transparency (Albertian window) when the viewer loses himself in the movie, means reaching a point beyond where the projection frame lines vanish, as they're being absorbed into the action they are watching. Any other viewing device, except the cinema hall, has a very defined contours, sharpened edges with high contrast environment limits which distract the viewer's attention from the content he or she sees. The Internet draw a defined border between spectacular cinema and informational content. Today the work of art has lost its symbolic weight outside of the cinema halls; all the interactive denominations like DVD's, VOD, smartphones and tablets lead the viewer to another content (movie structure) which certainly differ as meaning, comprehension and emotion to the diegesis imagined by its creators. Within today's new digital media environment we're facing a revolution with disseminated weak versions of the movie's originals, the copies become the new originals for an overdraw and recycled content. Regarding today's feature film and digital media expressions, instead of the message convergence within the media, we witness an atomisation of messages caused by the hypermedia homogenisation (Internet), each expression form becomes a separate message and beyond that, every device have its own code of signs and communication trough size, interactivity and connectivity. The grip on realism is easily lost in the current digital "reality", a virtual and mediated reality reconstructed trough mathematical algorithms and decoded onto pixel array devices.

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**MISCELLANEA:
ESSAYS AND INTERVIEWS**

Vocal Composition in Creating the Commedia dell'Arte Characters

Oana POCAN¹

Abstract: The paper presents a possible approach to the construction of a comic character from both a vocal and a verbal point of view, by using various language disorders. For the scenic procedure of language composition, voice and pronunciation as well as rhythm and influence disorders can be important tools for students in their creating a comic character, since these techniques have a significant potential also outside the Commedia dell'Arte. Hence, conscious training and practice of speech/language disorders, such as dyslalia, as well as of rhythm and fluency disorders, develops and improves both the students' voice usage abilities and their vocal creativity, so that they can manifest themselves artistically in a more expressive way.

Keywords: acting, character, training, speech/language disorders, rhythm and fluency disorders, Commedia dell'Arte.

"Working with the body and the mind, with each and every muscle and each and every vocal, with each gesture-expression of an idea, health of the body and soul have been and will always be the roots of a representation"².

Preparing a role for a Commedia dell'Arte show implies constant and sustained physical and vocal training. It is, most likely, the most demanding period of professional training for the young aspirer to the title of actor and

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² Andrea Perruci, *Despre arta reprezentăției dinainte gândite și despre improvizație* (București: Univers, 1984), 22.



artist. It's the show where the student becomes aware that talent alone is not enough, but technique and work sustained by daily exercise, physical and vocal, are the essential ingredients for success and accomplishment of the role. Now they understand the need for technique and instruments in order to develop their bodily and vocal expressions, so they can speak powerfully, clearly and confidently on stage. Now they understand that preparation for this profession cannot be made by leaps and bounds, it is a constant. From simple to complex, each step precedes another.

Voice training during the first year of professional preparation of an acting student presupposes the student becoming aware of the body-mind-voice unit. Amongst the most important acquisitions of this first year of vocal exercise there is the Centred Posture,³ the point of balance from where we extract out physical, mental and vocal power. Thus, Centering is a point of start and return, a point of reference helping us connect to our inner energy, our breathing and our voice. The Centred Posture enables breathing and voice to work freely at high levels of efficiency, hence the act of uttering to be naturally sustained by the anatomical structure of the body. Thus, Centering becomes a vital principle not only for acting, but also for working with the voice and the body.

We breathe and speak naturally, without thinking or being aware of the mechanism/ process of breathing or speech. The first step in working with the voice is very physical, we use our entire body in order to expand sound and voice. The students learn to pay attention to how they breathe, how they move, how they talk. The body and the voice are instruments they learn to use appropriately. It becomes clear that working with the voice compels us to use our entire body, from head to toes. Speaking and singing are the results of reflex physical actions and the position/posture of our body influences the way sounds are emitted. Voice modulations are tightly related to the expressive actions of our body, imagination and emotions affect our muscles. Vocal improvisations develop the student's capabilities of vocal emission, the diverse sonorities and intensities their voice can produce. Mind, body and voice act together and thus Expressivity is born.

³ Patsy Rodenburg, *The Actor Speaks* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 28-35.

Another important objective of voice training in close relationship to the body is a stable and balanced voice or the Natural Voice – a voice free of any restraint, of any tension. For an adequate workout with our voice we need to *eliminate any tension* that contract our breathing, blocking and limiting the voice. Thus we reach another objective of the first year of voice training – *recognising/identifying speech patterns* that block Natural Voice (tense shoulders, rigid or weak spine, tense/tight cheeks, clavicular breathing, etc.). This target is hard to reach for at least two reasons: on the one hand, learning to renounce bad habits in order to discover new voice possibilities and, on the other hand, knowing them you will be able to use them, consciously, in building your character.

Theoretical knowledge, i.e. the anatomy of the respiratory and phonatory system, the articulation mechanisms along with physical warm-up exercises help the acting student to be aware of and understand the Breathing process as vital element, the key to working with voice. Physical and voice training is mandatory in reaching one's vocal potential and vocal development as, Patsy Rodenburg says, "You don't train to consolidate what you can already do, but to move into new and dramatic areas of change."⁴ Therefore, what is essential during the acting student's first year of training is work on Breathing, on developing the respiratory and articulation abilities: increasing breathing precision (dosing the inhalation and exhalation), increasing breathing volume (the diaphragmatic rib cage breathing put in practice), increasing muscle tone, increasing elasticity and flexibility of muscle groups in order to ensure a functional articulation base (lips, cheeks, jaw, soft palate), differentiating mouth breathing versus nose breathing (becoming aware of the nasal nature of pronunciation and differentiating mouth breathing from nose breathing), prolonged exhalation in verbal breathing⁵.

Becoming aware of how sound is produced, of the resonance boxes (chest and head vocal registers), what are the components of articulation mechanism and what are the phonetic rules or features, the correct pronunciation

⁴ Ibid.,11.

⁵ Carolina Bodea Hategan, *Tulburările de voce și vorbire. Evaluare și intervenție* (Cluj-Napoca: Presa Universitară Clujeană, 2013), 125-135.

of vowels and consonants in Romanian are aspirations of the first year's acting students.

Therefore, the goal of voice and speech training in the first stage of the acting student's training is to discover, experiment and be aware of the parameters of a Good/Functional Voice,⁶ as they are reminded by Carolina Bodea Hațegan in the volume *Treatment of Language Disorders. Open Structures*: pleasant quality of voice (musicality), solid resonance, adequate pitch range (pitch corresponding to voice and gender), appropriate volume (relation to space and context of communication), properly managed exhalation, accurate pronunciation of sounds and combining the mentioned parameters (vocal flexibility).

We have so far made a summary of the most important acquisitions obtained by the acting student during their first stage of professional training, from a voice and speech standpoint. It is necessary to remember this information because, next, we are going to briefly analyse and give example of how *vocal composition in Commediei dell'Arte* roles can be achieved. However, we want to underline that our approach is just a possible approach in working with the role, not an exhaustive one.

Specialist literature (Vito Pandolfi, Andrea Perruci, Mona Chirilă) maintains that in the Commedia dell'Arte show, the text was schematic and the intrigue simple, the weight and value of the performance belonging, to the greatest extent, to actors, more precisely to the way they embodied the interpreted characters. The show was a satire, and characters lacking a psychological load are created on a single idea, with a single development direction. The Mask characters represent human characters and typologies. The parody style therefore allows for exaggerations, exacerbations, the comic being one of situation and of language. Practice (pedagogical, but not only), confirms the fact that creating a Commedia dell'Arte role or character is a touchstone for an actor in terms of physical resistance, body and voice expression. We will mainly refer to voice and speech expressivity and, here, we need to reconfigure a series of articulation and breathing, resonatory and phonatory behaviours specific to the type of interpreted Mask. This is, therefore, a possible

⁶ Carolina Bodea Hațegan, *Logopedia. Terapia tulburărilor de limbaj. Structuri deschise* (București: Trei, 2016), 87.

definition of what we can understand by *vocal composition*. To be more specific, we will say that by *vocal composition* we understand the result of actions knowingly conducted for distorting or altering the voiced and unvoiced sounds uttered by the actor, conscious actions on breathing, on sound intensity and pitch, in order to obtain a comic effect and, in the case at hand, in accordance with the features of the Mask (as they are mentioned in the aforementioned specialist literature). To be more clear: we believe that vocal composition (in theatre) is an artificial voice, unnatural but functional for a limited period of time, hence opposed to Natural Voice and which modifies the parameters of the Good/Functional Voice.

