Directions, Targets and Interrogations in Contemporary Theatre Studies

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Directions, Targets and Interrogations
in Contemporary Theatre Studies

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CONTENT/ SOMMAIRE

MISCELLANEA

PERFORMANCE AND BOOK REVIEWS

Foreword

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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STUDIES AND ARTICLES

Le masque comme sujet : la matérialité du masque, entre forme, usage et savoir-faire

Candice MOISE[*]

Abstract: The paper *The Mask as Subject: the Materiality of the Mask, between Form, Use, and Craftsmanship* examines the object mask as a subject, utilised in both live performance and traditional European festivals. The analysis focuses on the ergonomics of masks and their relationship to the body, distinguishing between different types of wear and their expressive implications. The article explores the treatment of eye and mouth openings, revealing the technical choices that determine the character's expression. An analysis of materials and manufacturing methods reveals a dichotomy between the preservation of traditional skills and the pursuit of technical innovation. This material approach to the mask, which extends beyond the conventional symbolic analyses, facilitates an understanding of how communities engage in the negotiation of their relationship with tradition. In this regard, the mask assumes the role of a mediator between permanence and change, between the physical body and its representation.

Keywords: Theatrical mask, traditional mask, Mask-making, European festivals, Performance artifacts, Craft knowledge, Object-centred methodology

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Ce texte vise à étudier le masque en tant qu'objet et savoir-faire quand il est fabriqué dans l'objectif d'être porté pour devenir un personnage en contexte festif et spectaculaire[1]. Les réflexions sont issues de mes recherches sur les masques dans les fêtes traditionnelles d'Europe, mais aussi de ma pratique comme facteure de masques de scène côtoyant également d'autres artisans de masques. Mes études actuelles portent sur une cinquantaine de fêtes masquées de quatorze pays d'Europe[2], examinant principalement les techniques de fabrication et les formes générales des masques traditionnels, plutôt que leur symbolique ou leur signification culturelle. Par ailleurs, elles permettent de comparer les pratiques observées dans le contexte festif et populaire avec ma connaissance professionnelle des modalités de fabrication de masques dans le spectacle vivant. Je propose donc ici de poser le masque matériel comme sujet: comment le considérer, comprendre sa relation intime avec le porteur, et comment l'artisan gère ses spécificités formelles, techniques, et, *in fine*, esthétiques.

Le contexte du masque

Si l'on doit donner un symbole à l'art dramatique, c'est généralement au masque, et plus précisément aux deux masques de comédie et tragédie que l'on pense. Bien plus qu'un simple accessoire de scène, ce petit objet en forme de visage en devient l'emblème. Pour le comédien qui maîtrise ce travail très spécifique du jeu masqué, le masque s'assimile à son autre visage, une part intime, ou plutôt « extime », car dédiée à une perception de son personnage à l'extérieur. Dans les fêtes et carnavals, le masque par sa force visuelle toute particulière devient, lui aussi, bien souvent, l'image iconique d'une localité, que ce soit pour les proches de la fête souvent très attachés à leurs personnages, et aussi largement exploitée par les offices et guides de

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[1] On nomme également masque des objets à but décoratif, faits dans des matériaux et des proportions ne les rendant pas forcément utilisables, les masques funéraires non portés par des êtres vivants, les mascarons sculptés sur les architectures, et autres représentations de masques qui ne sont pas concernés par les considérations de cet article.

[2] France, Espagne, Portugal, Angleterre, Belgique, Allemagne, Suisse, Autriche, Pologne, Lituanie, Roumanie, Grèce, Slovénie, Italie.

tourisme. Élément à forme de visage, placé sur un corps bien vivant, il crée une empathie pour le spectateur mêlé à l'étrangeté de cet être mouvant, mais à la plastique faciale figée. Il peut impressionner, ou sublimer, laissant rarement indifférent. Et pourtant, il reste fort peu étudié, dans le domaine européen, comme objet, ni comme savoir-faire.

Toute étude définit ses contours. Pour mon travail de recherche, en pensant mes terrains de fêtes masquées, la définition qui s'est imposée pour qualifier mon sujet était et reste : le masque comme objet (tenu ou non sur le visage) formant la tête d'un personnage costumé lequel est identifié (il a un nom) et reconnaissable comme tel. Le personnage, dans ce contexte, se produit sous la même apparence, dans un scénario équivalent avec un comportement similaire chaque année (ou exceptionnellement à un autre rythme régulier) lors d'une période bien définie. Cette définition exclut, de fait, les masques créés sur des thématiques différentes à chaque carnaval, Halloween, ou bal masqué, et ceux librement choisis ou construits par chacun.e, à sa propre fantaisie, et qui ne demeurent pas moins essentiels aux carnavals et autres festivités. La recherche inclut toutefois des masques nouvellement imaginés pour des fêtes qu'elles soient existantes, récemment créées ou recréées. La notion de tradition, ici, n'est pas liée à l'ancienneté, mais à une intention de reproductibilité périodique de la fête, et donc, de ses personnages.

Quant au choix de l'objet masque, il pourrait sembler un peu restrictif. Dans les festivités locales, le personnage est central, et conçu comme un tout indissociable. Parmi tous les éléments qui constituent la panoplie du personnage, la partie masque n'est pas forcément très valorisée. Pourtant, dans la majorité des cas observés, la personne qui fabrique la partie visage du masque n'est pas la même que celle qui conçoit les costumes, ou d'autres accessoires, conférant une singularité à cet élément. Le masque comme visage artificiel qui sert de face au personnage ou en symbolise l'incarnation reste donc ici le sujet.

Dans les fêtes, le personnage qualifie l'ensemble porté de tous les éléments de costume, masque, coiffe, accessoires (ornementaux et sonores) et attribut (porté à la main). Il est généralement considéré comme un tout non dissociable. Dans un contexte de spectacle vivant, le personnage peut n'exister que pour une œuvre donnée dans une mise en scène donnée. Il n'en revient pas moins à chaque représentation à l'identique. La tradition de la commedia

dell'arte a également familiarisé les scènes avec des personnages récurrents et facilement identifiables. Le masque ne qualifie en général au théâtre que la partie face ou tête du personnage. Dans les fêtes comme au théâtre, chaque personnage possède son registre, voire son scénario: il a une manière de bouger, une manière de parler avec une voix modifiée ou son registre de sons non humains tels que cris et grognements, et il suit les actes d'une dramaturgie définie. Dans les fêtes, le personnage n'a habituellement de raison d'être que par la présence de personnes non masquées, dans leur tenue quotidienne, avec lesquelles il interagit. Les spectateurs, non impliqués dans le jeu, existent toutefois, a fortiori dans les lieux où le tourisme est très présent.

Pour qualifier les événements qui mettent en présence les masques, j'utilise par défaut le terme fête, suffisamment neutre pour couvrir la diversité des occasions de sorties de masques. Outre de nombreuses fêtes assimilables à des carnavals (quelle qu'en soit la date), mon corpus inclut des fêtes commémoratives et religieuses (comme Pâques, la Saint-Jean, ou le Corpus Christi), dont tout ou partie des actes, honorifiques ou édifiants, échappent à la conception du carnavalesque, tel que l'a défini Bakhtine[3] dans les années 1960 : inversions hiérarchiques, corps grotesque, subversion par le rire et la parodie.

Le masque comme usage : spécificités et implications

Le masque impose à son porteur un ensemble de contraintes et possibilités qui déterminent fondamentalement l'expressivité du personnage incarné. L'objet se conçoit en fonction de l'interprète et de ses futures actions. En tant qu'élément, souvent rigide, destiné à être posé directement sur le corps, il doit s'adapter aux volumes et aux mouvements de celui-ci. Il dissimule des parties essentielles à l'exercice des sens du porteur (vue, ouïe, odorat et goût) et ses fonctions vitales et expressives (respiration, communications orale et faciale). Il doit parfois aussi être pensé pour permettre l'accès aux boissons et nourritures dans le cas où la dramaturgie scénique ou festive le nécessiterait. Au-delà du travail esthétique, le fabricant de ces objets est par conséquent confronté à divers défis fonctionnels.

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[3] Mikhaïl Bakhtine, *L'œuvre de François Rabelais et la culture populaire au Moyen Âge et sous la Renaissance*. traduit par Andrée Robel, (Paris : Gallimard, 1970).

Un masque est un dispositif à deux visages: il offre au monde une fausse face, mais aussi, en le retournant, son autre visage en creux. L'intérieur d'un masque doit offrir un espace adapté à la morphologie de la tête qu'il recouvre, ce qui détermine sa portabilité, son confort, mais contraint certains choix esthétiques dans leurs volumes et proportions qui ne doivent pas entrer en conflit avec la tête réelle qui y prend place.

Les facteurs de masques de scène moulent généralement le visage du.de la comédien.ne pour en faire une reproduction en plâtre, pour une bonne adaptation ergonomique, fonctionnelle, et, le cas échéant, assurer une continuité maîtrisée entre la partie artificielle et les parties naturelles du visage. Pour l'usage scénique, dans la plupart des cas, le masque se crée sur mesure, se conçoit comme un outil de travail optimisé et personnalisé pour une œuvre précise[4].

En revanche, dans les fêtes traditionnelles, je n'ai jamais observé de pratique de moulage de visage pour servir de base. Les masques sont initialement fabriqués selon le modèle habituel que l'on adapte ensuite, si nécessaire, à la tête de celui qui le portera. Les masques en bois sont ainsi retaillés à l'intérieur pour le confort de son propriétaire. Les masques de grande taille nécessitent aussi des modalités d'attache pour moduler la position et le confort. C'est le cas à Bâle, en Suisse, ou les masques de la Fasnacht sont construits sur une calotte ou un casque de chantier avec un dispositif d'orientation du masque pour assurer confort, visibilité voire placement du fifre pour celleux qui en jouent. Plus surprenant, à Naoussa, au nord de la Grèce, les masques sont composés de cire d'abeille, tous moulés sur une même forme en positif. Le porteur est amené à mettre son nouveau masque plusieurs heures, en l'assouplissant de la chaleur de sa peau et de sa respiration puis l'aspirant pour le déformer et qu'il prenne bien place sur sa face. Le matériau implique le mode d'adaptation, plaçant ici cet objet d'apparence épaisse et rigide du côté des matériaux souples.

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[4] Les masques archétypaux comme les personnages de commedia dell'arte peuvent parfois être conçus par le.a facteur.e de masques et choisis et essayés par celui ou celle qui veut jouer le rôle pour vérifier l'adéquation. Les masques pédagogiques, comme les masques neutres, entre autres, sont par définition destinés à de nombreuxes comédien.nes et ne rentrent pas dans cette catégorie du *sur mesure*.

Les fêtes traditionnelles conçoivent les visages de leurs personnages, de manière standardisée. Dans les fêtes aux masques nombreux il peut exister différentes tailles, notamment pour les enfants. Il n'est pas rare que les masques passent de tête en tête s'ils sont propriété d'une localité ou d'un groupe. Quand chacun possède son propre masque, celui-ci peut se revendre ou se transmettre dans la famille. Un interlocuteur à Verín, en Espagne, me disait que certains pouvaient posséder successivement jusqu'à cinq masques dans une vie pour des raisons de dimension, en fonction de son âge (on le porte même enfant et adolescent) et des variations de corpulence de la vie adulte.

Une nécessaire recherche de points d'appui non douloureux sur le pourtour du visage permet, même en cas de mouvements de bouche et des yeux, de garder le masque stable. Au-delà des ajustements prévus, des tissus, mousses ou autres matières douces peuvent être appliquées dans l'objet pour le maintenir solidement en place. Plus le masque est volumineux ou lourd, plus les attaches doivent être solides et correctement réparties. Dans le spectacle vivant, avec un masque léger et bien conçu, la bande élastique reste la fixation la plus courante, avec ou sans système d'ajustage de la longueur, tandis que les fêtes, aux masques parfois très pesants, auront tendance à utiliser des attaches rigides telles que lacets ou lanières de cuir fermées avec boucle de ceinture par exemple.

La relation entre l'artefact et le corps peut définir plusieurs catégories de masques. Le **masque facial** s'appose directement sur l'avant du visage, conservant généralement des proportions proches de la tête humaine. Le **masque heaume** englobe le crâne à la manière d'un casque, offrant davantage de possibilités pour modifier la silhouette générale de la tête et pour supporter des coiffes volumineuses. Si la matière est souple, on parle plutôt de **masque cagoule**. L'adaptabilité du matériau permet alors une éventuelle mobilité perceptible du visage. Le **cimier** déporte la face du masque au-dessus de la tête laquelle reste généralement dissimulée. Le cimier peut être fixé sur la tête, ou présenté en hauteur grâce à un bâton tenu à la main, comme pour chèvres ou cerfs dans les danses de Nouvel An en Roumanie, ou d'autres dispositifs, telle une tige fixée sur un sac à dos, comme aperçu pour un personnage de grue à Kurtuvenaï en Lituanie. Ce déplacement vertical du visage fictif

produit un effet de grandissement significatif, et exige un jeu corporel adapté proche de la manipulation de marionnette.

Plus rares, les **masques corporels** déplacent la partie visage sur une autre partie du corps créant une reconfiguration de l'anatomie perçue. Il peut aussi amplifier ou déformer la partie du corps où il se trouve sans représenter un visage (ventre ou fesses factices par exemple). À la limite du masque corporel, mais tendant plutôt vers l'accessoire symbolique, se trouvent également des modalités de port du masque facial hors visage. C'est le cas par exemple du groupe de Wuescht à Villingen en Allemagne qui défile avec un masque, similaire à ceux d'autres personnages locaux (Narro), mais tenu à la main, encore appuyé sur le crâne comme s'ils venaient de le relever, ou posé en casquette sur la tête. La raison semble ironique envers les Narro d'aspect noble. Cette singularité se retrouve aussi dans d'autres fêtes, comme en Italie chez les Marascóns, au Val di Fassa qui tiennent leur masque à la main, ou le Caporabballo à Montemarano qui le porte sur le cône de sa coiffe. L'aspect symbolique du masque importe alors davantage que l'illusion d'un personnage.

Fig 1: Groupe de Wuescht défilant à Villingen, Allemagne pour le Fasnet (Période de carnaval). Le masque n'est jamais posé sur le visage, mais sur la tête ou à la main. Photographie Candice Moise, 2017.

Enfin, les **structures portées** offrent des volumes importants, recouvrant partiellement le corps qui les placent la limite du domaine du masque et de la marionnette habitée, du géant processionnaire voire du char de défilé. Un cas particulier de ces structures portables est le **personnage double**: le cheval jupon (cheval factice porté à la taille de celui qui en apparait comme son cavalier), et les vieilles femmes portant un homme dans leur hotte, notamment au nord de l'Italie et en Slovénie (le porteur apparait dans la hotte de l'effigie de la vieille femme factice devant lui). Dans les fêtes à déambulation, on constate que des personnages portent souvent de hautes **coiffes** au-dessus de la tête. Celles-ci complètent ce paysage du masque par des éléments à valeur ornementale, quasi signalétique, voire narrative en présentant de scènes sculptées ou peintes dont la teneur peut l'emporter, en sens, sur l'aspect du personnage lui-même.

Fig 2: Ta koševa (le panier), personnage double de la Laufarija de Cerkno, Slovénie. Photographie: Candice Moise, 2016.

Certains masques se trouvent entre plusieurs catégories. Ainsi distinguer si une grosse tête tient du heaume volumineux ou d'une structure portée en forme de visage reste subjectif. Certaines logent la tête du porteur dans leur cou ou dans le torse du personnage (c'est le cas par exemple à Nice, en France) de sorte qu'elles fonctionnent comme de volumineux cimiers. En catalogne, les grosses têtes sans cou sont portées sur les épaules et paraissent proportionnellement avoir des corps très petits ce qui leur vaut le nom de « nains ».

Le principal enjeu de ces choix de mode de portage et de proportions reste bien entendu la constitution d'un personnage surprenant, inhabituel, et pourtant crédible. Le masque désoriente en jouant du déplacement de sens, d'effet visuel et de proportions. Cette approche des volumes et portages ne dissocie pas la forme visible du masque de son rapport intime au corps du porteur, ce dialogue déterminant autant les techniques mises en œuvre que le champ expressif du personnage. Toutefois, la manière dont la formee joue de la part de l'humain de la part de matière détermine aussi une esthétique et la conception du rôle même du masque.

Le masque comme forme : un jeu de vides et de pleins

Pour un masque sur le visage, le degré et la localisation de la couverture du visage par le masque détermine le type de jeu ou la recherche esthétique, et par conséquent la manière de considérer le personnage. Le **masque entier** couvre la totalité du visage. Il peut être facial ou en heaume, aligné à la tête, voire déporté. Dans ce cas, le masque fait visage. Cette forme s'avère, de loin, la plus répandue dans mon corpus, témoignant d'une recherche d'anonymat quasi complet, ainsi que celle d'une altérité radicale du personnage. Sur scène, il est également prisé, et s'associe alors avec un jeu particulier, probablement plus hiératique, du fait de l'expression plus fixe, ou appelant au mime, surtout lorsque la bouche reste close et l'expression orale limitée.

Les formes partielles se déclinent en plusieurs variantes: le **demi-masque** couvre la partie supérieure du visage (front, yeux, joues, nez), dégageant la bouche pour la parole. C'est la forme la plus commune au théâtre, si celui-ci est parlant. En contexte festif, il est également lié à un besoin de libérer le bas du visage, mais, tel que constaté, davantage pour jouer d'un instrument de musique que pour la parole. Il s'utilise beaucoup pour les personnages issus

de la commedia dell'arte, notamment Arlequin qui est aussi devenu un personnage récurrent traditionnel, aperçu par exemple à La Louvière, dans la région de Binche, en Belgique, où il est réservé à des groupes d'enfants. On pourrait toutefois envisager des demi-masques localisés en partie inférieure du visage (nez, bouche, menton, mâchoire), mettant l'accent sur le regard, ou utilisant les déformations du bas du visage pour changer radicalement celui-ci par exemple en museau d'un animal. Le cas reste rare, et, dans des festivités, se limite à des foulards dissimulant le bas du visage ou des fausses barbes.

Le **quart de masque** présente une couverture de la face encore plus limitée, se concentrant sur des zones spécifiques comme le front et le nez, ou le nez et les joues. Il permet une expressivité accrue du visage, dont les parties les plus mobiles restent visibles. Le quart de masque s'emploie aisément dans le spectacle vivant, mais très peu présent dans les fêtes. Une variante du quart de masque se situe seulement sur la zone oculaire. Cette partie peut être sculptée, mais si elle apparait sans expressivité, simple morceau d'étoffe ou de carton, elle est nommée **loup ou domino.** Forme particulièrement minimaliste, elle est principalement associée aux bals masqués aristocratiques dès la renaissance puis bourgeois, après la Révolution française. Le loup est également dans la culture populaire du XXe siècle associé au héros, ou superhéros dont il symbolise l'anonymat (portant bien partiel), offrant une autre possibilité de déguisement masqué dans les carnavals où le costume est libre à chacun. On trouve quelques occurrences de loups dans les traditions où ils sont destinés à des personnages humanisés, parfois dits « beaux » ou « blancs ». Il reste une forme très prisée quand il s'agit d'évoquer le bal masqué aristocratique du passé comme c'est le cas à Venise.

Si l'on restreint encore l'emprise du masque sur le visage, on peut citer « le plus petit masque du monde » tel que le définissait Jacques Lecoq[5], à savoir le **nez** de clown, en l'occurrence, mais aussi toutes sortes d'autres formes de faux-nez. Dans le domaine du spectacle vivant, les appendices nasaux ajoutés peuvent être fixés en place grâce à un élastique discret, à un effet de pince

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[5] Jacques Lecoq (1921-1999). Pédagogue du jeu théâtral français, formé auprès de Jacques Copeau, il se rapproche dans les années d'après guerre de Amleto Sartori pour la création de masques de théâtre et de masques neutres à visée pédagogique. Il élabore un enseignement basé sur l'expressivité du corps du.de la comédien.ne qui utilise de nombreux masques, allant du masque entier au nez de clown.

du nez postiche, mais aussi collé à même la peau, quittant le domaine du masque pour celui de la prothèse du maquilleur d'effets spéciaux. Dans les fêtes, je n'ai pas observé de personnage traditionnel portant seulement un nez. Parmi les déguisements ludiques librement choisis par chacun, le clown reste une figure présente, et donc son nez s'observe régulièrement, sans doute par la liberté d'agir, parler boire qu'il permet contrairement à un masque plus couvrant.

Autre élément isolé pouvant être apposé sur le visage, la **mentonnière** agrandit le bas du visage, ou lui ajoute éventuellement une barbiche. Elle n'est qu'exceptionnellement utilisée seule, mais reste un élément marquant avec un demi ou quart de masque dont elle complète ainsi la physionomie tout en laissant la bouche et la mâchoire libres. Le personnage d'Arlequin, dans le passé, a souvent été représenté avec une mentonnière, en plus de son demi-masque. En contexte de carnaval, les masques des sorcières (*Hexen*) d'Imst au Tyrol, ne couvrent que la région oculaire et nasale, et sont complétés par une **mentonnière proéminente**. Cette configuration permet de laisser visibles les joues masculines des porteurs, des hommes, ce qui, par contraste avec leurs coiffures et costumes féminins, accentue le caractère grotesque du personnage[6]. Ces masques sculptés en bois comportent généralement des attaches souples entre la partie haute et basse, couverte de fourrure, les rapprochant de ce que l'on nomme **masque articulé**. L'articulation principale des masques scéniques (et bien plus rarement festifs) est celle de la mâchoire, permettant au comédien d'ouvrir la bouche de manière visible sous le masque.

Quand le masque n'est pas collé au visage, les mâchoires mobiles constituent également une forme d'animation courante. Les personnages de chèvres de Roumanie, notamment observées à Vorona, dont les têtes sont portées en cimier et tenues à la main, comportent un mécanisme d'animation de la mâchoire permettant de claquer de leur bouche de bois, produisant un bruit particulier qui scande le rythme de la danse et permet divers jeux.

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[6] Pour une analyse du caractère comique et grotesque des masques de sorcières voir : Stefana Pop-Curseu, Ioan Pop-Curseu "The Mask of the Witch: from Ritual to Carnival and Theatre", *Studia UBB Dramatica*, LXV, 1(2020): 17-50.

Fig 3: Hexe (Sorcière), personnage de la Schemenlaufen de Imst, Autriche.
Le masque de bois présente plusieurs parties (œil, nez, menton) reliées par fils ou élastiques, dont celui de la mentonnière est couvert de fourrure.
Photographie Candice Moise, 2020.

La suppression d'une partie de la face du masque permet un vaste répertoire de jeu entre peau humaine et matière sculptée. Cela est à considérer avant tout pour des aspects pratiques et expressifs, nous l'avons vu, mais aussi parfois simplement esthétiques, jouant gratuitement d'asymétrie. Si je n'en ai pas d'exemple dans mon corpus traditionnel, j'ai observé de ces masques dans des défilés de carnavals où les personnes se costument à leur fantaisie. Il s'agissait alors de masques industriels de matière plastique d'inspiration steampunk ou d'éléments d'aspect de dentelle, jouant autant d'asymétrie, plus ou moins échevelée, que de la présence de la peau visible entre les arabesques. Ces derniers masques sont également vendus et portés à Venise par des touristes pour le carnaval, car beaucoup moins coûteux que les masques artisanaux. Ce jeu de maille et de transparence rejoint, d'une certaine

manière, les masques en résille déjà présents sur certains tableaux des XVI et XVIIe siècles comme chez Brueghel fils (fig.4) et qui se déclinent de nos jours en grille métallique fine peinte d'un visage pour, par exemple, la face des Schleicher de Telfs en Autriche, ou celles des Bonitas de Sande en Espagne.

Fig 4: Détail de Pieter II Brueghel (1564-1638), *Le roi boit*, vers 1620, Florence, Musée Stibbert. À gauche du tableau entrent deux personnages dont un a le visage couvert d'une résille textile sous laquelle on distingue encore ses traits. (https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Pieter_Brueghel_(II)_-
_The_king_drinks.jpg)

L'oeil et la bouche: expression de l'interprète et expression du masque.

Le traitement des ouvertures pour les yeux présente une variabilité significative. L'emplacement faisant face au regard du porteur se doit d'être ouvert pour permettre une visibilité, si ce n'est bonne, du moins suffisante. Toutefois, selon les proportions du masque et les choix esthétiques, les trous de vision peuvent se placer au niveau des yeux du masque ou déportés, vers le haut ou le bas de ce visage. Ainsi les très gros masques, comme ceux de certains *Waggis*, ou des groupes de *Guggenmusik* au carnaval de Bâle présentent souvent des ouvertures pour voir aménagées dans les narines du masque. Les grosses têtes présentent un espace pour voir qui peut se situer plus bas, parfois même dans le cou du personnage. Sur des masques de taille plus modeste, les ouvertures peuvent se positionner à l'emplacement du sourcil, dans le creux de l'œil ou dans son cerne. Si l'œil du porteur ne correspond pas à l'espace de l'œil du masque, ce dernier est forcément sculpté ou peint à un autre endroit. L'implication pour le porteur du masque est alors de prendre conscience de ce décalage et de jouer avec le regard artificiel du masque. Au théâtre, la maîtrise de ce regard et de son orientation pour indiquer qui ou ce que le personnage observe, et induire son expression est essentiel. Dans les fêtes, l'usage parait moins précis, et le regard artificiel joue de lui-même par sa force plastique, sans travail de jeu préparatoire des participants. Dans les deux cas, un textile lâche ou un grillage sombre peuvent fermer l'ouverture permettant la vision afin que le spectateur ne puisse y voir le porteur du masque. On retrouve ainsi le principe de la résille.

Dans le cas d'une ouverture en face des yeux, celle-ci peut rester discrète laissant toute l'expressivité au regard fabriqué. Notons toutefois que le masque s'avère souvent plus large que le visage, afin de le cacher intégralement. Dans le cas où le percement serait effectué devant des yeux du porteur dans le but de former la pupille ou l'iris du masque, proportionnellement, celui-ci risque fort de présenter un strabisme convergeant, dont ne se privent pas de jouer certains masques grotesques (voire l'image de la sorcière d'Imst ci-dessus par exemple fig. 3). Si le personnage ne doit pas présenter cette caractéristique, c'est alors tout un jeu de proportions qui devra rendre au personnage son regard droit.

Si l'ouverture est plus grande, absorbant la totalité de l'œil de la sculpture, avec ou sans les paupières, un vide apparait qu'il convient de laisser dans l'ombre ou au contraire révéler l'œil du porteur comme œil vivant du masque. Au théâtre, l'œil du comédien est souvent préféré bien dégagé et visible de loin. Ainsi l'interprète peut jouer de ses propres expressions, et indiquer par le regard ses intentions, sortant l'objet masque de son hiératisme figé. Cet ajustement du masque autour de l'œil est assez délicat et requiert de préférence un moulage de visage et une adaptation à la physionomie de la personne. C'est peut-être pour cela que c'est une configuration rare dans les fêtes où les yeux des masques, quand ils sont largement ouverts, présentent assez souvent un éloignement entre les cavités et le visage qui laisse les yeux dans l'ombre. Cela préserve l'anonymat tout en offrant une meilleure vision. L'œil visible ressort alors noir, peut-être plus inquiétant, ou, simplement, plus graphique. Quand l'éloignement moindre ne permet pas cette ombre, une résille noire peut être ajoutée.

Les ouvertures buccales présentent également une grande diversité morphologique. Les masques de l'Antiquité gréco-romaine, avec leurs bouches largement ouvertes, répondaient à une nécessité de faire entendre le chant et la parole dans les amphithéâtres. Toutefois, des études ont démontré l'inutilité totale de cette ouverture comme amplificateur. Une ouverture large au niveau de la bouche reste toutefois d'actualité non pour amplifier, mais pour permettre la meilleure diffusion possible de la voix, parlée ou chantée, quand le masque est entier. Par exemple, les remarquables masques cagoule pour le théâtre de Werner Strub[7] présentent souvent cette ouverture buccale, qu'il conviendrait d'imaginer avec une bouche humaine mobile à l'intérieur.

À l'inverse, nombre de masques festifs présentent une bouche fermée ou minimalement ouverte, leurs porteurs s'exprimant principalement par des cris, grognements et sons inarticulés, ou demeurent totalement silencieux. De mon observation, lorsqu'il y a parole, elle s'adresse plus souvent directement à une personne ciblée plutôt qu'à un vaste auditoire. Les personnages qui parlent en public restent généralement à visage nu ou maquillé. La voix

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[7] Werner Strub (1935-2012) facteur de masques suisse ayant notamment collaboré avec Benno Besson. Ses masques cagoule pour la scène sont le plus souvent de cuir et de textiles brodés.

occultée par le masque peut ne pas porter, mais elle se doit surtout de se modifier. La structure même du masque peut contribuer à une déformation sonore spécifique, comme le suggère l'observation de Michael Hügle à propos de certains masques de bois des carnavals de Forêt-noire allemande : « plus le masque de bois était finement sculpté et travaillé, plus la voix du Narr était méconnaissable et nette »[8]. Comme pour les yeux, si les bouches sont ouvertes, une résille noire peut être apposée pour cacher le visage en dessous. C'est par exemple le cas de certains masques de Blanc-Moussis à Stavelot en Belgique (fig. 5). Cet artifice existe également dans le spectacle.

Fig 5: Masque de Blanc-moussis du Laëtare de Stavelot, Belgique. Masque en résine, il présente des résilles noires pour occulter les yeux et la bouche du porteur et en préserver l'anonymat.

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8   Hügle, Michael. « Les traditions masquées dans la Fastnacht souabe alémanique », dans *Masques d'Europe, patrimoines vivants*, Deliège, Christel, dir. Waterloo : Renaissance du livre, 2012. p.44

D'autres percées fonctionnelles existent, notamment pour faciliter la respiration ou permettre l'usage d'instruments, comme dans le cas des joueurs de cuivre des groupes de *Guggenmusik* (fanfares) de Bâle dont les masques sont parfois découpés d'un cercle assez grand pour y passer l'embouchure de l'instrument.

Regarder un masque implique d'imaginer, en ellipse, le visage qui y prendra place, et les fonctions qui y sont liées. Les cavités et manques n'apparaissent alors le plus souvent qu'en tant que plein de visage, ou une ombre sculptée maintenant l'humain en retrait.

Le masque comme technique

Dans l'histoire, les techniques de fabrication des masques restent largement méconnues, sans doute en raison de la fragilité des matériaux et d'une transmission des savoir-faire essentiellement orale. Très peu de masques européens portables ont survécu plusieurs siècles jusqu'à nous, rendant toute reconstitution technique largement spéculative. Même sur les périodes plus récentes, l'aspect artisanal de la fabrication de masques reste peu documenté, que ce soit pour le spectacle vivant ou pour les fêtes. Observer les pratiques actuelles permet de mettre en évidence bien plus que le simple matériau final. Le processus a son importance également, et témoigne non seulement des savoir-faire, de leurs circulation et transmission, mais aussi d'un imaginaire du masque, de la fête ou de l'art.

Regarder les matériaux employés, c'est non seulement comprendre la matière du masque, mais également considérer leur origine : le bois est-il séché ou vert ? Acheté en blocs usinés ou coupés à même un tronc ? Le papier est-il récupéré ou est-ce un carton spécial pour le papier mâché ? Etc. Par voie de conséquence, on met en évidence les réseaux de fournisseurs, plus ou moins spécialisés, et des choix opportunistes ou franchement techniques qui sont opérés. On peut étudier aussi les outils employés, et la mise en œuvre. L'ajustement au visage demeure un aspect technique important déjà évoqué. Un autre point d'intérêt est la reproduction. Le moulage reste une technique très courante, mais quelle est la matière du moule ? Est-ce un moule à forme en négatif ou en positif ? Et comment s'y prend-on pour reproduire dans des matériaux de formation directe (taille du bois, textiles cousus…) ? Enfin, quels aspects du masque évoluent ou se modifient et quels aspects ne le peuvent pas ?

Fig 6: Atelier Konaki, à Naoussa, Grèce, où sont fabriqués des masques de cire.
On aperçoit le moule de forme positive, un tirage en cire brut et des masques finis.
Photographie: Candice Moise, 2018.

Dans mon corpus, les masques en bois sont de loin les plus nombreux. Une variété notable d'essences, et de traitement du bois est à remarquer. Les outils varient également beaucoup, et avec eux, selon les lieux, toute une gamme d'approches, issues de savoir-faire artisanaux divers. Ceci renseigne autant sur le masque lui-même que sur son histoire, parce que ces savoir-faire se sont généralement transmis avec le métier. Observer les évolutions et les points de persistance est également fécond. La reproduction de masques des masques en bois reste un questionnement vaste, avec en parallèle des sculpteurs qui reportent les dimensions du modèle à l'aide de gabarits, et des ateliers de reproduction munis de pantographes copiant automatiquement un modèle en série grâce des fraiseuses.