Commedia dell'Arte is a representation where what is important is the actor's play, and the charm and the comic come from the unexpected manner in which actors use their body and voice. Physical resistance, fluidity and plasticity of the body, the easiness to use diaphragmatic rib cage breathing, the effortless use of resonators, speech on effort are the elements that highlight the talent and the physical and vocal transformation ability of the actor. Talent does not exclude technique, it protects it, so Technique becomes the main ally in the process of creation. We mean here the *Imitation Technique* as theoretical point of start in the creative process and the *Vocal and Speech Technique* as practical procedure, applicable to the role building. Defectology and speech therapy are of great use to us in the achievement of the latter.

In the chapter dedicated to *Imitation Technique* of the book *Fundamental Techniques of Scenic Creation*, Diana Cozma offers us details and examples concerning several imitative procedures we can appeal to in the creative process:

(...) we discern, as concerns the imitation of the actions of a person, several imitative procedures, i.e.: imitating the way of speaking, imitating the way of walking, imitating the way of behaving, imitating the particularities specific to such individual.⁷

Attention is paid to each procedure presenting different ways to walk, postures, gestures and attitudes that can make the object of imitation and

⁷ Diana Cozma, *Tehnici fundamentale de creație scenică* (Cluj-Napoca: Presa Universitară Clujeană, 2016), 27.

that, we believe, also find their utility in the building of a *Commedia dell'Arte* role. What has drawn out attention, however, is the following opinion of the author: "As for imitating the way of speaking, we need to focus not on identically transposing their speech, but the extremes of that speech. Extremes can be pronunciation errors or speech disorders. Errors are the direct result of reflection into our body of inner life, psychological phenomena that usually betray hidden intentions."⁸ We are offered a few examples coming from speech therapy, more precisely *voice and pronunciation disorders and rhythm and influence disorders* according to specialist terminology.

We find this idea of using speech disorders in the actor's work with the role/character and in Valeria Covătarîu's volume *Words About the Word*, in the chapter "Non-literary Speech."⁹ Copying, simulating, imitating any type of non-literary language (archaic, non-local, neologist and hypercorrect, popular regional, vulgarised language or speech disorders) implies, first of all, knowledge by the actor of their own vocal capacities. We think it is important to be aware of any phonetic change on vowels, consonants or syllables, etc. and monitor it for the actor's vocal health.

Given our theme, we will focus our attention on the possibilities defectology and speech therapy can offer us as theoretical and practical support in achieving a vocal composition adequate to the *Commedia dell'Arte* roles. (Our approach today can be, in the future, the point of departure for an elaborated interdisciplinary research, applicable in theatre pedagogy and practice).

Any deviation from the natural breathing process, from the normal functioning of the voice-producing and speech mechanism is included in the category of voice and speech disorders. Quoting Emil Verza, Iolanda Mititiuc and Ana Maria Lăzărescu, they mention in their book *Defectology and Speech Therapy* the six categories of language disorders: pronunciation, speech rhythm and fluency disorders, voice disorders, reading-writing language disorders, polymorphic disorders, language development disorders. Those that interest us and that can be used in achieving the vocal composition are the first three mentioned categories. This is possible because the characteristics of such disorders usually imply neither anatomical deformities of the phonetic and

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Valeria Covătarîu, *Cuvinte despre cuvânt* (Târgu Mureş: Casa de Editură Mureş, 1996), 57-99.

articulatory apparatus, nor mental problems. With a lot of exercise they can be simulated, imitated, the purpose being that of offering individuality and more flavour to the character/role.

Further on, we are going to make an overview of these three categories of speech disorders, with the intention of identifying what we could apply, what we could use as an element in the vocal composition of Commedia dell'Arte roles.

Dyslalia (lispings) is the most well-known form of pronunciation disorders. The specificity of this deficiency is incorrect pronunciation or missing sounds. The alteration comes from either *deformation, substitution/replacement, omission or inverting sounds* in spontaneous or reproduced speech. When consonants are affected, dyslalia has a specific name. For example, where the sound B is changed or omitted dyslalia will be called BETACISM, if the sound B is replaced with another one dyslalia bears the name of PARABETACISM.

We think that dyslalias that can be mostly used in acting are: *sygmatisim/parasygmatisim, rhinolalia, rhotacism/pararhotacism and uvular trill*.

SYGMATISM/PARASYGMATISM is the name of dyslalia affecting the sound S or Z, Ș [sh] and J, (sibilant/whistling consonants) and Ț [tz], CE, GI (partial occlusives/ affricates). Sygmatisim can be the result of:

- incorrect positioning of tongue (apex of the tongue) in the mouth. Thus, instead of the apex of the tongue being at the base of the inferior incisors, the tip of the tongue is positioned interdently (lispings).

- replacing the consonants Ș/J with S/Z; CE/CI with ȚE/ȚI; GE/GI with DZE/DZI - replacing S/Ș/Z/J/CE/CI; GE/GI/Ț with D or T (f, v, h).

RHINOLALIA refers to nasal emission, the so-called "hypernasal speech" produced by sending a large amount of air in the nasal cavity, at the same time with descending of the soft palate. We can find in the speech of those who suffer from this dyslalia the replacement of consonant B with M, or D with V. T can be also omitted from speech.

RHOTACISM – is a speech disorder consisting in omitting the sound R in speech, mainly due to an incorrect positioning of the tongue (intradently or tongue pressing the soft palate - uvular trill) or vibration of the uvula instead of the tongue apex. Pararhotacism is the replacement of the sound "R" with other sounds (L, D, H, I or U).

According to specialist literature in the speech therapy field, the *accent and intonation* component of the rhythm and fluency disorders category is of great significance. Due to this human language has fluidity, fluency, naturalness and quality. Of this category we mention *stuttering*. What is specific to this disorder are “repetitions and extension of syllables and words, uttering hesitation, pauses.”¹⁰ Stuttering can be articulatory, phonatory and respiratory. The first affects the consonants P, B, D, T, C, G so that stumbling, blockages or spasms can occur at their level. In making an imitation of this disorder, exercise implies the immobilisation of the phonetic and articulatory organs: lips, tongue, jaw, soft palate. In phonatory stuttering spasms, blockages affecting speech fluency happen in the larynx. In the exercise of copying this deficiency it is the throat that is intervened upon (tensing, straining) and in the coordination of the breathing flow. Respiratory stuttering “can also be the result of lack of coordination of inhalation and exhalation, emitting sounds on inhalation,”¹¹ speech is jerky, although the exercise will be oriented to using a small amount of air and abnormal, unnatural coordination of inhalation and exhalation. We must mention that in our approach of composing an unnatural but functional voice, in the sense that the spectator should understand what the actor is saying, *clonic stuttering* is what we recommend and exercise, mainly:

this type of stuttering implies repetitions of sounds, syllables, parts of words, words, sentences, prolongation of sounds, coming back on some words, sentences and self-reviews, dysrhythmias. Clonic stuttering is characterised by less severe symptoms, so that speech intelligibility is not significantly compromised.¹²

Other two deficiencies ought to be “copied”/imitated, namely: bradylalia and tachylalia. Both are related to speech rhythm. Thus, bradylalia is defined by a very slow, dallied rhythm, the mouth barely opens. Diction is affected.

¹⁰ Carolina Bodea Hategan, *Logopedia. Terapia tulburărilor de limbaj. Structuri deschise* (București: Trei, 2016), 298.

¹¹ Ibid., 316.

¹² Ibid.

Sounds are unclear and incompletely articulated. Vowels are pronounced in a dallying, blurred manner. Consonants are weakly articulated. (...) In general, bradylalia is accompanied by bradypsychia, thinking processes being very slowed down, as well.¹³

Tachylalia is speaking very fast. Some people can have a faster speech rhythm but also speak correctly, with clear sounds, adequately articulated but the opposite can exist as well.