Au XIXe siècle, l'industrialisation amène des manufactures à développer des techniques de masques en papier mâché ou en toiles encollées, moulées et durcies à la cire. Ces masques se vendent en boutique et sur catalogue,

permettant aux groupes festifs de commander leur modèle de prédilection, comme l'ont fait les Gille de Binche avec leur masque en cire du "bourgeois Napoléon III" datant probablement de la fin du XIXe siècle et alors commandé à une firme allemande. Avec l'arrivée des masques en matières synthétiques, ces firmes ont cessé leurs activités au milieu du XXe siècle. Depuis les années 1970, c'est donc un artisan local[9] qui a recréé le masque et réinventé sa technique à base de cire afin de perpétuer non seulement la forme, mais aussi la matière à l'identique. C'est un exemple où le masque de série est devenu le modèle d'une fabrication artisanale.

Le papier mâché lui n'a pas cessé et reste typique de différents carnavals urbains comme ceux de Bâle ou de Venise, qui dépendent des derniers fabricants d'Europe de cartons spécifiques pour papier mâché. Toutefois, un tableau plus global dépeint une grande diversité des techniques, mêlant savoir-faire préexistant, opportunisme pour tel ou tel matériau, et imagination technique de chaque fabricant.

Le XXe siècle voit une diversification des matériaux avec l'apparition des matières synthétiques qui élargissent les possibilités créatives, particulièrement pour les productions théâtrales et cinématographiques, mais aussi dans les fêtes, artisanalement et, bien entendu, par les industriels du cotillon et du déguisement. Toutefois, une redécouverte des techniques traditionnelles s'opère simultanément, tant dans les fêtes qu'au théâtre. Par exemple, à partir des années 1940-1950, Amleto Sartori développe sa technique de fabrication du masque en cuir pour la commedia dell'arte, établissant une méthodologie qui fait encore référence et continue de se transmettre. Dans les fêtes traditionnelles, ce double mouvement est tout aussi perceptible : d'une part une recherche de reconstitution des savoir-faire anciens liée à une valorisation des matériaux naturels au nom de l'authenticité, d'autre part une appropriation pragmatique des nouvelles technologies et matériaux qui facilitent certains aspects de la création. On observe par exemple des masques industriels servant de matériau de base pour des têtes de personnages, et même certaines parties de masques imprimées en 3D, comme à Urnäsch en Suisse.

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[9] Il s'agit de Jean-Luc Pourbaix, décédé en 2023. C'est son petit-fils, Ulrick Pourbaix qui a repris l'atelier produisant environ cinq cents masques par an.

Le masque, qu'il soit conçu comme un outil sur mesure adapté au porteur dans une pièce de théâtre spécifique[10] ou comme le visage identitaire d'une fête qui désire s'ancrer dans la tradition, apparait comme une riche clé de lecture du contexte où il joue. Le travail de proportions entre masque et corps, le mode de portage ainsi que le jeu entre matière artificielle et peau du visage forment un vocabulaire technique et expressif à part entière, permettant d'affiner le lien entre le corps mobile et l'image graphique de l'artefact.

Entrer dans l'atelier et comprendre les ressorts des gestes, outils et matières dresse non seulement un portrait du masque lui-même, mais le replace aussi dans une histoire et dans un imaginaire collectif. Les innovations et adaptations placent les techniques dans un processus dynamique où la permanence de certains éléments techniques ou esthétiques procède du signifiant, tout autant que les transformations consenties. Interroger ce à quoi une communauté reste attachée et ce qu'elle fait évoluer dans la matière offre un regard d'autant plus fécond, que les formes, les esthétiques, les expressions des masques suivent également des évolutions soumises aux mêmes tensions. Choisir d'étudier le masque dans sa matérialité technique propose de reconsidérer la façon dont les pratiques artistiques s'incarnent concrètement dans la matière avant même de prendre vie sur scène ou dans l'espace festif.

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[10] Pour l'importance du masque comme outil dans le travail du personnage, voir M. Filip Odangiu, "Saving the Mask", *Studia UBB Dramatica*, 67, (no1/2022): 165–188.

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The Paradox of the Self. Beyond Identity

José Maria VIEIRA MENDES*

Abstract: In 2023, the invasion of the stage during a performance by the trans woman Keyla Brasil at a theatre venue in Lisbon, as part of a protest that claimed for the visibility of transgender performers, spawned numerous reactions. One of the most common was that such action meant an offense to the principle of theatrical representation and the 'art of acting'.

This idea of theatre as a place of illusion, where the self presents itself as the non-self, is commonly accepted as an interpretation of Diderot's *The Paradox of the Actor*, but we are convinced that describing Diderot's idea of the actor as someone who never seems to be himself is not an accurate interpretation.

We will therefore read Diderot's paradox following two postmodern interpretations by Lacoue-Labarthe and Eyal Peretz and adding the contributions of biologists who have been working with recent microbiological knowledge that challenges notions of One and the Individual. Our goal is to describe the action of Keyla Brasil not as an 'interruption' of a performance but as a complex intersection of (re)presentations that think with each other, destabilizing epistemic boundaries between one and the other, actor and character or performer and audience. We are convinced that the descriptions and vocabulary that emerge from this discussion will allow us to cast a new light not only on Diderot's idea of the actor but also on Keyla Brasil's action, taking us a step further in Lacoue-Labarthe's and Peretz's considerations on the self and the actor.

Keywords: Theatre, representation, Diderot, Keyla Brasil, actor, the self.

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"That my agency is riven with paradox does not mean it is impossible. It means only that paradox is the condition of its possibility"
Judith Butler, *Undoing Gender*

In January 2023, the 'invasion' of the stage by the transgender woman Keyla Brasil during Teatro do Vão's performance of Samuel Adamanson's dramatic adaptation of Pedro Almodóvar's movie *All About My Mother*, at a theatre venue in Lisbon, as part of a protest that claimed for the visibility of transgender performers, spawned numerous and unexpected reactions in Portugal's public opinion. The large majority of newspaper articles, television commentators and social network opinionators regretted Keyla Brasil's personal, financial and professional situation, but regarded her action as an attack on theatre's freedom. One of the most common observations declared that Keyla Brasil offended the principle of theatrical representation and the 'art of acting' by claiming that a transgender character could only be played by a transgender person.

Before entering this discussion, we would like to make clear that Keyla Brasil's action should be firstly considered as part of a discussion that looks at inequality and working conditions for transgender persons and actors, as well as at what was mentioned by the activists themselves, when they claim, in a manifesto published in the LGBTQI+ website '*esqrever*', they are protesting against "transfake casting".[1] However, in this paper, we would like to look at this performative event, by tackling the ideas of the actor and the self that are implied not only in Keyla Brasil's action but also in the reactions it prompted in the public opinion, and read them with the help of a certain reception and interpretation of Diderot's *Paradox of the Actor*, thus hoping to not only interfere in a way of talking about acting in theatre as well as on representation (and *mimesis*) in the performing arts. By doing so, we will also try to describe Keyla Brasil's action not as an invasion or interruption of an artistic performance, but to consider it in its continuity with the performance, thus complexifying the distinction between actor and audience, fiction and reality or art and politics.

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[1] https://esqrever.com/2023/01/21/manifesto-diz-nao-ao-casting-transfake/).

This approach allows us to ponder on how a certain idea of the actor has been conditioning and simplifying descriptions of performances and its relations with the world. Seeing the spectator as the inhabitant of the (real) world and the actor as the inhabitant of the (fictional) performance simplifies and downgrades the complexity of Keyla Brasil's particular action. We would like to work on a description that acknowledges the protest not just against the current representation of transgender performers in the theatrical stages, but also against a certain idea of theatre and, finally, against a metaphysical normative conception of the self.

Dramatic Theatre

"The invasion of the stage at Teatro São Luiz during the performance *All About My Mother* by the transgender actress and performer Keyla Brasil puts at stake the principle of the art of acting."[2] "The controversial invasion of the São Luiz stage by a trans woman has ignited the debate about what acting is."[3] Or, as Manuel Carvalho put it in his editorial in the Portuguese daily national mainstream newspaper *Público*, "The fight against transfake is political, it is not art."[4] These are examples of some of the reactions prompted by Keyla Brasil's action. Accompanying such considerations, there frequently came the idea of theatre as the stronghold of magic and the purity of representation, which should not allow itself to be contaminated by (political) issues of representativeness. The yielding of the performance, of the company and of the theater to the demand of the protest – the production actually substituted the cisgender actor by a transgender actress – opened, according to these opinions, the Pandora's box that stroke the final blow on the possibility of all bodies representing any bodies. As a Portuguese actress wrote on Facebook: "We [Theater] will lose our identity".

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[2] https://tvi.iol.pt/noticias/videos/perplexidades/perplexidades-keyla-brasil-invadiu-peca-mas-esta-nao-e-a-primeira-vez-que-a-reivindicacao-chega-a-arte-de-representar/63d439280cf28f3e15c964de

[3] https://ionline.sapo.pt/artigo/790849/transfake-uma-luta-pela-representacao-e-visibilidade?seccao=Portugal_i

[4] Carvalho, Manuel. editorial "A luta contra o transfake é política, não é arte", *Público*, January 23, 2023.

There is an obvious connection between such arguments and a traditional interpretation of Diderot's famous dictum in *The Paradox of the Actor*: "c'est parce qu'il nest rien qu'il est tout par excellence." [It is because he (the actor) is nothing that he is before all everything][5]. This description of the actor's self has been used by a theatrical tradition or genre which is usually comprised within the concept 'dramatic theatre', namely those performances that consider theatre to be the representation or animation of plays and characters.

As stated by these opinions, theatre is the place of illusion '*par excellence*'. When Keyla Brasil claimed that she (and not a cisgender actor), as a transgender woman, should be playing the role of the character who is a transgender woman, she was supposedly challenging the basic theatrical convention that confirms the stage as a place where one can be anything, i.e. where the self is the other, the non-self. If Keyla Brasil's claim were to be attended, it was said, this would set a precedent that is contrary to theatre and its essence, in the sense that, in theatre, one necessarily recognizes the boundary between the self and the non-self. According to such reasoning this explains why, when watching a performance, we do not jump on stage to interfere with the narrative, since we know we would only interfere with the performance. We know the actor on stage is no one, in the sense that he or she is a representation, a character, an illusion, a protean and virtuous figure capable of living every possible fiction and therefore a body without a self.

Such analysis should however be contextualized and contradicted.

Histories and concepts

During the 20th Century, with the emergence of performance, as a genre drawing on the avant-garde and performance art, but also as a paradigm of study and theories in social and linguistic sciences (Richard Schechner, Victor Turner, Erving Goffman, Elisabeth Burns, Fischer-Lichte, Judith Butler or J. L. Austin are some of its most prominent thinkers), the idea of the actor underwent

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[5] Denis Diderot, *Oeuvres. Tome IV. Esthétique – Théâtre* (Paris: Robert Lafont, 1996), 1401. I will quote Diderot from the original French text. The English translation will adapt or transcribe Walter Herries Pollock translation published in *Collected Works of Denis Diderot* (Hastings, East Sussex: Delphi Classics, 1883).

significant transformations. These transformations were discussed by theatre artists like Antonin Artaud, Bertolt Brecht, Jerzy Grotowski, Augusto Boal, Wooster Group, Robert Wilson, among many others. The prominent Canadian theatre scholar Josette Féral described it with the following words in her 1982 key article, "Performance and Theatricality: The Subject Demystified":

> "The conventional basis of the actor's 'art', inspired by Stanislavski, requires the actor to live his character from within and conceal the duplicity that inhabits him while he is on stage. Brecht rose up against this illusion when he called for a distancing of the actor from his part and a distancing of the spectator from the stage. When he is faced with this problem, the performer's response is original, since it seems to resolve the dilemma by completely renouncing character and putting the artist himself on stage. (…) From then on, since it tells of nothing and imitates no one, performance escapes all illusion and representation."[6]

Féral developed the argument, in her later book *Théorie et pratique du théâtre. Au delà des limites* (2011), and stated that the emergence and the expansion of performance marked the end of a certain theatrical genre: dramatic theatre[7]. To describe this turning point, theatre scholars such as herself, Erika Fischer-Lichte, Elinor Fuchs, Philip Auslander, among others, as well as artists, developed the term 'performance' "in a dialectical relationship to theatre". As Marvin Carlson put it, "the opposition was usually based on some variation of theater's association with semiotics and formal structures, and that of performance with the inchoate, still uncodified material of life itself"[8]. It is this dichotomy which is present in Marina Abramovic's typical way of dividing both disciplines, performance and theatre:

> "To be a performance artist, you have to hate theatre. Theatre is fake…
> The knife is not real, the blood is not real, and the emotions are not real.

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[6] Josette Féral, "Performance and Theatricality: The Subject Demystified", *Modern Drama,* 25, no 1 (1982):170-181. (1982), 177.

[7] Josette Féral, *Théorie et pratique du théâtre. Au delà des limites,* (Montpellier: L'Entretemps, 2011), 110

[8] Marvin Carlson, "The Resistance to Theatricality", *SubStance,* 31, No. 2/3, Issue 98/99: Special Issue: *Theatricality,* (2002): 242.

Performance is just the opposite: the knife is real, the blood is real, and the emotions are real."[9]

However, with postmodernist influence in experimental theatre in the 1970's and 80's, such opposition progressively became less antagonistic. Josette Féral started using the expression 'performative theatre' to name new ideas of theatre that were emerging at the turn of the century, thus signaling a juxtaposition of opposite terms: theatre and performance[10]. Hans-Thies Lehmann, in *Postdramatic Theatre*, also mentioned a "changed conception of the performance text":

"postdramatic theatre is not simply a new kind of text of staging – and even less a new type of theatre text, but rather a type of sign usage in the theatre that turns both of these levels of theatre upside down through the structurally changed quality of the performance text: it becomes more presence than representation, more shared than communicated experience, more process than product, more manifestation than signification, more energetic impulse than information."[11]

The "end of illusion", "the death of the character"[12] make theatre the equal of life (the blood is real) and it is in that sense that it has absorbed postmodern theory and has let itself be invaded by performance art. The

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[9] O'Hagan, 2010, "Interview: Marina Abramovic", *The Guardian*, 3 Oct. (2010): [https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2010/oct/03/interview-marina-abramovic-performance-artist]

[10] 'La performativité y apparaît comme synonyme de fluidité, d'instabilité, d'ouverture du champ des possibles, se situant entre reconnaissance et ambiguïté des significations. Elle est donc multisignifiante et plurielle, et va à l'encontre de l'Un pour faire émerger le Pluriel. L'idée récurrente véhiculée par la notion est bien celle d'ambiguïté des flux de sens, d'instabilité, de glissement des formes et des significations.' (Féral, 2013: 212).
[Performativity appears as a synonym for fluidity, instability, broadening horizons, situated somewhere between the identification and ambiguities of meanings. Therefore, it is multi-signifying and plural, and goes against the idea of One to reveal the Many. The recurring idea conveyed by this notion is the ambiguity in the multitude of meanings, instability, and shifting forms.]

[11] Hans-Thies Lehmann, *Postdramatic Theatre*, (London / New York: Routledge, 2006), 85.

[12] Elinor Fuchs, *The Death of Character. Perspectives on Theater after Modernism* (Bloomington/ Indianapolis: Indiana University Press,1996).

non-self lost its place in experimental theatre, and the question of illusion and reality disappears if all reality is a fiction: "performance is the only reality"[13].

In her 1983 article "The End of the Character"", when describing Lee Breuer's trilogy *Animations*, Elinor Fuchs claimed that "if the 'I' is everywhere, then it is nowhere."[14] With these words, Fuchs draw an equivalence between what was happening to the self in experimental theatre and in postmodern philosophy. The similarity with Diderot's previously quoted dictum – "it is because he [the actor] is nothing that he is before all everything" – deserves some attention.

The actor's nothingness, according to those who interpreted Keyla Brasil's action as an 'invasion' of the stage, is to be attained through a process or practice that enhances the actor's skills. Such skills can be trained. One forgets who one is in order to be more capable of representing or becoming the non-self. On the other hand, Fuchs described the disappearance of the metaphysical self and the appearance of a fragmentary identity and an 'accreted self' on stage. The actor on stage, according to Fuchs, does not embody a concealed duplicity but rather a conspicuous multiplicity. In her analyses of certain performances, she claimed that the actors never lose themselves, because there is nothing to be lost. What is constituent of the actor's self is its multiplicity and not a protean virtuosity to become the non-self. In her understanding, nothing and everything, just like everywhere and nowhere, are to be understood as synonyms, or, as Fuchs herself put it, "obverse sides of a single coin"[15].