As concerns voice disorders (aphonia, dysphonia, phonasthenia) we must understand that in order to obtain these deficiencies (in the vocal construction of the role) the intervention should aim at the sound spectrum: intensity, pitch and resonance of the sound. Carolina Bodea-Hategan, in her volume titled *Treatment of Language Disorders. Open Structures* offers us important information that we can take into account during our creative artistic approach:

voice disorders at the level of pitch imply exaggeration in both directions, up or down, in relation to the frequency the voice is issued on; disorders related to voice intensity imply either too weak a voice, or too strong; disorders in the range of flexibility parameter imply a monotonous voice or a too emphatic voice, or a voice incongruent as related to the communication context.¹⁴

The information provided by Carolina Bodea Hațegan in the same book, in chapter *Types of voice disorders*, and which refers to the details offered by The National Center for Voice and Speech concerning voice disorders sub-types, also indicating the deficient phonatory mechanism, is really valuable. Here are a few: "covered" voice, "breathed" voice, "screeched" voice, "high" voice, nasal voice, "smooth/prolonged" voice, "discordant" voice. Another array of terms describing voice disorders are found in the 2005 medical publication *Clinical Voice Disorders*, whose authors are Arnold Aronson and Diane Bless: tired, asthenic, monotonous, infantile, passive, sober, tense, discreet, rough, metallic, strident, thick, thin, weak, whispered voice, etc.

¹³ Iolanda Mititiuc, Ana Maria Lăzărescu, *Defectologie și logopedie* (Iași: Editura Alfa, 2011), 118.

¹⁴ Carolina Bodea Hategan, *Logopedia. Terapia tulburărilor de limbaj. Structuri deschise* (București: Trei, 2016), 89.

Beside all these speech disorders there are, of course, other elements that can become savoury ingredients in the vocal composition of comic characters, such as *verbal tics* or *speaking with a foreign accent* (non-native language). An appropriate example to compose foreign voice and speaking the language with a foreign accent is the character Il Capitano. It is described by the specialist literature as being a bragging and swaggering soldier, fearful when fighting is involved, a satire to foreign power. He is usually a Spaniard, hence the actor interpreting the role can add this element also considering that in Spanish the consonant H and the interdental S sound are predominant in speech. His posture is open when he is bragging, closed when he is afraid, his walking and attitude allow the use of the chest and head register achieving by this sliding of the phonatory air a voice disorder (in pitch and intensity). A notable performance could be obtained by adding a tachylalia as, Olga Mărculescu says in the foreword to the *Commedia dell'Arte* anthology, "he talks excessively, words with no sense, a rushed logorrhea."¹⁵

Gli Innamorati/The Lovers – dreaming natures, sentimental and peaceful, lacking inventivity, or arrogant, authoritarian and insolent. The actors' play for this stock character can be centred on exaggerating the moody, pouty, spoiled behaviour. Passing from one state to another, from agony to ecstasy and the other way round is often accompanied by onomatopoeia, the head register is predominantly used, and completing the vocal composition with a pronunciation disorder can borrow a plus of fun to the character. However, the shyness variant can also be considered. The following information in the speech therapy field can be useful in this sense:

The emotional constitution of the shy is also the premise of language disorders. The shy individual has troubles of external verbal language, the pronunciation, rhythm, tonality, as well as the actual language disorders being of interest, manifested by verbal and logical incoherence, imprecision and indecision in picking words, in correlating then in a unitary semantic structure, as they also betray an internal language disorder, characterised by emotional instability, fragmentation and even disruption of informational message.¹⁶

¹⁵ Andrea Perruci, *Despre arta reprezentației dinainte gândite și despre improvizație* (București: Univers, 1984), 21.

¹⁶ Iolanda Mititiuc, Ana Maria Lăzărescu, *Defectologie și logopedie* (Iași: Editura Alfa, 2011), 118-119.

Therefore, a type of respiratory stuttering can be used (talking on inspiration, reduced air column) with rattling speech that can also justify and make believable a series of fainting, tremors, wide-eyed looks (acted, obviously). Or, why not, even slow speech, bradylalia, can be used, if the lines are short. To avoid the sound monotony of the bradylalia a dyslalia and a sliding of the phonatory air in the resonance chambers (for example, nasal, chest register) could be added.

Of the Old characters group, we learn that the Mask Tartaglia is fat and his name comes from the verb *tartagliare* which means 'to stutter'. Because of his big belly, his posture with dorsal extension spine causes a tensing of the abdomen, which makes the breathing effort to be quite big. Our suggestion is of using an articulatory stutter and a grave tone, in a chest or normal register, because the dorsal extension, anyway, forces neck tensing by pushing the chin towards the chest. This latter remark is also valid for the character Dottore, with the mention that paradoxical expressions, the dilettante language, the use of Latin phrases randomly quoted that characterise the manner of expression of this character, could not have the same impact to the public if the stutter was used. A rhinolalia or any dyslalia is preferable.

Vito Pandolfi in volume II of his *History of Universal Theatre* affirms about Pantalone – the old decrepit, lewd, greedy and stingy, haughty and ridiculous merchant, always on the look for a beautiful young wife, that “he jumps and sings like a clown.”¹⁷ The semi-closed posture, leaning towards the front, limits the use of diaphragmatic rib cage breathing. The mask with a long, hooked nose favours rather a pronunciation disorder, a nasal voice and, maybe, a verbal tic.

The mask character Zanni portrays two types of servants: either astute and clever, intrigant, shrew, or dumb, funny and greedy. Along him, the most well known servant characters are Brighella, Arlecchino and Pulcinella. There is one more category of servants of lower importance, i.e. the so-called “small masks.”¹⁸ Mezzetino, Trufaldino, Scapino, Coviello, Beltrame. We learn from Vito Pandolfi's research that Brighella does not have Arlecchino's

¹⁷ Vito Pandolfi, *Istoria teatrului universal*, Volumul 2 (Bucureşti: Meridiane, 1971), 43.

¹⁸ David Esrig, *Commedia dell'Arte. O istorie a spectacolului în imagini* (Bucureşti: Nemira, 2016), 104.

agility and graceful gestures, but, Mona Chirilă says in *Central Figures in Commedia dell'Arte* "His natural idleness does not prevent him from being skilful in his movements, like a monkey"¹⁹ and his voice is raucous and his speech is jerky. Nonetheless, he is a good serenade singer.

We can find a wider study dedicated to Arlecchino and Pulcinella in the aforementioned volume belonging to Mona Chirilă. One of the most well-known theatrical figures, Arlecchino, can be interpreted either in the version of a ragged servant, rude, even violent, with unbridled lust – reminding by his black mask of his devilish origins, or as he transforms along history, becoming a joyful, goofy mask, ingenuous and bright. Over time, language and gestures change in the Arlecchino character, too, giving birth to precise interpretation requirements. In no other character is it perhaps as evident that body rhythm is in direct relation to speech rhythm:

In Arlecchino movement, that nonsensical back-and-forth, those baffling drifts end on brisk stop angles (lying, kneeling, elbow-propped, etc. positions) and recover by *kinetic arabesques* (jumping, spinning, pirouettes, dancing or disarticulated movements). He has all the types of walk specific to the *zannis*, but more elegantly performed. In addition, he has three types of toe walking (...). He describes everything with precision, by both words and gestures even when or especially when he improvises or fabricates something (...).²⁰

shows Mona Chirilă, quoting John Rudlin, the author of *Commedia dell'Arte. An Actor's Handbook*. Due to the physical effort implied by the interpretation of this character we recommend a voice training along with the physical one. Arlecchino talks mostly with his body, physical dynamism, gestures, body plasticity are the forms of expression he is characterised by. His vocal composition presupposes variations of rhythm and moving from one vocal register to the next, according to the context, the relationship with the other characters. Arlecchino is in love with Colombina. She is his feminine double. The merry and intriguing female servant knows how to use her feminine

¹⁹ Mona Chirilă, *Figuri centrale în Commedia dell'Arte* (Cluj-Napoca: Editura Fundației pentru Studii Europene, 2010), 54.

²⁰ Ibid., 99.

charm, her voluptuousness, her power of seduction to reach her purpose. Chatty and full of life, her speech is energetic, lascivious or not, strident at times (cephalic resonance). It is worth mentioning that often the course of action requires that the servant pair use the *dressing up/disguise*. This interpretation hence implies a vocal technique as good as possible, a special ability in using speech disorders.

The last Mask character we are talking about is Pulcinella, "The servant character who kept his peasant nature the longest and with most stubbornness (...)"²¹ as David Esrig says. In his vocal composition we will take into account, as with the other characters, on the one hand the specific body expression: humpback and pot belly, beak-like nose. His body is heavy, but he talks with his hands a lot, his gestures are large, open, caricatural, he has a special mobility of his shoulders and feet, what is specific are his footwork and goat jumps. On the other hand, we can consider the description made by Mona Chirilă:

(...) Pulcinella's lively gestures corresponded his logorrhea vocation: he talked without pause, with onomatopoeic interventions, comic repetitions and dismantling of words, which he then put side by side according to rules of sound and not of meaning, just to suddenly nosedive in pantomime, where soundless mouth went on forming unheard words.²²

We also point out that a vocal composition taking into account the "gallinaceous symbolism" would be possible to this mask, or other bestial images he is associated with (donkey, black cat, parrot, rooster, monkey, dog) and even its hermaphrodite nature. Details on this subject can be found in Mona Chirilă's book.

Before ending we would like to add that we have not made any reference to the dialectal language specific to each Mask as we have attempted to approach the theme from the perspective of professional training of the acting student, a pedagogical and practical approach. As long as the student

²¹ David Esrig, David, *Commedia dell'Arte. O istorie a spectacolului în imagini* (București: Nemira, 2016), 99.

²² Mona Chirilă, *Figuri centrale în Commedia del'Arte* (Cluj-Napoca: Editura Fundației pentru Studii Europene, 2010), 171.

uses a Romanian text we consider that the attention should be directed to the phonetic features of this language. Certainly, if wished, an accent specific to Italian language could be added to each mask in the vocal composition.

To conclude, we mention that, regardless of the Mask stock character we refer to, vocal composition presupposes a series of changes of the natural characteristics of the voice. In order to handle this exercise with full success – creating and interpreting a role in the *Commedia dell'Arte*, the following are required, as starting point: knowing one's voice and body capabilities, knowing and acquiring the rules of correct pronunciation of vowels and consonants in Romanian, a breathing capacity as large as possible, and physical endurance. In parallel with practising voice and speech disorders we also recommend them to continue the voice training, strengthening of the abdominal muscles, phono-articulatory muscles and diction. Physical effort is constantly accompanying the means of expression used in this type of performance. Due to the fixed mask on the actor's face, their body and voice take over some of the expression tasks of facial expression and amplify the body and voice expression. Wearing a mask also has an impact on the mobility of facial muscles with consequences on voice emission and projection, pronunciation, even without adding any voice and speech disorder. We underline that our proposal of approaching voice and verbal language for the *Commedia dell'Arte* characters, from the perspective of defectology and speech therapy, is wished to be an informational and practical plus for students, a source of inspiration for studying these roles. Studying speech disorders opens unsuspected possibilities of using voice in the creation process and we support Valeria Covătaru's opinion, who maintains:

Simulating speech disorders is becoming a scenic procedure of language composition, without hindering intelligibility and penetrating ability, which are basic features of an actor's speech; the choosing criterion, if no director's order intervenes, is simple: speech defect that is the most easily obtained (what ensures credibility) and that is the most suitable to the character.²³

²³ Valeria Covătaru, *Cuvinte despre cuvânt* (Târgu Mureș: Casa de Editură Mureș, 1996), 86-87.

We complete and affirm that an acting student's talent, imagination and creativity are needed for walking, voicing, look to appear natural and symbolic at the same time, be in harmony and make a whole.

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The Actor's Body as an Instrument: Expression, Mind, Hope. A Dialogue with Actress Maia Morgenstern

Sorin-Dan BOLDEA¹

Abstract: A conversation with Maia Morgenstern prompted interesting reflections about what it means to be an actor. In it, subjects such as fear, motivation, desire, and even the differences between stage and film acting are touched upon. We explore both surface matters as well as profound and extremely sensitive aspects about the actor in general and his instrument. Maia Morgenstern is a celebrated theatre and film actress, known for theatre productions such as *An Antique Trilogy* (Andrei Șerban, 1990) and films such as *The Oak* (Lucian Pintilie, 1992) and *The Passion of the Christ* (Mel Gibson, 2003).

Keywords: theatre, film, actor, performer, body, motivation, emotion.

Maia Morgenstern was born in 1962, in Bucharest, Romania, into a Jewish family. After graduating from the "I.L. Caragiale Theatre and Film Institute" in Bucharest in 1985, she played in various acclaimed and successful movies and theatre productions, both Romanian and international. She has been the recipient of numerous awards for best actress, including at the Venice Film Festival (1992) and granted by the European Film Academy (1993). In 2003, she was named Actress and Woman of the Year by the European Parliament from Strasbourg. In 2012, she was awarded the Order of Arts and Letters in

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the rank of *Knight* by the President of *France*. In addition to her impressive career as a professor, theatre and film actress, Maia Morgenstern is a humble and emotive person I've had the opportunity to meet a few times. I've always been curious to discover the stories and insights of an actor of her status, as explored in the dialogue that follows.



Maia Morgenstern (copyright Raluca Ciornea, 2021)

Sorin-Dan Boldea: *First of all, I am pleased to be here today and to have the opportunity to carry on this dialogue. I'd like to begin by complimenting you on all your career achievements. Moving on to the first question to you, we know that many actors choose either theatre or film. There are also actors who choose to do both. I personally have chosen both because love and passion are equally strong in both directions. And you have a career in both also, hence the question, from your perspective, why theatre and why film?*

Maia Morgenstern: I would have loved to give a complex answer with some depth, and with a horizon that would lead to some conclusions, but I will just say that I was offered different challenging and interesting roles in different projects, to which I answered yes. I have to confess with all the assumptions, that I don't know how to say no, and that when it was the case, I answered yes to different, interesting, challenging, exciting, controversial projects, not a few times, especially in cinema. I love working in the theatre, I love working on the set, or in television, whether we're talking about a series, or something else, whether we're talking about an installation, new forms of performance. So that's my answer, I've been given opportunities! And I honestly don't see working in theatre, creating a role in theatre, as different from creating a role in the film. Yes, maybe the methods, and the way of expression, of course, differ, and it's normal to be like that, but basically, I think they both start from the core of truth, from emotion, and from communication.

From my point of view also, based on my experiences gained so far, there is not a huge difference between them, I think we can talk about adjustments and nuances rather than differences. On the other hand, again, in your opinion, how do they complement each other in an actor's career? Theatre and film, or theatre acting and film acting?

I don't know how they complement each other, but I know they sometimes contradict each other. At times these hypostases, these dimensions, these paths that an actor walks in theatre or film can be challenging. When I started practicing my profession, my craft, at the faculty in Bucharest, I learned as hard as I could, that's how it was done back then, a lot of practice in order to perfect your professional existence. I don't know how they complement each other, but I think they do. Sometimes you are told in the theatre, that you are being theatrical, or you are told that you have to play filmic in a certain scene, and this is also because the means of expression and the methods of addressing the audience have diversified, and yes, we play with a microphone, not only in musical performances, even in normal performances, and it is like this because the performance economy, the artistic conception, implies a certain degree of intimacy, of utterance. The camera is also used not rarely in theatre performances.

I'm thinking now specifically of the performance *Empire*², part of the European trilogy by Milo Rau at Schaubühne, a performance with which I have toured the world. In this show there was a camera, we were on stage, and we had the lavalier glued to our bodies so that it captured every breath, every inflection, to capture the truth and the emotion, and to be as alive, as present. Sure, it was played out on stage, but it was played back in the image and sound on a screen. It was different. On the other hand, you hear not rarely in the film, speak louder, speak clearer, no one can understand what you're saying. Of course, the art of film acting involves murmuring, and I assume this term, murmuring is a term for conveying emotion and information. Yes, sometimes the technique tells you that you need to speak more clearly, you have to be careful about the incandescence of emotion, truth, and communication. You need to convey the real truth of the stage, television, or cinema production.

We all know that as actors, we have a few moments in our careers when we put so much heart into certain projects that it ends up overwhelming us. Personally, I had this experience only once, at the theatre, in the production Fragil³ at the Maidan Theatre in Cluj-Napoca, when I had to play a character who was extremely depressed, with homicidal tendencies that ended up really disturbing me. Some of our colleagues have had extremely deep and difficult-to-control feelings in film projects for example. For you, when did these intense feelings arise, when working on stage or in the film?