One could say that different rules apply to postmodern theatre and to dramatic theatre and that Diderot's *The Paradox of the Actor* is no longer relevant to postdramatic experiments. We are however convinced that the actor in dramatic theatre and postdramatic theatre is not so different. The difference stands rather in how our considerations of the self influence our reading of Diderot, just like they influence our interpretation of Keyla Brasil's action. The self/non-self model has been used to think about the actor

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[13] Fuchs, *The Death of Character…*, 175.

[14] Fuchs, *The Death of Character…*, 173.

[15] Fuchs, *The Death of Character…*, 173.

both in dramatic and postdramatic theatre, helping us distinguish between its representations as well as between different ideas of the actor. However, if we put aside this grid of interpretation, we may find out that actors in dramatic and postdramatic theatre are ontologically the same.

In fact, as shown, Diderot's description of the actor is very much in tune with Elinor Fuchs' description of the performer in Lee Breuer's work. If it is true that the model of the self/non-self has been used to read Diderot's *The Paradox of the Actor*, it should also be noticed that we are not tied to such interpretation, which might explain why Diderot's thoughts on the actor have been used both by those who cannot let go of illusion and representation in theatre (the actor is nothing), as well as by those who describe and assert a performative turn in theatre (the actor is nowhere).

We would therefore like to show, with the help of a postmodern reception of the *Paradox of the Actor* by Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and, more recently, by Eyal Peretz, how Diderot opened up the possibility for a different approach to the question of the self, one that comes from theatre but is not confined to its context. Being nothing does not necessarily mean, as those who defend the illusion in theatre think it does, that the actor is deprived of subjectivity. It can also mean that subjectivity is not to be confined to an idea of a self-same self based on the individual and the opposition with the other, the non-self.

Diderot and the paradox of the actor

The reception and readings of Diderot's famous text can be divided in two thematic fields: the specifically theatrical and the broader philosophical (ontological). This means that the 'actor' in *The Paradox of the Actor* is both viewed as a theatrical figure, a profession specific to theatre and the performing arts, as well as an idea or representation of subjectivity and the question of the self, and in that line as a 'new kind of thinker', as Eyal Peretz puts it in *Dramatic Experiments*, his book on Diderot. We will be mostly concerned here with the second of these approaches, although, as I have previously shown, if we consider theatre to be the equal of life, I will necessarily handle both.

Let us then focus, first of all, on Diderot's statement that 'it is because he [the actor] is nothing that he is before all everything'. Such allegation is commonly understood in the continuation of the platonic discussion around the concept of *mimesis*. According to Plato, the mimeticians are no one, they are mask and hypocrisy, and as such they are unassignable and unidentifiable. The miming of human action is targeted. Actors are mere appearances, they do not speak in their own name, they are only accountable for a system of indirect presentation that allows for a speech without responsibility.

In that line, Diderot's actor is devoid of a self, of a will and identity, of desire and feeling, thus living as a sort of puppet on stage who represents the other which she is not: the non-self. Diderot insisted in the paradox: the less the actor feels, the more the audience feels what the actor is not feeling. This means that the actor cannot 'identify' with the character, i.e., feel what the character is feeling, live what the character is living, but rather preserve the ability to control the emotions, an ability that is only achievable by those who have the skill of being insensible. As Diderot put it:

> C'est qu'il s'écoute au moment où il vous trouble, et que tout son talent consiste à non pas sentir, comme vous le supposez, mais à rendre si scrupuleusement les signes extérieurs du sentiment, que vous vous y trompiez.[16]
>
> [At the very moment when he touches your heart he is listening to his own voice; his talent depends not, as you think, upon feeling, but upon rendering so scrupulously the outward signs of feeling, that you fall into the trap.]

The actor is a trickster and the best trickster, because she is able to imitate feelings. The actor simulates authenticity itself, that which we hold as the core of the self, becoming the epitome of illusion. The capacity to be insensible is, in this reading of Diderot, the capacity not to be yourself.

This view of the actor as someone who is devoid of 'character' is what Plato and those that borrow his terms condemned in theatre and the actor. It is also the thinking that is implied in Marina Abramovic's description of

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[16] Denis Diderot, *Oeuvres. Tome IV…*, 1384.

theatre's fakeness and even of Michael Fried's famous description of minimalist art as something which is inexhaustible 'not because of any fullness … but because there is nothing there to exhaust.' (Fried, 1998: 166)

However, there is an interesting possible twist in the interpretation of Diderot's actor that should not be eluded. Lacoue-Labarthe, in his 1982 essay, 'Diderot: paradox and mimesis', published in *Typography* (1989), pointed out to this passage in Diderot's essay, describing it as the search for a remedy for mimesis in mimesis (Lacoue-Labarthe, 1989: 266):

> On a dit que les comédiens n'avaient aucun caractère, parce qu'en les jouant tous ils perdaient celui que la nature leur avait donné; qu'ils devenaient faux, comme le médecin, le chirurgien et le boucher deviennent durs. Je crois qu'on a pris la cause pour l'effet, et qu'ils ne sont propres à les jouer tous que parce qu'ils n'en ont point. [17]
> [It has been said that actors have no character, because in playing all characters they lose that which nature gave them, and they become false just as the doctor, the surgeon, and the butcher, become hardened. I fancy that here the cause is confounded with the effect and that they are fit to play all characters because they have none.]

Lacoue-Labarthe developed a reading of *The Paradox of the Actor* that found in it the germ for the reversal of the metaphysical representation of the self as "constant and self-same"[18] He underlines the fact that the actor does not lose, with his acting, that which nature gave her (the self), because, according to Diderot, the actor does not become something, since she already is that something: which is no one. The actor's self *is* the non-self and does not *become* the non-self.

This distinction will be important for Lacoue-Labarthe's reading of the paradox. He regarded Diderot's theatrical mimesis as a model for general mimesis and the actor as the model for a "subjectless subject" or "a subject that is a nonsubject", one who has the "gift of impropriety, … the gift of nothing", which Lacoue-Labarthe also called a 'poetic gift', i.e., 'the gift of mimesis':

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[17] Denis Diderot, *Oeuvres. Tome IV…*, 1407

[18] Eyal Peretz, *Dramatic Experiments. Life According to Diderot*, (New York: State University of New York Press, 2013), 118

"By this I mean nature's gift of itself, not as something already there, or already present – 'natured', as one would have said at the time – but more essentially, as pure and ungraspable poiesis (in withdrawal, and always withdrawn in its presence): a productive or formative force, energy in the strict sense, the perpetual movement of presentation. ..."[19]

Lacoue-Labarthe is reading Diderot's description of the actor as a self that acts and of 'nature' as the result of such activity and activation. The actor's 'gift' is an attempt to 'convert' mimesis or to master the paradox of mimesis against passive mimesis[20]. In that sense, the actor, as Eyel Peretz described it, "occupies an uncanny space that is internal or immanent to the world and yet not exactly of it or in it"[21].

Peretz acknowledged that his reading of the *Paradox* is indebted to Lacoue-Labarthe's, although the French critic still associated Diderot's self 'with the logic of possession' that characterizes metaphysics. For Peretz, however, Diderot is on to something much more profound here.

"It is not a question of opposing a non-metaphysical dimension of originary dispossession with a metaphysical desire for self-possession, but rather of finding a third dimension, a certain insensible alienation to be discovered at the heart of the logic of an originary madness, the place where it is as if this madness is revealed to itself in its own showing, revealed to itself in the theatrical image."[22]

Peretz characterized Diderot's actor in his chapter on *The Paradox of the Actor*, which is part of the book *Dramatic Experiments. Life According to Diderot*, as a reversal of the "metaphysical rejection of the actor as the most inconstant figure"[23]. In that sense, Peretz followed Lacoue-Labarthe's reading of Diderot. However, Peretz also focused on the actor's scopophilic tendencies, when he described the actor as a self who has "the power and wisdom of the one who

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[19] Lacoue-Labarthe, (1989), *Typography. Mimesis, Philosophy, Politics*, (Cambridge/London: Harvard University Press, 1986), 259

[20] Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, *Typography. Mimesis…,* 265

[21] Eyal Peretz, *Dramatic Experiments…*, 121.

[22] Eyal Peretz, *Dramatic Experiments…*, 234.

[23] Eyal Peretz, *Dramatic Experiments…*,118

knows how to activate a fundamental internal excess and non-identity"[24]. Such knowledge derives from the "context of a complex optical situation" offered by theatre as "the realm in which the self activates its most properly, if disappropriating, power". Indeed, this optical situation comprises the relations (thus its complexity) between the actor and himself as well as between the actor and the audience, the actor and those she imitates or "the actor and the phantom".[25]

This optical context interferes with the traditional coupling of world and stage. According to Peretz, the actor is "the one occupying the position of a spectator in relation to those acting in the world, which he watches, and out of those watching he creates his characters." This '*immanent position of spectatorship*' which is "internal to the world's very constitution" means that actors are "ncanny creatures, occupying the position of world-spectators" who "have their own arena of acting" (the theatrical stage), "while the acting world, the world that was watched, now acquires itself a position of spectatorship, watching those on the theatrical stage.' The complexity of such optical situation can be summarized in the reversibility of those who look and those who are being observed, which is why 'in the theater, the world watches its own being watched'[26].

What interests us in this reading of *The Paradox of the Actor* is the juxtaposition of the coupling world and stage. The possibility of the reversal of both realities (the world and the stage) is part of the reversibility of subject and object, the self and the non-self, the one who observes and the one who is being observed. The optical complexity Peretz identifies in theatre is constituent of the figure of inconstancy that the actor (and the self) is. The reversibility of world and stage makes both part of the same reality (of the same world), just as the reversibility of actor and spectator implies that they are, ontologically speaking, identical subjects characterized by accumulation and complexity.

Peretz's and Lacoue-Labarthe's interpretations of the actor as a subject that emerges from Diderot's *Paradox of the Actor* focus on an alternative to the self-same subject that is commonly regarded as the metaphysical self. It is this metaphysical subject that those who criticize Keyla Brasil's action as trying to put an end to theatre are afraid of losing.

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[24] Eyal Peretz, *Dramatic Experiments…*,118
[25] Eyal Peretz, *Dramatic Experiments…*,119-120.
[26] Eyal Peretz, *Dramatic Experiments…*,121-122.

If one sees in Keyla Brasil's 'invasion' of the stage a confusion between the self and the non-self, in the sense that Keyla Brasil wants the self to be the non-self, what happens if we regard it as an action against the logic of possession? Wouldn't that action rather be about someone claiming the complexity of the self, the reversibility of subject and object, world and stage, indeed the right to a subjectless subject, to Lacoue-Labarthe's poetic gift or to what Eyal Peretz regards as a metamorphosis, namely, "the transformation of the world's suffering into the possibility given by the staged phantom/image to re-open the world out of its unidentifiable excess, out of that which is beyond identity"[27] ?

This means that the actor is not a subject who has lost her identity as well as the ability to be truthful or to separate reality and fiction, but rather someone who is beyond such descriptions of the self. This meaning is also extensible to theatre as a genre, which is why Keyla Brasil was accused of putting at risk theatre's identity just as transgender persons are often accused of putting at risk the identity of the human being. The common argument that opposes such accusations usually recurs to the fact that transgender persons are not destroying identity but rather expanding its realm, by adding identities. However, we believe that Keyla Brasil is not creating other identities nor simply claiming for the visibility and presence of certain identities on stage, but rather working with an idea of the self that is beyond identity.

We would thus like to conclude by attempting to describe what a self beyond identity might be, adding to this discussion a vocabulary which has been conveyed by recent biological studies concerning the idea of individual. We are convinced that these descriptions and vocabulary that emerge from the studies of microbiologist Lynn Margulies in the second half of the 20th century, will allow us to cast a new light not only on Diderot's idea of the actor but also on Keyla Brasil's action, taking us a step further in Lacoue-Labarthe's and Peretz's considerations on the self and the actor.

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[27] Eyal Peretz, *Dramatic Experiments…*, 133.

The self as continuity

Since the second half of the 19th century, but particularly in the last two decades of this century, a new paradigm for biology and its view on the self is being argued. Some, like Scott Gilbert, call it an ecological approach, meaning the shift from a molecular-centered science towards ecological considerations, understood in terms of collective behaviors and exchange relationships. Interests move from discerning mechanisms of insularity to those concerned with how the organism becomes an integrated constituent of a larger community.[28]

"We have never been individuals" is one of the slogans for such biological descriptions, and the word 'holobiont' is being used to describe organisms in order to acknowledge the 'complex consortia' that "def[ies] any singular definition of organismal individuals as monogenomic agents"[29].

To understand the practical implications, we can shortly look at the branch of immunology where the model of the self/non-self has been hegemonic since the 1940's (albeit Russian zoologist, microbiologist and Nobel prize winner Metchnikov (1845-1916) is frequently quoted as the founder of such model in immunology) and is currently being questioned as a consequence of microbiological discoveries that were once impossible to observe. According to the self/non-self model any element which is foreign (non-self) to an organism will trigger an immune reaction if introduced to it, whereas endogenous elements (self) do not, in normal circumstances, induce an immune reaction[30]. Some scientists have called attention to the symbiotic relations established among different organisms that require a different description that encompasses a 'notion of continuity' as Pradeau and Carosella put it, "the metaphysical deflation from a definition of identity based on substance (identity-substance) to a definition of identity based on continuity (identity-continuity)"[31]. This deflation from *self* to continuity changes our

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[28] Scott Gilbert, Albert I Tauber, "Rethinking Individuality: The Dialectics of the Holobiont" *Biology and Philosophy* 31, (2016): 839-853.

[29] Scott Gilbert, Albert I Tauber, "Rethinking Individuality …", 840

[30] T. Pradeau, E.D Carosella, "The Self Model and the Conception of Biological Identity in Immunology", *Biology and Philosophy* 21 (2006): 235.

[31] T. Pradeau, E.D Carosella, "The Self Model…, 245.

description of immunity, since it no longer merely means the guarding of "the body against other hostile organisms in the environment; it also mediates the body's participation in a community of 'others' that contribute to its welfare"[32].

These biological descriptions of the self, if viewed in conjunction with what Peretz and Lacoue-Labarthe read in Diderot, lead us to an idea of the self that not only opens itself to reversibility but, more importantly and in a more radical approach, operate outside or *beyond* such system of signification, namely the one that either allows for the separation between the self and the non-self or for its ventures of reversibility. The complex interactions that constitute such a conception give rise to an optical complexity that is easily extendable to other realities outside theatre or the stage. In continuity there is no coupling between the stage and the world or between the self and the other.

Those who regard Keyla Brasil's action as the 'invasion' of the stage and the fiction are hermeneutically resorting to the self/non-self model. There is, for these people, a clear distinction between a character and a person based on an idea of bounded individualism, just like there is a distinction between the stage and the world. In classical immunological terms, Keyla Brasil is the non-self, the foreign element to the performance, representative of the (political) reality, who is destroying the illusion, thus killing the performance.

Stanley Cavell famously describes the joke of the 'Southern yokel' who rushes to the stage to save Desdemona from Othello. The joke depends upon the fact that this spectator "thinks something is really happening, whereas nothing is really happening. It's play acting", Cavell adds[33]. However, if you can say that there are two women on stage (the actress and Desdemona, the self and the non-self), you can also say, beyond such logic, that they are in continuity, and that by jumping on stage, the Southern yokel is actually preventing a killing, just like Keyla Brasil is preventing her own killing.

I am also thinking here of what Keyla Brasil said while on stage, namely that in the previous week she had almost been killed while prostituting herself to make a living. If we acknowledge the continuity of such narrative with that

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[32] Scott Gilbert, Albert I Tauber, "Rethinking Individuality …", 333

[33] Stanely Cavell, *Must We Mean What We Say. A Book of Essays*, (Cambridge University Press, 1976), 328

of the performance she 'interrupted', we expand the hermeneutical possibilities of Brasil's action and performance. This performer does not consider what is happening on stage as something other or foreign, apart from hers and the audience's world, and it is for that reason that she can be part of the fiction and claim her presence on stage beyond the frame provided by the couple fictional/real. I am actually convinced that Keyla Brasil did not interrupt a performance, but that she rather continued it, changed it, interfered in it, just like the performance was itself continuing the life of the 'world-spectators'.

The nothingness that Lacoue-Labarthe finds in the actor's self, the nothing that allows one to be everything, according to Diderot, is what Keyla Brasil is calling for as she goes on stage. The theatre and the performers, who are still stuck to the metaphysical self, think she is interrupting the performance whereas she believes, following her idea of continuity, that the "whole dear notion of one's own Self – marvelous, old free-willed, free-enterprising, autonomous, independent, isolated island of a Self – is a myth."[34]. Keyla Brasil is claiming a self that is continuous, equal to life and equal to theatre, beyond the dichotomy which is constitutive of the majority of interpretations of her action.