Firstly, thank you for this question, and secondly, I can say that I am learning to manipulate my emotions. I have felt it, I have sensed it, it crystallizes, it conceptualizes, it takes shape for me, I mean what it means to work with the mind, with emotions. It's not easy. To be in control, for me, is important, it is important to control and manage with wisdom and dignity and with moderation, your feelings, and emotions. And it can happen that

² *Empire*, a theatre performance, drama, directed by Milo Rau, with Maia Morgenstern, Rami Khalaf, and Ramo Ali. First performance in Berlin at the Schaubühne Theatre. Premiere: 2016.

³ *Fragil*, a theatre performance, drama, directed by Diana Aldea, with Dan Boldea and Paul Tonca. First performance in Cluj-Napoca, Romania, at the Maidan Theatre. Premiere: 2021.

you are overwhelmed by a kind of emotion, a kind of passion, that is not beneficial, or rather useful in the economy of the show, or film production, and this can make you tense, and distract you. There's nothing to do with your overdose of emotion, and this must be well understood, and it's all about craftsmanship, and mastery. Personally, I'm a fan of good management, of diversifying the tools and methods I use to practice my profession. With this comes control.

Dominic LaCapra said that most of the time, traumatic moments in one's life do not register in the conscious mind at the moment of impact, but long after, when something makes us relive the trauma we have suffered and makes us aware of it.⁴ Likewise, in the same performance I mentioned earlier, I had this kind of experience and it took me a long time to understand what actually happened to me. In all your years of acting, have you had a moment, or several moments, where you've relived a trauma on stage or on set through the role you've played?

No, that did not happen to me.

In my early years of college, I always heard from my mentors that my body is my own instrument. So, yes, the actor's body is his instrument, but what are its limits?

Its limits are numerous, and here we are talking about three-dimensionality, and that's all, but there are also limits of the knowledge and other limits. Perhaps it would be interesting to know them first, to be aware of them, to accept them and then it is up to us to work on them from here on. Limits fluctuate and vary, according to age, according to the stage of personal or artistic development, basically, you have to know where you start and what you are aiming at, and what are the means by which you can get where you want to go. I think that not infrequently, at least from my point of view, there are barriers and cultural limits to knowledge, and these we could overcome, and manage through knowledge, information, and documentation, and everything beyond that, are the limits that we can not overcome. As much as I would like to be a contortionist now, or a ballerina, I don't know if I could, these are my limits. I would like to add something else, maybe

⁴ Dominic LaCapra, *Representing the Holocaust: History, Theory, Trauma* (New York: Cornell UP, 1996), 177.

prejudices can also be limits in the free approach and in the free expression of creation, prejudices of all kinds, maybe a certain construct or another in which we have been educated, can be a limit, or a barrier.

In the last few years, I've taken on projects that I wouldn't normally take on or done things in certain projects that I wouldn't want to do. When should you say STOP in the work process?

I'm afraid I don't have an answer to this question.

Although I'm past 25, I often feel much younger, especially when working in a pleasant environment. How old is Maia Morgenstern's inner body?

The body? What does the inner body mean? The inner mind? I have no idea. Let's say 16, or maybe even 12.

Yes, a young age. How wonderful it is to be young! However, we all have our down times. Maybe we have periods when we don't take some castings and we don't play in anything, or when our self-esteem drops dramatically. What do you think saves our bodies and minds when we go through dark times in our careers?

Self-respect, correct information, courage. Does it save us or not, I don't know, this is a very hard question, but perhaps the courage to assume our own opinions, or the courage to at least live according to our principles or just not to abdicate from what we consider to be our principles, our beliefs, or our truth, that can save us! And here I have an example, I don't know if it's the best, maybe it's the worst. My father lived according to the truths he knew, that he formulated, and was simply shattered from his social and professional life, but nevertheless, he did not abdicate. That is not to say that there was not enormous suffering and pain, and he needed the support of my mother, his wife, and his family. Something that I didn't understand at the time, and I wondered why my father had to be different, and why he had to do yoga to make people laugh at us on the beach in Mangalia. Why? Because it was good for him, and he knew and felt at that time, in the 60s, that this was public opprobrium, and only that they didn't throw stones at him, and yet he sat on his mattress and did his mobility exercises. He was approaching the age of 50 and his body and his mind and his breathing needed it. His scars needed it, he had found relief in yoga, but the world

THE ACTOR'S BODY AS AN INSTRUMENT: EXPRESSION, MIND, HOPE.
A DIALOGUE WITH ACTRESS MAIA MORGENSTERN

booed him. Well, what to do? Nowadays, yoga and breathing exercises and all that are in demand, but back then... He didn't abdicate, he knew it was good for him back then. So, I don't know if courage and all that is salvation or not, maybe, but self-respect is.

Throughout college, I had many moments where I felt fragile and extremely emotional. Not infrequently I judged myself for this and thought it was not normal. We know that in addition to your career in theatre and film, you have also mentored generations of actors. Because you have had the opportunity to observe many actors in their growth, I ask you, how fragile is an actor?

An actor is very fragile and very vulnerable and maybe the way he is being raised by school and teachers, or at least it was like that in my time, in order to learn the mysteries of this profession, as I tell my students, you have to understand that these mysteries are sensitive and moving and this kind of profession is a noble but hard one. When you are inspired, you know it all, you don't need anyone to tell you anything, and I believe that each of us, those of us who love and who want to approach this art in one way or another, have moments of inspiration. I think there are moments of divine inspiration, that's what I think. But what do you do with all the other moments when inspiration doesn't come down to you? And then I think in those moments, you have to have a very solid foundation, a very deep root in the ground, a grounding, a strong base. You must always be firmly rooted in the ground, you must have a solid anchor that does not let you break at the first gust of wind, at the first dissatisfaction with yourself, or at the first failure that most of the time is from the point of view of others.

So there may be such moments, how do you move forward? Well, as I said, it takes very solid preparation and self-respect. You must always not waste your energy except to grow, you must always channel your energy for transformation, for self-improvement. It's good, it's not good, see who tells you, how they tell you, whatever. I think every actor, at the beginning of a new project, is a beginner. So yes, we're terribly vulnerable and it's very good that it's like that. And then we have to think about what we become actors for, for virtual appreciation or for concrete appreciation, or are we a mirror of society, or a landmark, or can I make a difference through the universes I create through my acting?

Throughout our discussion I deduced how important self-respect and love for your own body and your own profession are. Yes, it's good to be friends with yourself, but with all that said, there are times when we can't be friends with ourselves and others, what do we do? Who do you talk to when you don't want to talk to anyone?

Yes, exactly. Well, I talk to my parents, in my thoughts.

*The Biggest Challenge is the Heaviness of Existence as a Human
Being Living in and Feeling Responsible for Today's World*

Ramona TRIPA¹

**Interview with Çağlar Yiğitoğulları, about THE QUEST,
a Shaman-Punk performance inspired by Farid ud-Din Attar's
poem *The Conference of the Birds*, at the National Theatre in
Cluj-Napoca, Spring 2023**



Çağlar Yiğitoğulları, April 2023, credits Nicu Cherciu

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Çağlar Yiğitoğulları was born in Ankara, Turkey, in 1977. He graduated in Theatre – Acting from the Bilkent University in Ankara, the Faculty of Music and Performing Arts. After graduation, during 2001-2003, he lived in Australia and studied contemporary dance.

Returning to Turkey in 2003, he started working for the Istanbul City Theatre, as an actor with a permanent contract. In parallel with his work at the Istanbul City Theatre, he began producing his own performances, bold pieces exploring the limits of corporeality, and presenting them in the country, as well as abroad. *Diss* (2008) and *Luvstory* (2009) are two of his most celebrated works. In 2017, disheartened by the limited freedom of expression in Turkey, he moved to Germany, where he currently lives and creates.

Çağlar Yiğitoğulları has been awarded several important prizes, including the International Association Of Theatre Critics (IATC) “Actor Of The Year” in 2010. He has worked with influential theatres across Europe, such as Abattoir Fermé in Belgium, Attis Theatre in Greece, Münchner Kammerspiele and Maxim Gorki Theatre in Germany.

THE QUEST, a Shaman-Punk performance inspired by Farid ud-Din Attar’s famous poem *The Conference of the Birds*, is the first production he directs at the National Theatre in Cluj-Napoca.

Ramona Tripa: *What drew you to The Conference of the Birds? Why a performance inspired by this particular text?*

Çağlar Yiğitoğulları: The Iranian poem *The Conference of the Birds* brings many layers and aspects of life together into one beautiful story. The philosophy behind the story fits perfectly with any kind of existential or spiritual question which has defined our Shamanic path and sound.

The story of the poem also deals with that constant need of humanity to seek out or wait for our heroes to turn our world into a better place again. The story ends with the idea and ideology that the leader we seek is in us. No need to look for them on the outside. During these times of war, in the post-Corona age, I think it is important to remember and argue about such things with the audience members.

THE BIGGEST CHALLENGE IS THE HEAVINESS OF EXISTENCE AS A HUMAN BEING LIVING IN
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The process of the making of this performance has been quite a special one. Tell us about your creative method and working with the actors from the Cluj-Napoca National Theatre.

My creation method demands full openness and equality in every sphere. Likewise, artistic risks are taken on an equal footing by every member involved in the production.

However, in my work, the idea of collaboration is somewhat a bit complicated, as the material I bring to the stage is mostly extreme. That is why when I direct or make choreography I always have the urge to get on the stage as a performer too, to encourage, even provoke the performers, and bring them to the level that I would love them to reach. Here, with the artists of the Cluj-Napoca National Theatre, it has been such an easy and perfectly harmonious type of collaboration. Emotionally, artistically, intellectually they were fully open and ready to do it!



Mihnea Blidariu, Diana Licu, Sânziana Tarța,
in *The Quest*, credits Nicu Cherciu

The method I propose is a wide-range one, bringing diverse artistic elements together, and in the end turning everything into an anti-Theatre event. But from this place, you can also create perfect method actors on a wider scale. It is a complex, mind-expanding topic, and a long discussion for another time.

How has your experience as a performer informed the way that you direct?

If there are no active, productive minds and bodies during the process of creation, you'll end up with no production at all. Actually, this is exactly what I would like to encourage the audience to aim for while they are watching my work: that point where their minds and emotions are also active and productive.

You've used the term "Shaman-Punk" to describe this performance. What does "Shaman-Punk" mean to you and how has it shaped this performance?

Shaman-Punk is the term that I created to define my work, but it is also what best defines my identity. I have Shaman roots on my father's side and I have always lived in an environment where the Punk subculture background is essential. I have never regarded Punk as an accessory or a fashion trend. In the case of this performance, Shamanism dominates the sound, texture and attitude of the performance. Punk is the ideology of my work, but it is a very subtle, almost hidden dramaturgical concept. You will hear the influence of Punk only at the end, which is also the moment perfectly rounded off by the text to create the ideology of the performance. Please let me take my freedom here to openly use the term "ideology", as I hope we can all agree that everything in life has an ideology behind it. Even saying "we want no ideology here" creates an ideology which I can oppose to. As I mentioned above, the story ends with the understanding that we need no leaders, no heroes, since we are the leaders of our lives. That is very Punk to me.

The performance is structured into 8 songs for 8 performers, who all have their own individual moment to express themselves within the story they are telling as a group. Those individual moments are also informed by the idea and ideology of DIY (do it yourself). Each performer selects and brings on the stage the smallest elements they need to express themselves. At this point, let me remind you of that slogan of the Punks which said:

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“even you know 3 chords to play their instrument, occupy the stage and express yourself”. That is the way I transfer and use the terms of Shamanism and Punk together as the key-concept and trigger of my work in general.



Sânziana Tarța with C. Rigman and Radu Dogaru,
in *The Quest*, credits Nicu Cherciu

The body plays a central role in this production, it is a meaning-bearing body. What is your view on the body as a tool for making art?

As an artist who is in voluntary exile, in my life, hence in my work, I am regularly dealing with limits. The “unlimited-limited” concept of the body amazes and scares me. It is a very existential hurdle, which finds its manifestation in human anatomy. The body is a moving geography.

In our performance here also, the body is the tool – with every emotion, idea, liquid in it, carrying us to that level of madness and ecstasy where we find the freedom of expression as artists who hold the role of the Shaman nowadays.



Cristian Rigman in *The Quest*, credits Nicu Cherciu

You are one of those artists who push the boundaries of performance art. What are the boundaries that The Quest explores and what has been the biggest challenge the team has faced on this journey?

The heaviness of existence as a human being living in and feeling responsible for today's world. I think that can be the concept of a lifetime, as well as a struggle, for an artist to find their motivation to create.

Music is essential to The Quest. How did you approach the process of composing for the performance?

Nothing had been composed, but everything was improvised by the performers during the rehearsal process. That makes the work even more precious, since everyone found or brought their own voice in(to) it. Sometimes it resonates with a Shaman drum, sometimes with a trumpet or guitar, and continually with the "vocals" of human anatomy. For every musical fragment

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or song we have, I had created the vocal part or melody beforehand, but everything was then transformed and developed by the performers. We have no single document to leave behind for the compositions. Only the performers have them in their minds and hearts. That is precious.

What would you hope the audience will be thinking about when they leave?

I believe that the curtain quality of the performance will make the audience enjoy what they hear and see. However, our concept, with every emotional and physical obstacle we bring forth, the transformation of the performers – which will happen live every time, again and again, in front of the audience – will add another unique and unexpected quality, which will encourage the audience to think about what lies beyond.



Mihnea Blidariu, Radu Dogaru, Anca Hanu, Diana Ioana Licu, Romina Merei, Mihai-Florian Nițu, Cristian Rigman, Sânziana Tarța in *The Quest*, credits Nicu Cherciu.

Note: The interview has been edited for clarity.
March 2023

PERFORMANCE AND BOOK REVIEWS

Retrouver le théâtre japonais dans l'expérience artistique et l'enseignement théâtral contemporain en Roumanie

Le Festival International de Théâtre de Sibiu, 29e édition 2022

On pourrait se demander si dans tout cet amalgame scénique contemporain de « performances » hybrides, d'insertions VR, d'utilisation de l'intelligence artificielle, de projections bi- et tridimensionnelles, de technologisation et numérisation du corps humain et post-humain dans les arts du spectacle, le théâtre oriental traditionnel parle encore à quelqu'un ; si dans ce monde, où la vitesse est devenue règle et l'arrêt, comme le silence, déconcerte et fait peur, il y a encore une place pour la lenteur énigmatique des mythes et des , pour la suspension du temps quotidien dans le son des tambours qui rythment une sacralité oubliée.

Le potpourri culturel au sein duquel nous vivons permettrait plusieurs réponses, tout aussi valides les unes que les autres, puisqu'en Europe, heureusement, chaque individu a le droit de choisir ce qu'il aime et d'apprécier ce qui fait du sens pour lui. Mais au-delà de cette pluralité très riche, la tendance générale plaide en faveur d'un théâtre des effets spectaculaires ou d'un théâtre très engagé dans les problèmes sociaux et politiques contemporains. En un mot, je dirais, d'un théâtre non pas nécessairement d'agitation, mais qui s'agite surtout extérieurement. Or, le théâtre oriental est tout le contraire de l'agitation extérieure. C'est le rythme soutenu des battements d'un cœur éternel, qui se laisse engager lui aussi dans des courses, des voyages, des tempêtes, de véritables batailles mais pour revenir toujours à son pas équilibré, à cette monotonie fondamentale qui redonne au sol la stabilité et à l'air l'impondérabilité qui leur



sont propres, afin de circonscrire l'humain dans sa véritable nature. Mais l'être humain a besoin d'expériences contraires pour comprendre le complémentaire et, surtout, il a besoin d'une alternance saine qui l'aide à retrouver ce qu'il a peur d'oublier.