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[34] Scott Gilbert, Jan Sapp, Albert I Tauber, "A Symbiotic View of Life: We Have Never Been Individuals", *The quarterly Review of Biology*, 86, no 4, (2012): 334.

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Une écologie de l'illusion : technologies et scénographie dans la redéfinition des relations entre humains et non-humains

Patrick LAFFONT DE LOJO*

Abstract: This article develops a research I presented at the *Technologies* symposium of the Prague Quadrennial 2024, an international event dedicated to exploring the relationship between technologies and scenography in live performance and exhibition. My presentation, entitled *An Ecology of Illusion*, examined how contemporary scenographic practices are redefining the interactions between humans and non-humans. This text extends that exploration by combining theoretical perspectives with concrete case studies, and by highlighting the ways in which scenography can function as a site of ecological awareness, illusion, and transformation.

Key-words: Scenography; Ecology of Illusion; Performance; Exhibition; Technology; Sustainability; Human–Nonhuman Relations.

L'évolution de la scénographie intègre de manière croissante les technologies avancées et les matériaux durables, ouvrant un champ d'expérimentation inédit pour repenser notre coexistence avec le monde non humain. Loin d'être de simples ajouts techniques ou des contraintes liées à l'urgence écologique, ces choix traduisent une transformation plus profonde : ils redéfinissent la place de la scène et son rôle dans la construction de nos imaginaires collectifs.

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La scénographie n'apparaît plus seulement comme un cadre destiné à accueillir une action, mais comme un dispositif critique et sensible qui interroge nos manières de percevoir, d'habiter et de coexister.
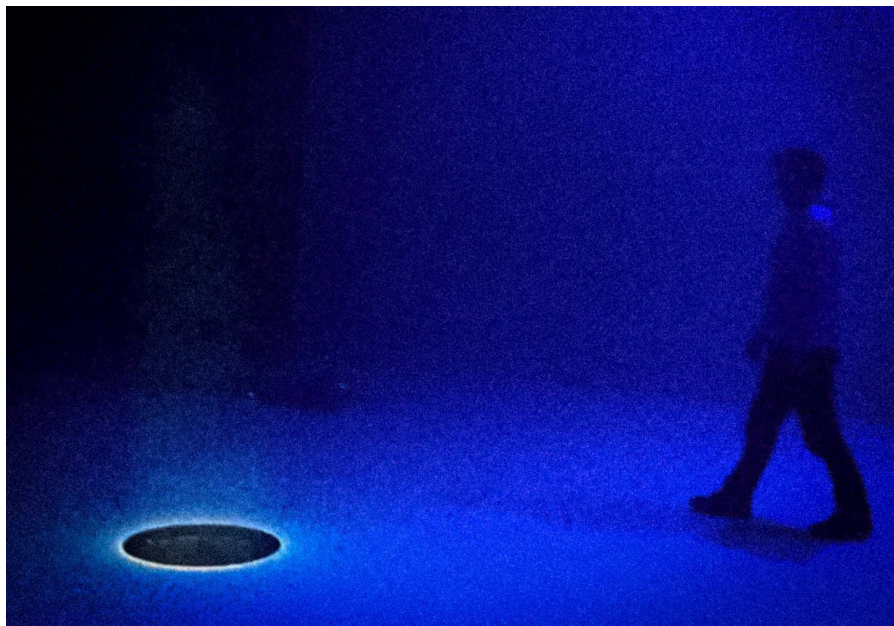
Fig. 1 : Vue de l'installation "Bleue" à Lux, Scène nationale de Valence, installation vidéo, lumière, son, miroirs, ordinateur et caméra en direct, 2017.
© Patrick Laffont de Lojo.

Dans mon travail d'artiste et de scénographe, vidéaste et createur lumière, j'explore comment ces outils peuvent élargir la conscience écologique et modifier notre perception de l'espace et du vivant. Les technologies numériques – capteurs, projections, environnements immersifs – permettent de rendre sensibles des phénomènes imperceptibles : circulation des flux, transformations de la lumière, rythmes naturels, temporalités étirées. Elles donnent une visibilité nouvelle à ce qui échappe habituellement à notre perception et invitent le spectateur à entrer dans un état d'attention élargie. Parallèlement, le recours à des matériaux sobres, recyclés ou issus de filières

locales inscrit l'acte de création dans une continuité avec les cycles du vivant, où la matière devient porteuse d'une mémoire et d'une densité propres.

Cette réflexion s'inscrit dans le prolongement de la **théorie de Gaïa**, formulée par James Lovelock[1] et Lynn Margulis[2] dans les années 1970. Selon cette hypothèse, la Terre n'est pas une simple somme de phénomènes isolés, mais un système autorégulé, où les éléments biologiques, géologiques et atmosphériques forment un tout vivant et interdépendant. Bruno Latour a beaucoup travaillé à diffuser et à reformuler cette théorie dans ses ouvrages, en la reliant aux enjeux politiques et écologiques contemporains. J'ai eu l'honneur de prolonger cette réflexion à ses côtés, en participant à la création du spectacle *Moving Earths*, mis en scène par Frédérique Aït-Touati, où la scénographie devenait un médium pour rendre perceptibles les forces terrestres et les interdépendances écologiques.[3]

Fig. 2-3 : Aperçus de l'atelier durant l'exposition "Down to Earth" au Gropius Bau, Berlin, 2020. © Patrick Laffont de Lojo.

Après avoir posé ce cadre théorique et esquissé les enjeux écologiques de la scénographie contemporaine, il est important de montrer comment ces

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[1] James Lovelock, *Gaia: A New Look at Life on Earth*, Oxford University Press, 1979.

[2] Lynn Margulis, *Symbiosis in Cell Evolution: Life and Its Environment on the Early Earth*, W.H. Freeman, 1981.

[3] *Moving Earths*, création au Théâtre Nanterre-Amandiers en 2019, mise en scène par Frédérique Aït-Touati, avec Bruno Latour.

principes trouvent une résonance concrète dans la pratique. Mon parcours m'a en effet conduit à expérimenter directement ces questions à travers des projets où contraintes matérielles, pensée écologique et création artistique se rejoignent.

En août 2020, mon travail m'a ainsi plongé au cœur de l'adaptation scénographique de *La Trilogie Terrestre*, un projet de Bruno Latour et Frédérique Aït-Touati, dans le cadre de l'exposition *Down to Earth* au Gropius Bau de Berlin. Sous la direction de Tino Sehgal pour le programme *Immersion* du Berliner Festspiele, cette exposition posait un défi singulier aux artistes : créer sans électricité, sans écrans numériques et sans éclairage artificiel – une expérience entièrement *off-grid* qui exigeait une réinvention radicale des pratiques artistiques.

Quand on m'a annoncé qu'il n'y aurait ni électricité, ni écrans, ni éclairage artificiel, ma réaction a été immédiate : *je vais dessiner*. J'ai donc décidé de créer un atelier directement dans l'espace d'exposition, transformant ce lieu en un espace de travail ouvert, ce qui a beaucoup amusé l'équipe curatoriale. Pendant un mois, j'y ai collaboré avec les équipes locales, en m'appuyant sur les ressources et matériaux disponibles sur place.

Dans cet atelier, j'ai réalisé une série de dessins à l'encre et au carbone, des œuvres dynamiques et fluides qui se sont rapidement intégrées aux performances, devenant des éléments centraux de la scénographie et l'enrichissant de nouvelles perspectives. Chaque couche était travaillée avec des techniques spécifiques : lavis au pinceau pour les dépôts successifs de matière, tracé des strates à l'aide de bambous taillés. L'un de ces dessins, une grande topographie de 400 × 100 cm, illustrait les dynamiques géologiques et la superposition des strates, dont l'Anthropocène constituait la couche la plus récente. Pensé comme un élément narratif, ce dessin s'inspirait directement de l'évolution de Gaïa et fut intégré à la scénographie de la performance *Inside*, où il offrait une profondeur supplémentaire en articulant la matérialité du geste artistique avec les récits cosmologiques explorés sur scène.

Cette expérience m'a conduit à reconfigurer mon rapport aux matériaux et aux contraintes environnementales, en envisageant la scénographie non plus comme une organisation statique d'objets mais comme une pratique processuelle, vivante et continuellement en transformation.
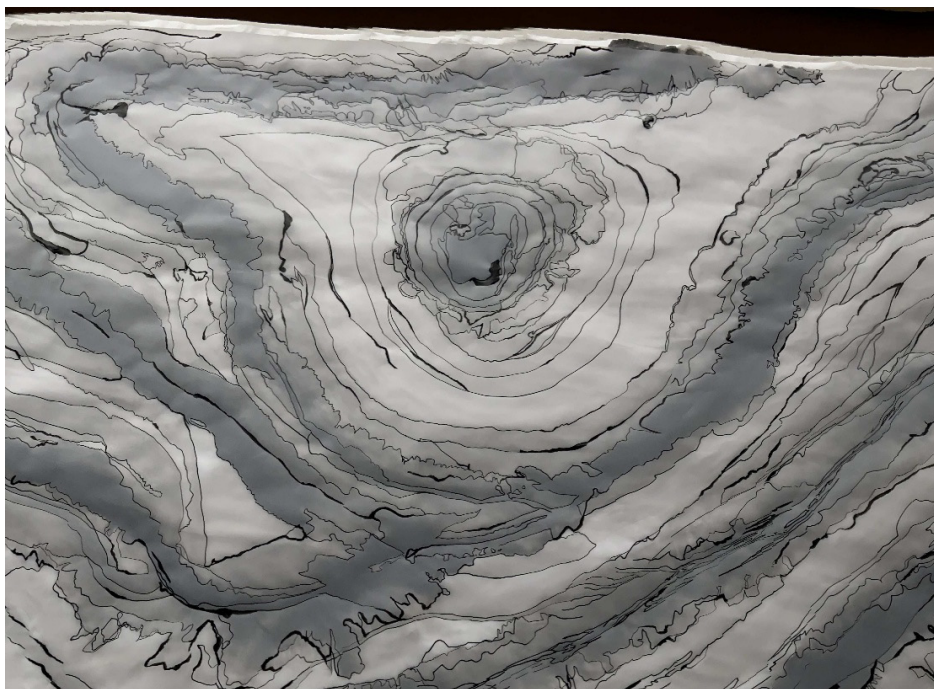
Fig. 4: Détail d'un dessin à l'encre réalisé à partir de plusieurs couches de papier superposées : kraft blanc, papier chinois et calque. © Patrick Laffont de Lojo

Ce déplacement rejoint la pensée de Tino Sehgal, pour qui « l'art ne doit pas laisser d'empreinte physique sur le monde »[4], affirmant ainsi la nécessité d'une esthétique de l'immatérialité et de l'expérience partagée. Il s'articule également avec les fondements conceptuels de *La Trilogie Terrestre*, qui met en question les cosmologies occidentales traditionnelles et invite à une redéfinition de la position du spectateur et du collectif humain au sein de la Terre envisagée comme système actif et interdépendant.

La Trilogie Terrestre se déploie en trois volets : *Inside* (2016), qui propose de réinventer notre manière de percevoir la planète en interrogeant les récits cosmologiques occidentaux ; *Moving Earths* (2019), qui explore les implications

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[4] Adams, Tim. "Artist Tino Sehgal: 'Human Interaction Has Become Much More Palpable'." *The Guardian*, July 11, 2021. https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2021/jul/11/artist-tino-sehgal-human-interaction-has-become-much-more-palpable.

d'une Terre envisagée comme un organisme dynamique, bouleversant nos représentations de la stabilité et de la permanence ; et enfin *Viral* (2020), élaboré en réponse à la pandémie, moment où chacun·e a été contraint·e de reconsidérer son interdépendance avec les autres et de reconnaître la vulnérabilité des systèmes humains. Cette performance examine comment la circulation globale des virus met en lumière l'interconnexion profonde de toutes les formes de vie et ébranle les structures sociales et politiques établies. Mais elle rappelle également que la viralité, loin de n'être qu'une menace, constitue un principe vital : la contamination, comprise comme échange, hybridation et transformation, est au cœur même du vivant. Sans ce mouvement de diffusion, aucune espèce, aucune culture, aucune forme de vie ne pourrait perdurer ni se réinventer.

Fig. 5: Vue de l'adaptation scénographique de Inside et Moving Earths lors de l'exposition Down to Earth au Gropius Bau, Berlin, 2020. © Patrick Laffont de Lojo

En réunissant ces trois performances en une œuvre cohérente, *La Trilogie Terrestre* devient une exploration holistique de notre relation à la Terre, nous invitant à réfléchir à la manière dont nous, en tant qu'humains, comprenons et habitons notre planète dans un contexte de crise écologique grandissante. La trilogie ne cherche pas à maintenir le public dans un rôle de spectateur passif, mais à l'intégrer activement dans un environnement partagé, où tous les éléments — humains et non-humains, vivants et inanimés – interagissent dans un processus dynamique et en perpétuelle évolution.

Ce projet a pris une nouvelle dimension avec *Viral* (2020), conçu spécifiquement en réaction à la pandémie, un moment où chacun·e a été contraint·e de remettre en question ses repères et ses liens avec le monde et les autres. Cette performance a mis en exergue les interrogations fondamentales soulevées par la crise : comment coexister sur une planète menacée ? Quels nouveaux récits devons-nous imaginer pour envisager des futurs viables ?

Cette approche de la scénographie s'inscrit dans la philosophie que j'explore : concevoir des espaces fluides et adaptatifs, capables d'évoluer en fonction de leur environnement et des personnes qui les habitent. Elle interroge le rapport entre l'espace et ses occupant·es, cherchant à repenser la scénographie comme une entité vivante, toujours en transformation.

C'est dans cette perspective que j'ai conçu *Le Musée des Contradictions*, un dispositif scénique léger, démontable et autonome en énergie, amorcé en 2022 à Châteauvallon et présenté depuis dans différents contextes, notamment aux Alyscamps à Arles (2022) et à Avignon (Théâtre des Halles et Festival du Train Bleu, 2023). Développé avec le collectif *ildieldi*, en collaboration avec Sophie Cattani et Antoine Oppenheim — qui en a assuré la mise en scène —, et inspiré de l'œuvre d'Antoine Wauters, ce projet repose sur un principe constant : des structures lumineuses transportables, alimentées par l'énergie solaire, qui se reconfigurent en fonction du lieu d'implantation. Chaque site investit le dispositif de sa propre histoire et de sa matérialité, donnant naissance à des variations singulières qui redéfinissent l'expérience collective.

Aux Alyscamps, les structures illuminées de 400 x 200 cm évoquaient à la fois le format 16:9 des écrans contemporains et les proportions des affiches publicitaires urbaines. Disposés au sol et dans l'espace, ces cadres redessinaient les relations entre corps et paysage, transformant le site patrimonial en un espace de confrontation poétique entre passé et présent, mémoire et vécu dans l'immédiat.

Fig. 6-7-8 : *Le Musée des Contradictions*, 2022–en cours. Collectif *ildieldi* (Sophie Cattani, Antoine Oppenheim), mise en scène : Antoine Oppenheim. Inspiré de l'œuvre d'Antoine Wauters. Scénographie : Patrick Laffont de Lojo. Présenté à Châteauvallon (2022), Alyscamps – Arles (2022), Avignon, Théâtre des Halles et Festival du Train Bleu (2023). Structures lumineuses 400 × 200 cm, dispositif autonome en énergie solaire. © Patrick Laffont de Lojo.

De la perspective à l'écologie: repenser la scénographie à l'ère de l'Anthropocène

L'histoire de la scénographie occidentale trouve une de ses racines majeures dans le Quattrocento italien, avec l'élaboration de la perspective linéaire par Filippo Brunelleschi et sa théorisation par Leon Battista Alberti dans *De Pictura* (1435). Ce dispositif visuel ne constitue pas seulement une innovation technique : il instaure un régime de vision où la spectatrice ou le spectateur, assigné·e à un point de fuite unique, est placé·e en dehors de la scène qu'iel contemple. La scène devient un espace organisé selon les lois d'une géométrie rationnelle, structuré par la distance et l'illusion d'un monde « devant soi », consolidant ainsi un dualisme entre sujet et objet, entre humains et non-humains. Comme l'a montré Erwin Panofsky dans *La perspective comme forme symbolique* (1927), cette invention ne traduit pas une simple conquête de la représentation réaliste, mais incarne une certaine vision du monde, où la mesure, la distance et l'extériorité définissent le rapport au réel.

Ce paradigme se prolonge et s'intensifie au XIXe siècle avec les grandes machines optiques. le *diorama* de Louis Daguerre (1822) et le *théâtre optique* d'Émile Reynaud (1892) offrent aux spectateurs et spectatrices des expériences

spectaculaires de lumière, de mouvement et de transformation d'images. Pourtant, malgré leur apparente immersion, ces dispositifs prolongent la logique de la perspective : ils organisent le regard depuis un point centralisé et maintiennent toujours la spectatrice ou le spectateur dans une position extérieure au monde représenté.