Ainsi, l'année dernière, après deux ans de pandémie, portes fermées, visages décolorés par les écrans, voix modifiées par les réseaux téléphoniques, conférences par Zoom, Google meet ou Microsoft Teams, relations à distance, après deux ans de théâtre filmé et de salles gardées vides, l'été 2022, à Sibiu, nous a permis de retrouver la magie d'un festival qui a su combler le désir de ressentir à nouveau l'énergie bénéfique des rassemblements culturels, des rencontres théâtrales, des dialogues face-à-face, les applaudissements des salles pleines et des places publiques où la curiosité et le plaisir esthétique des spectateurs-passants se mêlaient à la joie des enfants qui découvraient masques, costumes, danses et acrobaties spectaculaires. Mais ce n'est pas sur la variété des spectacles, sur l'offre culturelle de très bonne qualité que j'insisterai, mais sur la présence exceptionnelle de l'art japonais dans le cadre de cette 19^{ème} édition de ce festival international, qui a créé ainsi la possibilité d'une ouverture d'esprit et d'un enrichissement implicite d'humanité et de sensibilité de tous ceux qui ont ouvert les portes et ont mis le pied dans les trois espaces privilégiés qu'ont été l'Église évangélique St Jean, le Centre d'information touristique de l'Hôtel de Ville et le Musée Brukenthal.

Les deux expositions visitées et le spectacle de Théâtre Nô vu pendant la première journée de festival ont suffi pour me faire retrouver l'énergie vitale dont j'avais besoin. Ce fut un réel ressourcement. La chance a fait que je sois arrivée juste avant le commencement du spectacle ; deux minutes plus tard et l'entrée aurait été impossible, non pas seulement parce que toutes les places disponibles dans l'église étaient occupées, mais aussi parce que très probablement une entrée tardive aurait été perçue comme sacrilège et la garde montée au portail par le staff japonais le montrait bien.

La présence silencieuse des fidèles spectateurs dans les stalles de l'église anticipait la sacralité de l'événement théâtral arrivé de l'autre bout du monde, de l'Orient lointain, d'un Japon qui trouvait dans cette église chrétienne l'espace parfait de partage des valeurs humaines et artistiques communes. *Les Voix du*

Théâtre Nô, un spectacle conçu spécialement de manière synthétique pour l'Occident, par les maîtres du Théâtre Nô Yamamoto, a réussi à partager avec nous une histoire nourrie de la mythologie et des croyances bouddhistes, pleine de poésie et d'enseignements profonds, allant au-delà de toute frontière.



Fig. 1: Entrée du protagoniste, *Les Voix du Théâtre Nô*,
Église Réformée Sait Jean, Sibiu, 24.06.2022¹

¹ Toutes les photographies ont été prises par moi.

Nous n'avons pas les mêmes dieux et démons, ni les mêmes conventions sociales ou la même philosophie de l'existence, mais quand il en est de l'amour et de la haine, de la générosité et de la trahison, de la cruauté et de la charité, de la vengeance et du pardon, l'art du théâtre passe outre toute barrière du concret réaliste et civil, pour parler le langage de l'éternelle poésie et de l'éternel humain. Sans comprendre la langue japonaise, la « musique de la voix » du protagoniste, pour citer Jean-Jacques Lemêtre, soutenue par les intonations vocales d'un des musiciens percussionnistes, les rythmes, les lignes mélodiques et la gestuelle précise tranchant l'air et entourant le masque d'une expression fondamentale si puissante, donnaient corps à une énergie d'un symbolisme envoûtant et déconcertant à la fois.



Fig. 2: Un des panneaux de l'exposition *Les Visages du Théâtre Nô*, 25.06.2022

J'ai cru reconnaître au cours de la représentation des passages proches de la musique du Moyen Âge, puis des passages étonnamment contemporains, puis à nouveau des sonorités plus proches de ce que connaissais de la musique du Japon. Cela m'a intriguée et transportée successivement dans des dizaines d'espaces-temps différents. C'était pour la première fois que j'assistais à un échantillon de spectacle Nô, n'étant familiarisée qu'avec des enregistrements vidéo, et, bien qu'ayant déjà vu une représentation de Kyogen invitée par le Théâtre du Soleil à la Cartoucherie il y a plus de dix ans déjà, cette nouvelle expérience théâtrale m'a apporté une joie spéciale, en réitérant dans mon esprit les arguments des grands penseurs du théâtre moderne du XXème siècle en la faveur du théâtre oriental comme source d'inspiration et de revitalisation de la scène européenne. A la fin de la représentation je me suis attardée quelques minutes à discuter avec le compositeur Vasile Şirli la richesse musicale qui nous avait été offerte par l'ensemble des musiciens dirigées par Akihiro Yamamoto². En effet, mon oreille ne m'était pas trompée et la surprenante modernité de cette musique ancienne m'a été confirmée par un professionnel.

Après cette solennelle entrée dans le tourbillon du festival de Sibiu, l'exposition de masques Nô, apportée du Japon par ce même Yamamoto Noh Theatre, complétait visuellement ce que la représentation fournissait comme support et environnement sonore à l'imagination théâtrale des spectateurs roumains. *Les Visages du Théâtre Nô*, titre bien choisi pour l'ensemble de ces quarante visages en bois laqué, les uns plus expressifs que les autres, ouvrait l'horizon de nos attentes, tout en circonscrivant chaque type de personnage, avec de précieuses explication sous chaque masque. Des figures de jeunes femmes (comme Dei-gan), jeunes hommes ou divinités masculines (Kantan Otoko), vieillards heureux (Okina), démons (Hannya), esprits, monstres (Shikami) ou animaux tels que le renard Kitsune.

² La distribution complète: Akihiro Yamamoto, Motonori Umewaka, Kazuo Imamura, Yoshiaki Yamamoto, Noriyuki Moriya, Tomohide Furuta, Atsushi Saito.



Fig. 3: *Shishi-guchi*, créature mythique léonine qui éloigne les mauvais esprits et qui ressemble à Buddha lorsqu'il prononce la vérité sacrée



Fig. 4: *Ko-beshimi*, masque de démon et esprits infernaux. Considérée comme ayant une expression tendue et féroce

Ce qui me semble le plus intrigant et fascinant concernant ces masques, c'est que, sans les détails explicatifs de l'utilisation et du parcours de chaque masque, il est très facile, en tant qu'Européen, de se tromper dans l'interprétation et dans l'association des lignes de certains visages à des émotions et à des traits de caractère qui s'avèrent être souvent opposés aux suppositions initiales. Il en est ainsi par exemple pour le masque *Shishi-guchi* (fig. 3) qui peut nous paraître effrayant mais s'avère être positif, ou pour *Ko-beshimi* (fig. 4), qui peut nous sembler à la rigueur comique mais se révèle féroce et démoniaque. En effet, l'expérience d'une telle exposition peut être révélatrice si le spectateur novice prend son temps pour lire attentivement les indications et pour promener son regard autour du masque afin de surprendre son expressivité multiple et changeante en fonction de l'angle du regard (correspondant aux nuances données par l'inclinaison de la tête qui porte le masque pendant les représentations). Pourtant, malheureusement, nombreux sont ceux qui passent sans s'en apercevoir et se limitent à l'admiration superficielle d'une beauté décorative et tout au plus exotique.

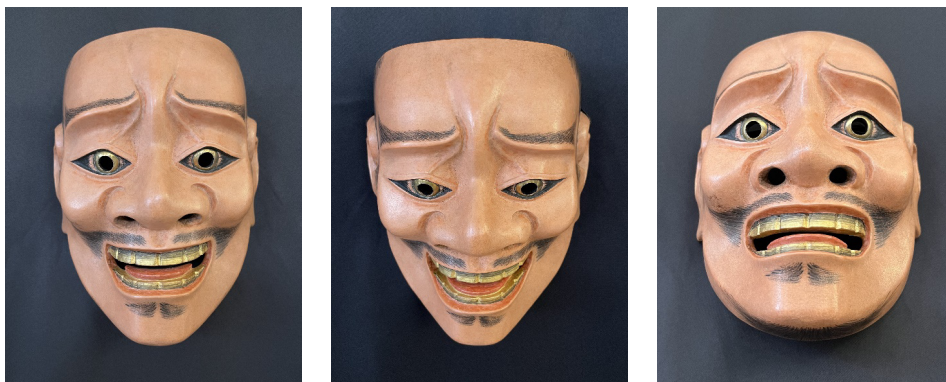


Fig. 5: *Taka*, le gardien des mers, même masque vu de trois angles différents

Non loin de l'Hôtel de Ville, le Musée Brukenthal ouvrait ses portes sur deux expositions qui complétaient le panorama de la très belle collection permanente : *Goya et Dali, le maléfice de la guerre*, qui réunissait, par paires mises en miroir, des gravures de Goya et leurs réinterprétations par son compatriote surréaliste, et *Voyages dans les estampes Meiji*, qui présentait l'impressionnante collection privée de George Șerban, ouverte au public à l'occasion de l'anniversaire de l'empereur du Japon. Le festival de théâtre de Sibiu a très bien su intégrer ces deux expositions et ce qui a suscité le plus d'intérêt pour moi, c'est la théâtralité très forte, misant sur le grotesque, le jeu du double et du caché-montré, dans les gravures européennes, face à une théâtralité très différente, plus conventionnelle peut-être, mais aussi plus subtile, musicale et poétique, qui revêt même la violence guerrière d'une mise en scène de soi relevant d'un esthétisme recherché. D'ailleurs, ces estampes qui proviennent justement de la période de transition d'une société encore féodale vers le Japon moderne, à la fin du XIXème siècle, se retrouvent, pour le spectateur contemporain, dans ce même « entre-deux » (si bien défini par Georges Banu et si cher à son approche du théâtre), que le spectacle Nô dans l'église protestante et l'exposition des masques traditionnels dans l'espace moderne du hall de l'Hôtel de ville.