Cet héritage de la projection et de l'illusion constitue aussi un terrain d'expérimentation pour des recherches artistiques contemporaines. Mon installation *White Out* (2017), présentée au cinéma du Lux, Scène Nationale de Valence, prolonge et détourne cette tradition. L'œuvre explore la relation entre la projection et la matérialité de l'image, en jouant avec les plis et les textures de l'écran pour créer une profondeur visuelle immersive. Inspirée des réflexions de Roland Barthes dans *La Chambre claire* [5], elle interroge la nature de l'image et sa capacité à représenter l'absence, en mettant en scène l'interaction entre l'image projetée et la surface tangible. Ce travail témoigne de la manière dont la scénographie contemporaine peut à la fois hériter des dispositifs historiques de l'illusion et les mettre en tension pour ouvrir d'autres régimes de perception.

C'est précisément cet héritage que plusieurs penseurs contemporains ont entrepris de déconstruire. Philippe Descola, dans *Par-delà nature et culture* [6], montre que la séparation entre nature et culture, si centrale à l'Occident, n'est ni universelle ni nécessaire, mais une construction culturelle particulière, parmi d'autres cosmologies possibles (animistes, totémiques, analogistes). Bruno Latour, dans *Nous n'avons jamais été modernes* [7], démontre que la modernité repose sur une illusion de séparation, alors même que nos existences sont toujours prises dans un réseau complexe d'interactions entre humains, non-humains, techniques et institutions. Tim Ingold, dans *Être au monde* [8], propose enfin de substituer à cette vision statique une conception dynamique du monde : non plus un ensemble de points fixes reliés par des lignes, mais un enchevêtrement de trajectoires, où habiter signifie suivre des mouvements et tisser des relations.

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[5] Roland Barthes, *La Chambre claire: Note sur la photographie* (Paris: Gallimard, 1980).

[6] Philippe Descola, *Par-delà nature et culture* (Paris: Gallimard, 2005)

[7] Bruno Latour, *Nous n'avons jamais été modernes* (Paris: La Découverte, 1991)

[8] Tim Ingold, *Être au monde. Quelle expérience commune ?* trad. Sophie Renaut (Bruxelles : Zones sensibles, 2013)

De la perspective du Quattrocento aux dispositifs optiques du XIXᵉ siècle, jusqu'aux expériences contemporaines comme *White Out*, un même fil se dessine : celui du pouvoir de la représentation. Nos dispositifs visuels, en scénographie comme ailleurs, ne se contentent pas de refléter le monde : ils façonnent la manière dont nous le comprenons et dont nous y prenons part. Pour la scénographie, cet héritage est décisif. Représenter l'espace, c'est toujours orienter l'expérience et engager une responsabilité dans nos manières de coexister avec le vivant et le non-vivant. Comme le rappelle Ingold dans *All Art is Ecological*[9], toute pratique artistique, qu'elle le veuille ou non, est une pratique écologique.

Fig. 9: Patrick Laffont de Lojo, *White Out,* 2009 – en cours. -
Lux – Scène nationale de Valence
Installation vidéo, projection HD, boucle 01:01:23,280.
Première présentation : Le Lieu Unique, Nantes, 2009.
Avec l'interprétation de Cyril Teste. © Patrick Laffont de Lojo

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[9]   Tim Ingold, *All Art is Ecological* (Londres: Penguin Books, 2021)

Réinventer les représentations de Gaïa par la scénographie

Ce point nous amène à une réflexion essentielle sur le potentiel de la scénographie. La scène traditionnelle, héritière de la perspective de la Renaissance, a longtemps encadré et contrôlé la vision du monde en imposant un point de vue singulier et statique. Cette logique du cadre peut être éclairée par Roland Barthes, qui distingue, dans *La Chambre claire* (1980), le cadre photographique du masque cinématographique :

> "Pourtant le cinéma a un pouvoir qu'à première vue la Photographie n'a pas : l'écran (a remarqué Bazin) n'est pas un cadre, mais un cache ; le personnage qui en sort continue de vivre : un champ aveugle double sans cesse la vision partielle. Or, devant des milliers de photos, y compris celles qui possèdent un bon studium, je ne sens aucun champ aveugle : tout ce qui se passe à l'intérieur du cadre meurt absolument, ce cadre franchi."[10]

Cette distinction nous invite à repenser les possibilités de la scénographie. Considérée non plus comme un cadre figé mais comme un masque dynamique, la scène ouvre sur un espace excédant ce qui est visible. Le « champ aveugle », analogue à l'espace hors-scène, devient une zone de potentiel où la vie se prolonge au-delà de ce qui est représenté, obligeant la spectatrice ou le spectateur à imaginer et à compléter ce qui échappe à la perception immédiate. En ce sens, la scénographie ne se réduit pas à une organisation matérielle de l'espace mais devient une pratique relationnelle qui met en jeu notre manière d'habiter le monde.

C'est là que le concept de **Gaïa** prend toute sa portée. Formulée par James Lovelock et Lynn Margulis dans les années 1970, l'hypothèse de Gaïa envisage la Terre comme un système autorégulé, où l'ensemble des organismes vivants et de leur environnement interagissent pour maintenir les conditions de la vie. Bruno Latour, dans ses derniers travaux, a réinvesti cette notion pour en faire le nom de la « zone critique », ce mince film terrestre où se concentrent toutes les interactions vitales. Penser Gaïa, ce n'est pas imaginer une entité mythique, mais reconnaître la matérialité fragile de cette zone où humains, non-humains, vivants et non-vivants sont intriqués.

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[10] Roland Barthes, *La Chambre claire. Note sur la photographie* (Paris : Gallimard 1980), 89-90.

La scénographie, dans cette perspective, peut contribuer à *réinventer la représentation de Gaïa*. Elle ne montre plus un monde distant, objectivé, mais met en scène notre appartenance à ce réseau d'interdépendances. Elle offre la possibilité d'un basculement de point de vue : passer d'un regard extérieur sur la Terre à une expérience située dans la Terre, au sein même de ce tissu de relations. C'est ce passage, de la scène comme cadre à la scène comme masque, qui ouvre un véritable « point de vie ».

Technologies et nouvelles pratiques scénographiques

La scénographie, à l'ère de l'Anthropocène, ne peut se penser indépendamment d'une généalogie longue où les avancées techniques et les dispositifs d'illusion ont sans cesse déplacé les frontières de la perception. Depuis l'époque baroque, le théâtre s'est constitué comme un laboratoire de la modernité technique, où la machinerie scénique, loin de n'être qu'un artifice spectaculaire, traduisait déjà une volonté de faire du plateau un espace cosmologique. Les inventions de Giacomo Torelli au XVIIe siècle, avec leurs systèmes de poulies et de contrepoids capables de métamorphoser instantanément le ciel, les paysages ou les architectures du Teatro Farnese de Parme, offraient aux spectateurs et spectatrices l'expérience d'un monde en perpétuel mouvement[11]. La scène devenait un lieu d'apparition et de disparition, de surgissement et de retrait, où l'ordre terrestre semblait rejouer les logiques célestes.

Au XIXe siècle, cette ambition se déplace vers une immersion totale. Les panoramas et dioramas, comme le Panorama des Champs-Élysées conçu par Jacques-Ignace Hittorf en 1838, enveloppaient le public dans des environnements peints à 360°, abolissant la distance critique au profit d'une absorption sensorielle complète[12]. Ces dispositifs, qui préfiguraient nos environnements immersifs contemporains, mettaient en scène l'illusion non plus comme un effet ponctuel mais comme une architecture du regard, où la spectatrice ou le spectateur devenait habitant temporaire de l'image. La scénographie ne se contentait plus d'encadrer un monde représenté : elle le faisait littéralement exister autour des corps.

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[11] Christopher Baugh, *Theatre, Performance and Technology: The Development and Transformation of Scenography* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

[12] Oliver Grau, *Virtual Art: From Illusion to Immersion* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003).
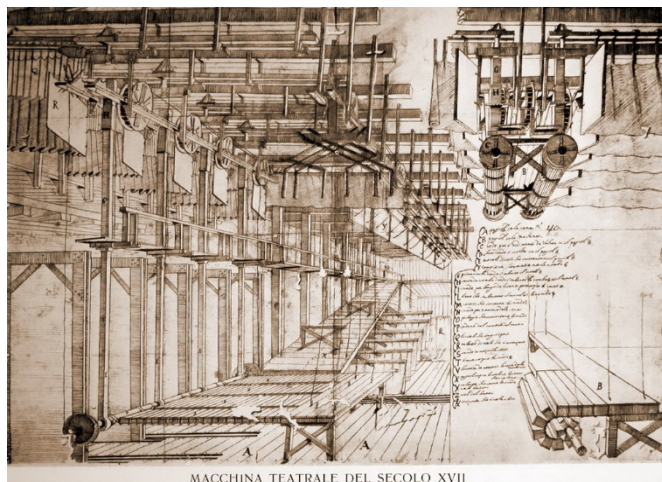
Fig. 10: "Macchina Teatrale del Secolo XVII." Biblioteca Palatina, Parme.
Diagramme illustrant les machineries scéniques du Teatro Farnese,
conçues par Giacomo Torelli au XVIIe siècle.
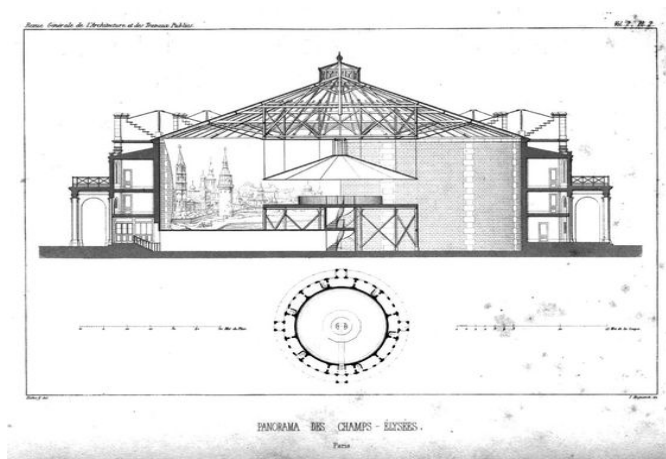
Fig. 11: Coupe architecturale du Panorama des Champs-Élysées, conçu par J.-J. Hittorf
en 1838. Ce bâtiment, situé à l'intersection des Champs-Élysées et de l'avenue
d'Antin (aujourd'hui avenue Franklin D. Roosevelt), fut démoli en 1855.
Il accueillait des expositions panoramiques immersives comme L'Incendie
de Moscou, La Bataille d'Eylau ou La Bataille des Pyramides.[13]

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[13] Cf. Recueil des ouvrages d'architecture et des travaux publics, Paris, XIXe siècle.

Un siècle plus tard, l'introduction de la vidéo bouleverse à nouveau cette relation entre illusion et expérience. *Three Transitions* de Peter Campus (1973) constitue un jalon fondateur de ce passage. L'artiste, par un usage pionnier du chroma key et de la manipulation analogique, découpe, traverse et reconfigure sa propre image. L'écran cesse alors d'être surface de projection : il devient membrane, peau fragile, espace de transit. Ce geste inaugure une scénographie du médium, où l'image elle-même se déploie comme corps, et où le spectateur est invité à éprouver la perméabilité de la frontière entre réel et représentation.

Fig. 12: Image de Three Transitions de Peter Campus, 1973. Vidéo couleur monocanal avec son, 6 minutes, enregistrée à l'origine sur bande magnétique EIAJ-1 ½ pouce. © Peter Campus

Dans une démarche à la fois archaïque et contemporaine, Roméo Castellucci prolonge cette réflexion en recyclant l'imaginaire des illusions optiques du XIXᵉ siècle. Dans *Purgatorio* (2008), l'usage d'un cadre circulaire, qui révèle d'immenses fleurs en papier, évoque à la fois les lanternes magiques et les dioramas de Daguerre. Mais là où le XIXᵉ siècle cherchait à produire l'illusion d'un monde extérieur, Castellucci transforme l'objet scénique en sujet.

Le grossissement monumental de la fleur agit comme un gros plan théâtral, bouleversant l'échelle de perception et immergeant le public dans une dramaturgie où le micro et le macro se confondent[14]. La scénographie devient ici un espace de métamorphose perceptive : ce qui était décor devient cosmos.
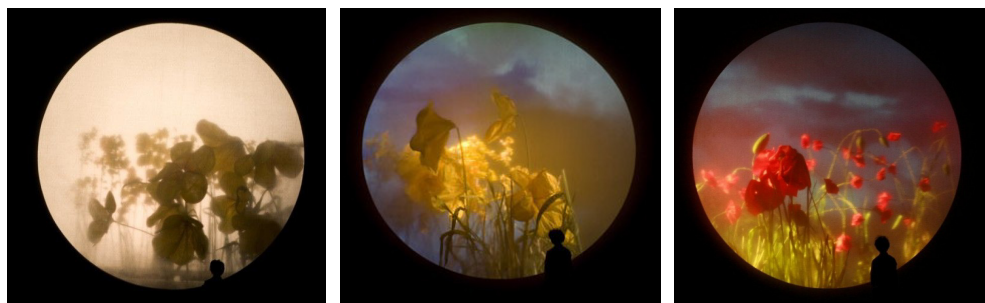
Fig.13-14-15: Photographies de Purgatorio de Roméo Castellucci, 2008.

Cette logique trouve une intensité particulière dans le travail de Phia Ménard, notamment avec Vortex (2011). La performance met en scène un corps qui expulse lentement des sacs plastiques animés par l'air, dans une lente mue libératoire. Loin d'un engloutissement, c'est une délivrance qui se joue : le plastique se disperse, dévoilant un corps presque nu, fragile mais réaffirmé. Ici, l'illusion se transforme en métaphore écologique et existentielle. La matière artificielle, symbole d'une pollution envahissante, devient paradoxalement l'instrument d'une renaissance. *Vortex* n'est pas seulement une performance sur la matière, mais une dramaturgie de la transformation : un rituel de passage où l'artifice dévoile la possibilité d'un corps autre, réinscrit dans un devenir vivant (Ménard 2011).

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[14] Ioan Pop-Curseu, « Expérimentations optiques et changements de genre dans le théâtre du XIXe siècle », in *Théâtres en liberté du XVIIIᵉ au XXᵉ siècle. Genres nouveaux, scènes marginales ?*, edited by Valentina Ponzetto, (Publications numériques du CÉRÉdI, "Actes de colloques et journées d'étude (ISSN 1775-4054)" : n° 19, 2017, https://publis-shs.univ-rouen.fr/ceredi/436-1.pdf)

Fig.16: Ménard, Phia. *Vortex*. Biennale de la danse de Lyon, 2011.

Dans toutes ces pratiques — de Torelli à Ménard — se lit une même quête : faire de la scène un espace où se brouille la frontière entre illusion et expérience, entre représentation et transformation. Comme l'affirmait Augusto Boal, « tout théâtre est politique »[15] Mais cette dimension politique ne réside pas seulement dans les contenus dramatiques : elle s'incarne dans les conditions mêmes de la perception, dans la manière dont le spectateur ou la spectatrice est impliqué·e dans un monde partagé, traversé de forces matérielles, sociales et écologiques.