Ce sentiment très puissant d'une théâtralité pleine de vitalité, qui fraie son chemin à travers les âges et les différentes cultures, m'a accompagnée pendant le court, mais riche séjour au festival de Sibiu à l'été 2022. Et j'ai eu aussi la confirmation que l'Extrême Orient reste une source riche de sens pour l'expérience spectatorielle contemporaine, comme pour la pratique de l'art du théâtre, puisque, en cette même fin d'année universitaire, un collègue acteur, enseignant à la Faculté de Théâtre et Film de Cluj-Napoca, Cătălin Codreanu, a soutenu une Thèse de doctorat dédiée justement à l'utilisation des techniques japonaises dans l'enseignement de l'art de l'acteur en Roumanie: *L'influence du théâtre japonais Nô sur les méthodes et les techniques d'entraînement dans l'art de l'acteur*. Techniques qu'il utilise avec les étudiants depuis quelques années avec de très bons résultats, dans les recherches de perfectionnement de la maîtrise corporelle dans l'acte scénique aussi bien que dans la construction de la relation avec le masque dans le théâtre de convention. Ce qui est certain, c'est que l'interculturalité³ enrichit et nuance de manière incontestable l'art de l'acteur européen contemporain, de même que le travail avec le masque, fût-il de théâtre Nô, Kyogen, ou de Commedia dell'arte, qui reste fondamental pour la découverte de l'expressivité du corps en scène et de l'approfondissement de la compréhension de la valeur théâtrale, non-réaliste du geste signifiant dans la construction d'un personnage⁴.

Que dire d'autre ? L'expérience du théâtre oriental me semble plus que nécessaire aujourd'hui, pour l'acteur en formation aussi bien que pour le spectateur. Le festival de Sibiu, a réussi une nouvelle fois à poser une belle pierre à la fondation de cette relation vitale entre les cultures, les peuples et les théâtres du monde en Roumanie.

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³ Voir "Paradigms of education in the art of acting", *Studia UBB Dramatica*, LXVII, 2 (2022): 9-28.

⁴ Voir Filip Odangiu, "Saving the mask", *Studia UBB Dramatica*, LXVII, 1 (2022): 165-188.

A Digital Interactive Exhibition from the Inside Out

Performance Review: *Human Presence in a Digital World* showcase by the Digital Interactive Arts Master Program and the Performing Arts and Film Master Program, Faculty of Theatre and Television, Babeş-Bolyai University. Coordinators: Professor Rodica Mocan and Cristina Pop-Tiron. Central Shopping Center (3 February 2023)

On a particular Friday evening, 3 February 2023, people were invited to enjoy, live and play at the event called *Human Presence in a Digital World*, designed by students belonging to two master programs of the Faculty of Theatre and Film: The Digital Interactive Arts and the Performing Arts and Film. The students and their professors designed two interactive digital performances, as results of one of their courses. For these, the students with different backgrounds came together and joined their skills, their ideas and their interest in order to create a live performance incorporating digital elements. Friends, family, acquaintances and digital arts enthusiasts arrived at the Central Shopping Center, the 4th floor, starting from 19:00. The space hosts the filming studio of the faculty, so it was the right place for this event. People walked in through a long, carpeted hallway to find on their left a large space with chairs. The entire floor has very large windows to see and enjoy the view of the city at night. After waiting a few minutes for the audience to gather, they were informed about the schedule: the first performance, called *Anxiety*, started at 19:30 and the second, called *Jungle Machine*, started twenty minutes later.





Fig. 1: Image from the *Anxiety* performance (copyright Virgil Puia, 2023)

Anxiety was an interactive performance that took place in a large open space, as the audience was sitting down and was delivered a short introduction. In front of the wall, opposite to the spectators, there was a projector on the floor, about one meter away. The performer was standing against the wall, in line with the projection. The visuals simulated rain, pouring down on the performer. A woman's voice, one of the team members, started talking. It was as if she was sharing her personal experience, her feelings and sensations in the moments of her life when anxiety is manifesting. Her tone was slow, sometimes as if it was hard to bring out the words. While she was talking, the performer was trying to escape the rain, moving from left to right, down, towards the public and back. But whatever he did, the rain was following him, with no escape from it.

This production intended to replicate feelings of anguish, nervousness, unease, feelings anyone has felt at some point in their lives. The pouring rain can lead to significations of pain, sadness, distress, depression. *Anxiety* was meant as a proposed conversation between the human and the digital, without taking a precise form, as the conversation gets its shape from the movement of the performers. When the performance ended ten minutes later, the artists, namely Virgil Puiac, Ioana Hanchevici, Elvis Petrea and Elena Petrea were rewarded with appreciation and applause. The topic chosen is often present in many people's lives, even if only a few can talk about it. The audience took their time to congratulate and discuss with the artists, just enough before the second performance started.



Fig. 2: Image from the *Jungle Machine* performance (copyright Virgil Puiac, 2023)

Jungle Machine was set up in the film and photography studio, further down the hallway. The room was spacious, with the floor and ceiling painted in black, with foam texture on the walls. The feeling of spaciousness was

given by the fact that the room was empty, except for a table in the middle, with a spotlight shining on it from the top. On the left and right sides of the table there were two tall plants, and on the table there were: an apple, a banana, a bottle, a spoon, a pineapple, a mango, a knife, a metal bowl, a red pepper, a moka, and an orange. Quite an intriguing table for a performance. Hidden under the table, the projector was set up to show the visuals on the wall in front of the table, opposite the entrance.

The artists Peter Leidl, Gergely Matyas and Marta Winkler were all involved in the performance. Once they started, the set-up looked like a musician's desk, or a piano, but one with metal objects and fruits. By touching the objects and fruits, the performers started to *play* this peculiar instrument, they were creating music. In a different approach from the first performance, in *Jungle Machine* the interaction was tactile, each object on the table had a sound or melody assigned to it, as well as elements for the interactive visual on the wall. The performance also lasted about ten minutes, during which the time the space gave the sense of an audio-visual performance. Here, the spectators were standing, so they could feel free to move and dance to the jungle rhythms they were listening to. The performers knew well which objects to touch and when to do so, as well as for how long, in order to create the musical rhythm they intended. At the end, the artists were also rewarded with appreciation and applause, along with a generous dose of curiosity.

The spaces of both performances changed their status to interactive installations, where the public could experience them, play in the digital rain and explore the fruits to discover the music. This was one interesting thing that both performances and their artists did at the end of the shows. Some people went back to the first room, in the space of *Anxiety*, to play and interact with the chasing rain. They were also taking pictures with the beautiful aesthetic of the pouring rain, maybe even forgetting the intended meaning behind it. In the second room, in the space of the *Jungle Machine*, the people were having great fun becoming musicians themselves. The artists were there to explain the mechanics of the installation and the audience was interested in exploring what the installation had in store for them. It was a pleasant sight to see people, with and without musical knowledge, playing this fruit instrument and listening to the creation of their music.

The *Human Presence in Digital World* showcase stands a balanced bond of deep feelings expressed through digital elements and human presence, together with basic needs for movement and rhythms, driven by curiosity and discovery. The artists created two projects that impacted the audience in different ways. Digital interactive performances are valuable productions that emphasize both the digital and aesthetic tools, in the scope of exploring the relevance of the human presence in conveying a meaningful experience.

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