À la fin du XXᵉ siècle, cette dimension politique se déplace vers une interrogation sur la surcharge médiatique et les formes d'immersion techno-logique. Le collectif japonais Dumb Type, avec *S/N* (1994) (fig.17), propose une performance qui explore l'interaction entre technologie, communication et corps humain à travers des projections multimédias, des textes synchronisés et

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[15] Augusto Boal, *Théâtre de l'opprimé* (Paris: Maspero, 1974).

des images numériques. En exploitant les technologies de pointe de l'époque — écrans vidéo, graphismes numériques, systèmes de projection en temps réel — Dumb Type brouille délibérément les frontières entre réalité physique et information virtuelle. La scène se transforme en un espace saturé où l'image déborde et se répète, créant une expérience sensorielle à la fois fascinante et critique. *S/N* constitue ainsi une méditation sur la manière dont les technologies modifient nos identités et nos structures sociales, tout en illustrant l'approche innovante du collectif en matière de médias. En repoussant les limites de la scénographie, Dumb Type fait de l'illusion non plus une fin en soi, mais un outil d'interrogation existentielle sur notre immersion dans un monde saturé de signes et de flux numériques (Dumb Type 1995).
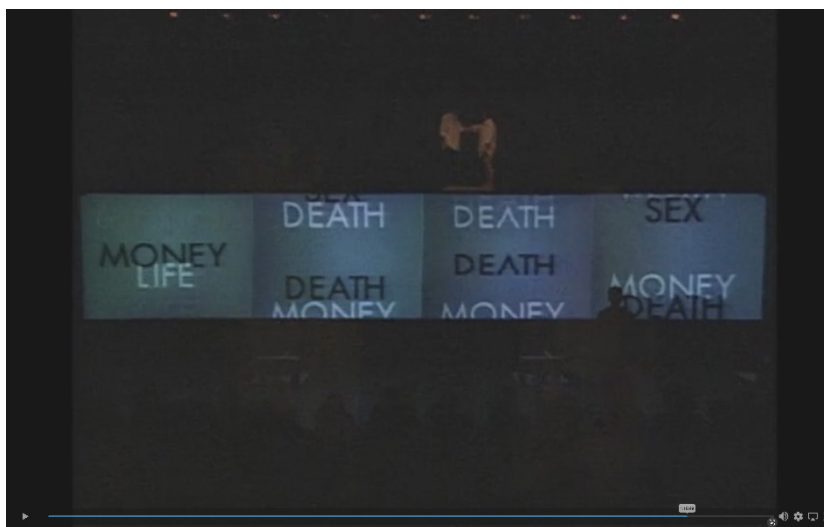
Fig. 17 – Dumb Type, S/N, 1994. Performance multimédia avec projections vidéo, textes synchronisés et environnements sonores. Captation : WOWOW – Japan Satellite Broadcasting, Spiral Hall, Tokyo, 1995. Montage : Shiro Takatani. © Dumb Type.

La technologie LED a profondément transformé non seulement la scénographie mais aussi la production cinématographique et télévisuelle. Les environnements de studio immersifs utilisant des volumes LED, tels que ceux déployés dans *The Mandalorian*, permettent de créer des décors virtuels

en haute résolution qui remplacent désormais les fonds verts traditionnels. Cette innovation offre aux acteur·rices la possibilité d'interagir directement avec des arrière-plans réalistes et dynamiques, améliorant à la fois la qualité du jeu et l'efficacité du processus de production. L'illusion cesse d'être une projection postérieure pour devenir une composante immédiate de l'expérience, vécue simultanément par les interprètes et par l'œil de la caméra. Comme le montre le dispositif visible sur le plateau (fig. 18), les volumes LED couvrant 270° enveloppent l'espace filmé : à la manière d'un diorama contemporain, ils construisent un environnement immersif qui ne s'adresse pas directement à un public présent dans la salle, mais au regard mécanique de la caméra, qui restitue ensuite au spectateur un monde déjà transformé par cette illusion technologique.

Fig. 18 – *The Mandalorian*, 2019 – en cours.
Plateau de tournage utilisant la technologie LED "StageCraft", Industrial Light & Magic (ILM). Volumes LED immersifs à 270°. © Lucasfilm Ltd. / Disney.

Ce mouvement rejoint mes propres expérimentations. Dans *Sans Faim 1* (2004) et *Sans Faim 2* (2008), créées avec Hubert Colas, j'ai travaillé sur l'intégration du *mapping vidéo* comme élément constitutif de la scénographie. Les images, projetées sur des tapisseries et des surfaces architecturales, venaient se superposer

aux textures matérielles du décor, produisant un brouillage perceptif entre matière tangible et flux numérique. L'espace scénique devenait ainsi un *palimpseste mouvant*, où la matière et l'image se superposaient, s'effaçaient et se redessinaient continuellement, comme si le réel lui-même se recomposait sous l'effet du virtuel (fig. 19-22). Pour *Sans Faim 1*, réalisé en 2004, j'ai collaboré avec Sophie Urbani sur le tournage et le montage des images, qui venaient s'inscrire dans une dramaturgie de l'effacement et de la réécriture du décor. Dans *Sans Faim 2* (2008), la démarche s'est approfondie : le mapping ne servait plus seulement à recouvrir la surface, mais à révéler les tensions entre l'image projetée et le tissu architectural, inscrivant la scénographie dans une dynamique de transformation continue.

Fig. 19-22: Photos de *Sans Faim 1* (2004) et *Sans Faim 2* (2008) de Hubert Colas. Patrick Laffont de Lojo a assuré la création vidéo, les images, le montage, le mapping et le système de projection pour ces deux productions. Pour *Sans Faim 1* (2004), il a collaboré avec Sophie Urbani sur le tournage et le montage des images projetées. © Patrick Laffont de Lojo & @D.R. Diphtong cie

Ces expérimentations visaient moins à renforcer l'illusion d'un décor réaliste qu'à révéler la porosité entre réel et virtuel, à placer le public face à un espace instable, en perpétuelle mutation. Elles s'inscrivent dans une réflexion plus large sur la manière dont la scénographie, à travers ses outils technologiques, peut devenir un *agent de transformation perceptive*, interrogeant non seulement la représentation mais aussi les conditions matérielles de notre expérience commune.

Il est cependant essentiel de rappeler que les technologies employées dans les expériences immersives — écrans LED, systèmes de projection, environnements numériques interactifs — ne sont jamais neutres. Leur déploiement repose sur des chaînes de production lourdes et extractives : extraction de terres rares, fabrication énergivore, logistique mondialisée, auxquelles s'ajoute l'électricité consommée lors de leur utilisation. Les analyses de cycle de vie menées par le *U.S. Department of Energy* montrent que, pour les dispositifs LED, la phase d'utilisation concentre l'essentiel de l'empreinte carbone, mais que la fabrication contribue elle aussi de manière significative à l'impact global (DOE 2012). Dans le même esprit, Tsao et ses collègues insistent sur le fait que l'efficacité énergétique des LED ne doit pas masquer leur coût environnemental initial[16], tandis que Prendeville rappelle que l'éco-conception dans le design reste largement freinée par la complexité des filières industrielles[17]. La lumière, symbole de clarté et d'immatérialité, apparaît ainsi inséparable d'un poids matériel, énergétique et politique.

Face à ce paradoxe, la scénographie possède une responsabilité particulière. Art historiquement éphémère, adaptable et réutilisable, elle a toujours travaillé dans l'économie des moyens et la contingence des situations. C'est précisément cette tradition qui lui permet aujourd'hui d'affronter les contradictions du présent : comment continuer à expérimenter avec des technologies fascinantes, capables de transformer radicalement notre perception, tout en prenant acte des limites planétaires qui conditionnent leur usage ? Cette tension rejoint les réflexions de Timothy Morton, qui invite à dépasser

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[16] Tsao et alii, "Solid-State Lighting: An Energy-Economics Perspective", *Journal of Physics D: Applied Physics* 43, no. 35 (2010).

[17] Sharon Prendeville et alii., "Sustainable Design Futures: Circular Economy in the Creative Industries", *The Design Journal* 24, no. 2 (2021): 137–152.

l'« écologie sans nature » pour penser une esthétique où la technologie et la matière sont inextricablement mêlées[18]. Elle résonne également avec les travaux de Sacha Kagan sur l'art et la durabilité, qui insistent sur l'importance des pratiques transdisciplinaires et de la « culture de la complexité »[19]. Enfin, Oliver Grau rappelle combien l'histoire des arts immersifs s'est toujours construite dans cette oscillation entre fascination technologique et conscience critique[20].

Adopter des pratiques plus durables ne signifie pas renoncer à l'innovation, mais inventer d'autres régimes d'usage : privilégier la réparabilité et la réutilisation des dispositifs, prolonger leur durée de vie en les intégrant à plusieurs productions, limiter la dépendance aux ressources importées en valorisant l'ingéniosité locale et les savoir-faire situés. Dans cette perspective, chaque projet scénographique devient à la fois un espace de représentation et une enquête matérielle, révélant les conditions écologiques de sa propre existence.

Penser la scénographie contemporaine, c'est donc assumer sa double vocation : produire des illusions tout en exposant les réalités matérielles qui les rendent possibles. Loin d'être une contradiction stérile, ce paradoxe – entre désir d'immerger le regard et conscience des limites terrestres – constitue la condition même d'une scénographie à l'ère de l'Anthropocène.

Médias interactifs et espaces virtuels

Les médias interactifs occupent une place croissante dans la conception scénographique contemporaine, créant des espaces réactifs qui se transforment en temps réel au contact du public. Dans des performances comme *Vortex* (2011) de Phia Ménard, des dispositifs mécaniques et lumineux – souffleries, sacs plastiques animés par l'air, jeux de projections – génèrent des environnements

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[18] Timothy Morton, *Ecology Without Nature: Rethinking Environmental Aesthetics* (Cambridge, MA : Harvard University Press, 2007)

[19] Sacha Kagan, *Art and Sustainability: Connecting Patterns for a Culture of Complexity* (Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2011)

[20] Oliver Grau, *Virtual Art: From Illusion to Immersion* (Cambridge, MA : MIT Press, 2003).

en perpétuelle métamorphose. Le spectateur ou la spectatrice n'assiste plus à un simple spectacle : il ou elle est immergé·e dans un espace en tension, traversé de forces matérielles et symboliques, où l'air, la matière plastique et le corps deviennent les protagonistes d'un récit écologique.

Dans les musées, cette logique interactive s'est rapidement imposée. Les installations contemporaines mobilisent capteurs de mouvement, interfaces sonores ou écrans tactiles pour transformer les visiteurs en participants actifs, brouillant la frontière entre exposition et expérience. L'introduction de la réalité augmentée (AR) permet désormais d'enrichir les dispositifs traditionnels : en projetant des superpositions contextuelles, elle offre la possibilité de visualiser des monuments disparus dans leur état original ou d'explorer des œuvres replacées dans leur contexte historique. La réalité virtuelle (VR), de son côté, ouvre la voie à des environnements entièrement recomposés où le visiteur peut littéralement « entrer » dans l'espace de l'œuvre.

Fig. 23: Photographie de *Rain Room* par Random International, présenté au LACMA (Los Angeles County Museum of Art) en 2012. © Random International.

Un exemple emblématique est *Rain Room* par Random International, présenté au LACMA (Los Angeles County Museum of Art) en 2012 (fig.23). L'installation utilise des capteurs pour détecter les corps humains et interrompre la pluie au contact des visiteurs.

Ces derniers interagissent directement avec l'œuvre, modifiant leur environnement en temps réel. Si la pluie constitue le matériau visible, c'est en réalité l'air – traversé par les mouvements corporels, mesuré par les capteurs – qui agit comme médiateur invisible, déclenchant la transformation du dispositif. L'expérience explore ainsi la relation paradoxale entre humains, technologie et forces élémentaires, en offrant une vision utopique d'un climat maîtrisé, où l'eau et l'air deviennent des partenaires actifs de la performance.

Avec l'intelligence artificielle, la scénographie interactive franchit un seuil inédit. Là où les capteurs et interfaces n'étaient que des relais obéissants, réagissant à des instructions déterminées, l'IA introduit une dimension mouvante, évolutive, presque imprévisible. Elle simule l'apprentissage, elle feint l'adaptation, elle produit des formes en constante recomposition. Dans *Unsupervised* (MoMA, 2022), Refik Anadol déploie des algorithmes génératifs qui transforment les collections du musée en paysages visuels changeants, comme un organisme qui respire, s'étend et se contracte sous nos yeux. Ici, la machine ne se donne plus seulement comme un outil, mais comme un partenaire : elle invente, elle réagit, elle suggère une vitalité.

Mais cette vitalité n'est qu'apparente. Elle relève d'une *illusion du vivant*, inscrite dans une généalogie longue – des automates baroques qui imitaient le souffle ou le chant, aux machineries optiques du XIXe siècle, puis au cinéma et à la vidéo qui ont donné au mouvement son apparence de continuité. L'IA radicalise cette tradition en s'appropriant non plus seulement l'illusion du geste, mais celle de la mémoire et de la créativité. Elle brouille la frontière entre organique et machinique, entre vie vécue et vie simulée, entre présence et calcul.

Cette mutation peut se lire comme un passage d'un « point de vue » à un « point de vie ». L'œuvre ne se limite plus à être contemplée : elle agit, elle interpelle, elle s'offre comme actrice. Le spectateur ou la spectatrice ne se tient plus en retrait, mais cohabite avec une entité qui mime l'autonomie. Comme l'avait pressenti Augusto Boal dans *Théâtre de l'opprimé*, le spectateur peut

devenir « spect-acteur » ; mais désormais, c'est l'œuvre elle-même qui semble dotée d'une initiative, renversant la logique du théâtre pour installer un régime d'interaction inédit.

Pourtant, cette illusion a un coût. L'IA repose sur des infrastructures massives, sur l'extraction de ressources, sur une énergie colossale qui alimente nos rêves machinés. Elle produit aussi ses propres fictions : en projetant sur les algorithmes des qualités anthropomorphiques — intelligence, mémoire, imagination — nous révélons moins leur essence que nos désirs d'animation, notre besoin de donner vie à la matière inerte. C'est précisément dans cette ambiguïté que réside sa force critique : l'IA construit une **écologie de l'illusion**, un espace où humains, machines et environnements se tissent dans un même réseau de co-création, où la scénographie ne cherche plus seulement à représenter le monde, mais à transformer notre manière de l'habiter, en mettant en jeu la question la plus fondamentale : qu'est-ce que vivre ?

Si l'intelligence artificielle et les dispositifs interactifs posent la question de l'illusion du vivant à travers la simulation et le calcul, mon propre travail s'inscrit dans une logique complémentaire, presque inverse : non pas donner l'apparence de la vie à des machines, mais inscrire la scénographie dans la vitalité concrète des lieux et des matériaux. Dans *La Trilogie Terrestre*, cet état d'esprit se manifeste autant dans la forme que dans le processus de création. Les éléments scénographiques essentiels tiennent dans une seule valise ; tout le reste est trouvé, collecté, inventé sur place, en collaboration étroite avec des équipes locales. Ce choix radical n'est pas seulement un geste d'économie matérielle, il constitue une véritable méthode : réduire l'impact environnemental, mais aussi ancrer la création dans un territoire, en impliquant la communauté dans un processus collectif et durable. La scénographie devient ainsi une pratique située, toujours en transformation, inséparable de l'écosystème qui l'accueille.

Ces principes rejoignent ceux que James Lovelock a formulés dans *Gaia: A New Look at Life on Earth* (1979) : la Terre comme système vivant, interdépendant, en perpétuelle recomposition. Dans *La Trilogie Terrestre*, cette vision se traduit par la fluidité des images projetées, qui fonctionnent à la fois comme lumière et comme paysage, remodelant en continu l'espace scénique et instaurant un rapport mobile entre spectateur·rices, performeur·ses

et environnement. L'image ne se contente pas d'illustrer : elle respire, elle circule, elle accompagne le mouvement de Gaïa.

Les scénographes, par la nature éphémère et adaptable de leur art, ont depuis longtemps intégré des pratiques de réemploi, de modularité et de souplesse. Aujourd'hui, cette tradition les place en position privilégiée pour expérimenter des formes de création qui allient innovation technologique et sobriété écologique. Concevoir un décor, ce n'est plus seulement fabriquer une image ou un cadre, mais instaurer une relation consciente avec les matériaux, les lieux et les êtres qui nous soutiennent. En ce sens, la scénographie n'est pas seulement un langage esthétique : elle devient un outil critique, une manière d'apprendre à habiter le monde autrement.

Fig. 24-27 : Photographies de *La Trilogie Terrestre* par Patrick Laffont de Lojo, présentée à Pékin, Chine, les 24 et 25 août 2024. Les éléments scénographiques tiennent dans une seule valise, tandis que tous les autres matériaux sont sourcés localement. Les images projetées, servant à la fois de lumière et de paysage, transforment la scène en temps réel, reflétant l'interconnexion et la transformation constante de Gaia. © Patrick Laffont de Lojo.

En associant invention artistique, dispositifs numériques et pratiques durables, les scénographes ne transforment pas seulement la scène ou le musée. Ils participent à une réflexion collective plus large, qui engage notre interaction avec les éléments – air, eau, lumière, sol – et interroge les conditions mêmes de notre existence terrestre.

Intégrer les perspectives non-humaines : vers une nouvelle écologie de l'illusion

L'intégration des perspectives non humaines dans la scénographie marque un tournant majeur dans la manière dont nous concevons et représentons l'espace scénique. En dépassant les récits anthropocentriques, cette approche invite les scénographes à embrasser la complexité des relations entre humains, animaux, plantes, mais aussi objets techniques et matières inanimées, afin de créer une nouvelle **écologie de l'illusion** qui reflète l'interconnexion de toutes les formes de vie. En intégrant ces dimensions non humaines au processus créatif, la scénographie devient un espace dynamique où les frontières entre espèces et matériaux s'effacent, ouvrant une compréhension plus profonde de notre place au sein de l'écosystème terrestre.

Pour rendre perceptibles les liens qui nous unissent aux entités non humaines et non vivantes, la scénographie doit mettre en lumière ces perspectives alternatives. Comme l'a montré Philippe Descola, « la distinction occidentale entre nature et culture n'est qu'une des nombreuses façons dont les sociétés ont conçu les relations entre les humains et les non-humains »[21]. Dans cette optique, la scène peut devenir un instrument critique et poétique, un espace où se reformule notre coexistence au sein de Gaïa, comprise comme système vivant, autorégulé et interdépendant (Lovelock, *Gaia: A New Look at Life on Earth*, 1979).

Cette nouvelle écologie de l'illusion remet en question les modes traditionnels de représentation, car elle cherche à donner à voir non seulement l'expérience humaine, mais aussi les perspectives et les actions d'entités non humaines. Qu'il s'agisse d'environnements immersifs, de technologies réactives

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[21] Philippe Descola, *Par-delà nature et culture* (Paris: Gallimard, 2005)

ou de matériaux organiques, les scénographes repensent le rôle de la scène comme un espace de cohabitation et d'influence mutuelle. Cette approche entre en résonance avec les réflexions de Bruno Latour, qui montre que nous n'avons jamais été modernes parce que nous n'avons jamais cessé d'être reliés à des réseaux hybrides d'humains et de non-humains[22], et avec celles de Donna Haraway, qui propose de « faire parenté » avec d'autres espèces et formes de vie.[23] Dans une perspective proche, Tim Ingold insiste sur l'idée que les êtres vivants ne font pas que « se trouver » dans le monde, mais qu'ils le tracent et le tissent sans cesse par leurs trajectoires[24].

En adoptant ces perspectives élargies, la scénographie ne se limite plus à proposer de nouvelles expériences esthétiques : elle devient un champ de réflexion active sur les crises écologiques de l'Anthropocène. Alors que nous faisons face à des bouleversements sans précédent dans notre relation au monde vivant, intégrer les points de vue non humains au cœur des pratiques scéniques peut inspirer des manières plus durables, empathiques et conscientes d'habiter et de créer. Ce déplacement transforme la scénographie en une pratique critique et sensible, qui ne cherche pas seulement à représenter le monde, mais à accompagner sa transformation, en écho à la nature fluide et évolutive de Gaïa.

Stratégies scénographiques pour une intégration écologique

Représenter *Gaïa* de manière significative suppose de concevoir des espaces où humains et non-humains interagissent de façon symbiotique, au-delà d'une simple figuration de la nature. La scénographie doit ainsi devenir un champ de relations, où données environnementales en temps réel, expériences multisensorielles et matériaux durables se conjuguent pour engager activement le public. En rendant perceptibles ces dynamiques

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[22] Bruno Latour, *Nous n'avons jamais été modernes* (Paris : La Découverte, 1991).

[23] Donna Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble : Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016)

[24] Tim Ingold, *Être au monde. Quelle expérience commune ?,* trad. Sophie Renaut (Bruxelles : Zones sensibles, 2013)

écologiques, elle peut favoriser une conscience accrue de l'entrelacement du vivant et du non-vivant, de l'organique et du minéral, du technologique et du terrestre.

Cela implique l'adoption de technologies économes en énergie, d'outils réparables et recyclables, mais aussi de pratiques de production qui privilégient la durabilité plutôt que l'accumulation. James Lovelock rappelle, dans *Gaïa: A New Look at Life on Earth* (1979), que la Terre fonctionne comme un système autorégulé où l'équilibre n'est pas un idéal abstrait, mais une condition de survie. Penser la scénographie dans cette perspective, c'est reconnaître que chaque choix matériel engage une responsabilité : celle de réduire l'empreinte écologique tout en exploitant le potentiel narratif et poétique des technologies.

La scénographie peut alors devenir un modèle de création durable : un espace où innovation et sobriété s'articulent, où la mise en scène n'est pas seulement représentation mais aussi action, capable d'interroger les coûts invisibles des matières et des dispositifs que nous utilisons, tout en ouvrant la possibilité d'un rapport plus juste et plus conscient au monde que nous habitons.

Conclusion

Comme l'a montré Bruno Latour, « nous n'avons jamais été modernes ». Reconnaître que la séparation entre nature et culture n'a jamais réellement existé, c'est accepter que les frontières que nous avons construites entre humains et non-humains, vivants et non-vivants, sont des illusions. Cette prise de conscience devrait transformer en profondeur notre manière d'aborder la scénographie. L'art de la scène n'est pas seulement un langage esthétique : il peut devenir un outil critique pour révéler l'enchevêtrement de toutes les formes de vie et donner corps à cette intrication.

Repenser la scénographie à l'ère de l'Anthropocène, c'est refuser le rôle d'observateur·rice passif·ve pour devenir acteur·rice d'une transformation commune. La scénographie, parce qu'elle est éphémère, modulable et toujours située, a la capacité de faire apparaître des relations inédites entre organismes, matières et environnements. Elle peut incarner une pratique de l'attention, où les technologies, loin de se réduire à l'illusion, deviennent des vecteurs de sensibilité, et où les matériaux, choisis pour leur durabilité, rappellent notre interdépendance avec le monde qui nous porte.

En ce sens, scénographier aujourd'hui, c'est participer à l'élaboration de nouveaux récits de coexistence. C'est inventer des environnements où l'immersion n'est pas seulement sensorielle, mais politique et écologique ; où chaque lumière, chaque surface, chaque son devient l'occasion de repenser notre manière d'habiter Gaïa. La scénographie peut alors assumer son rôle d'art de la transformation : non pas représenter le monde tel qu'il est, mais ouvrir des espaces où l'on puisse imaginer, éprouver et expérimenter d'autres façons de vivre ensemble, au cœur des contradictions et des possibles de notre temps.

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The Formal Import and Theoretical Metabolization of the Postdramatic in the Romanian Context

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Abstract: The article examines the importation and assimilation of the concept of postdramatic theatre into the Romanian theatrical landscape. The postdramatic, which emerged primarily in Lehmann's seminal book, was delayed in Romania due to the country's historical isolation during the communist era. The study traces the evolution of Romanian dramaturgy from pre-1989 influences to the 1990s and beyond, identifying a shift toward more socially and politically engaged playwrighting. The 2000s generation of playwrights embraced fragmented, collage-based texts and diverse theatrical forms, including documentary and political theatre. The article discusses the critical reception of the postdramatic paradigm in Romania, highlighting diverging views on its implications for narrative, character, and the role of the playwright. While some critics see postdramatic theatre as subversive, rejecting traditional story structures, others emphasize its continuity with past theatrical traditions. Ultimately, the article investigates how Romanian theorists and practitioners engage with postdramatic theory and its nuanced applications, questioning the legitimacy and utility of the term in the Romanian context, as well as its future.

Keywords: postdramatic theatre, Romanian theatre criticism, Romanian dramaturgy, text, performance.

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The Postdramatic – An Umbrella Concept

In the Romanian cultural context, the import of the postdramatic – as a theatrical aesthetic and a dramaturgical and performative formula only properly begins in the first years of the 21st century. This delay is due to a sense of cultural belatedness or lag, an aesthetic decentering in relation to dominant Western models, brought about by communism and the lack of contact with the countries located west of the Iron Curtain: "In the 20th century, the century of experimentation, the century of directing, we had no political theatre, no laboratories, and we lacked the courage to dream – except vaguely, in sketches, suffocated from birth by censorship and self-censorship."[1]

At the level of directorial practices, we can name a few key figures – at least: Liviu Ciulei, Lucian Pintilie, Cătălina Buzoianu, Andrei Șerban, Silviu Purcărete (included by Lehmann among postdramatic creators), and Mihai Măniuțiu. On the level of playwriting, the volume edited by Liviu Malița, *Să nu privești înapoi. Comunism, dramaturgie, societate [Don't Look Back. Communism, Playwriting, Society]*, addresses precisely the quantity and quality of Romanian dramaturgy under communism – its dogmatism and lack of accessibility (as well as the possibilities of rethinking or reclaiming it from a contemporary perspective).

The next generation, often referred to as the '90s generation, functioned more as a transitional buffer, organically continuing the flaws of pre-1989 dramaturgy and shaping the image of the "playwright as writer", with canonical aspirations (but seldom staged). With key figures such as Alina Nelega (a theorist and playwright, professor in the Playwriting MA program at the University of Arts in Târgu-Mureș) and Nicolae Mandea (professor of the directing program at UNATC), and through their initiatives – Dramfest and dramAcum – the 2000s generation of playwrights emerged, focused on the everyday, socially and politically engaged, activist in spirit.

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[1] Alina Nelega, "De la teatrul literar la teatrul documentar. Dramaturgia românească între 1989 și 2019" ("From Literary Theatre to Documentary Theatre. Romanian Playwriting between 1989 and 2019"), in *Să nu privești înapoi. Comunism, dramaturgie, societate* (*Don't Look Back. Communism, Playwriting, Society*), ed. Liviu Malița (Cluj-Napoca: Presa Universitară Clujeană, 2022), 710.

From Andreea Vălean, Gianina Cărbunariu, Peca Ştefan, Bogdan Georgescu, Mihaela Michailov, Maria Manolescu, to Alexandra Pâzgu, Andreea Tănase, Alexa Băcanu, the Romanian dramaturgy of the 2000s and post-2000s is heterogeneous in both form and theme. Of course, common thematic lines can be observed: recurring topics such as migration, social inequality, education and state-citizen relations, history, revisiting socialism, transition, capitalism, community, and political or gender identity. These themes are also prominent in Romanian literature of the 2000s, which reflects similar concerns.

Stylistically, however, the situation is considerably more complex: we cannot speak of a unified direction, nor of clearly defined movements. There are predominantly fragmented texts, built through collage techniques, poetic texts, devised works that blend styles and narrative cores, reality and fiction, performance and theatricality, as well as more classical plays with dramatic structures. Epic theatre with Brechtian roots persists, as well as poetic theatre, documentary theatre (which only appears in Romania in the 2000s), and political theatre (which may take on any of the aforementioned stylistic forms). While drama continues to dominate in state theatres, the independent scene is the nucleus of the postdramatic laboratory and experimentation.

From collaborative creation, to the "onstage" or "rehearsal-room" playwright, to the playwright-as-writer (one who proposes texts or writes commissioned works to be staged), we find a diversity of roles, styles, and directions that require legitimacy and a unifying discourse – similar to the way literary currents, theoretical schools, or stylistic and generational classifications function in literature and cinema.

Thus, if we can speak of 2000s and post-2000s movements in literature (which include fracturism, minimalism, autofiction, objective prose of the transition period, the import of posthumanism, etc.) and the New Wave in cinema, then playwriting and performative practices likewise import and adopt the postdramatic (a term sometimes used interchangeably in contemporary discourse with the even less theorized and debated "post-postdramatic"). The lack of legitimacy caused by dramaturgy's rupture from literature is, terminologically at least, "corrected" by the import of this concept.

Elinor Fuchs, a scholar of modern and postmodern theatre and professor at Yale University, believes that Lehmann's concept of the postdramatic needs to be reexamined. In a review-essay, she deconstructs his thesis concerning the replacement of the dramatic form with the postdramatic one – a radical vision for which, I believe, she partially misjudges him, given that Lehmann clearly states in his book that the postdramatic does not entail the disappearance of the text or of drama, with which its "twin" continues to coexist within the European theatrical space. Nevertheless, Fuchs' analysis is thought-provoking, and some of her critiques are well-founded. Starting from the question, "A decade and more after the publication of Lehmann's book, is the dramatic form closer to exhaustion?" and through a brief analysis of several neo-avant-garde American artists mentioned by Lehmann as supporting his thesis, Elinor Fuchs focuses on a few of those names, including Robert Wilson. According to her, Wilson's influence in Europe did not radically diminish the preference for drama. On the contrary, she argues that both in the American and European theatre scenes, there is a noticeable resurgence of interest in drama. Even Wilson, after fifteen years of exclusively staging his own symptomatically postdramatic works, returned to classic dramatic texts (with plot) – he staged *King Lear* (1985), then works by Ibsen, Strindberg, and others.

At the conclusion of her argument, Fuchs offers two possibilities: either Lehmann's formula is correct (drama and theatre have diverged, but there is no real or definitive shift from dramatic to postdramatic, merely an oscillation), or it is incorrect, based on a fragile and interpretable thesis. She leans toward the second option, arguing that the flaw in Lehmann's demonstration lies in undermining the very theoretical framework from which he draws – namely, Szondi's vision of drama – by positioning Brecht not as a revolutionary reformer of the Aristotelian model, but as a representative of classical dramaturgy:

> "What Brecht achieved can no longer be understood one-sidedly as a revolutionary counter-design to tradition. In the light of the newest developments, it becomes increasingly apparent that, in a sense, the theory of epic theatre constituted a *renewal and completion of classical dramaturgy*. Brecht's theory contained a highly traditionalist thesis: the *fable* (*story*) remained the *sine qua non* for him. Yet from the point of

view of the fable, the decisive elements of the new theatre of the 1960s
to the 1990s cannot be understood – nor even the textual forms of that
theatre literature (Beckett, Handke, Strauss, Muller, Kane, etc.)."[2]

The essayist further highlights the fragility of Lehmann's theory, due
to its subjectivity:

> "If Brecht was once viewed as radically other to the dramatic, and is
> now absorbed within it, a shift in perspective could also lessen the
> distance between drama and its departed twin, theater. Or rather, the
> two may display, over time, as perhaps suggested by my American
> examples of the return of narrative theater, a new rapprochement after
> the divide that Lehmann describes."[3]

The weaknesses of this theory, the critiques it has received, and the
gaps left by the author in the original text have created a context in which
the term's importation and assimilation into various theatre environments
has been particularly loose. The first problem, then, is the theory itself – its
ambiguities and internal contradictions. The second arises in its interpretation
and application. Therefore, in the following part of my article, I will examine
how the postdramatic – whether as terminology or as a dramaturgical/
performance paradigm – enters the vocabulary of Romanian theorists and
practitioners, what nuances, limits, and reframings it receives. I propose a
survey of the Romanian critical and theoretical landscape to assess how
postdramatic theatre has been received, imported, and metabolized.

A Survey of Divergent Critical Views Among Romanian Theorists and Practitioners Regarding the Postdramatic Paradigm

An important aspect that reveals the insufficient assimilation of the
concept – or perhaps its inefficacy (due to its fragile theoretical grounding
and the vagueness it implies) – is the dissonance of opinions among critics,

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[2] Hans-Thies Lehmann, *Postdramatic Theatre*, Translated and with an Introduction by Karen Jürs-Munby (London & New York: Routledge, 2006), 33.
[3] Elinor Fuchs, "Postdramatic Theatre and the Persistence of the 'Fictive Cosmos': A View from America." *UDC* 792(73) (2000/2010): 69.

theorists, and theatre practitioners. I therefore propose a survey of several central perspectives within the Romanian theatrical establishment regarding the postdramatic.

Miriam Cuibus, actress at the "Lucian Blaga" National Theatre in Cluj-Napoca and acting professor at the Faculty of Theatre and Film in Cluj-Napoca, cites George Banu's phrase "orphaned formulas" in reference to "postdramatic theatrical formulas" (as she further explains) in an essay on Romanian dramaturgy during the communist era (especially that of Gellu Naum). In another essay, also published in the volume *Să nu privești înapoi…*, she notes: "At present, it seems we are caught in the whirlwind of a great paradigm shift; the world is changing its mold and moving toward a vague, diffuse, imprecise destination. As a theatre person, I observe that the theatrical world is marked by the civilization of the image, by signs of postmodernism and postdramatic theatre, and by the harbingers of the posthuman."[4] From Naum's texts – marked by performative avant-garde language – to the immediate present, the postdramatic is shown here to *migrate* across temporalities and to be associated with both postmodernism and posthumanism.

In the same direction leans the discourse of theatre critic Ion Cocora, whose take is somewhat more radical in underlining the deconstructive impulse that defines the postdramatic:

> "Certainly, from the second half of the 20th century to the present, the theatrical act has undergone fundamental changes and unusual metamorphoses, also generating radical theoretical speculations (see: postdramatic theatre), whose subversion negates even the presence of 'story' and 'character' in a performance, going so far as to eliminate the playwright from the phenomenon."[5]

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[4] Miriam Cuibus, ["Anchetă cu oameni de teatru" ("Survey with Theatre Professionals")], in *Să nu privești înapoi. Comunism, dramaturgie, societate* (*Don't Look Back. Communism, Playwriting, Society*), ed. Liviu Malița (Cluj-Napoca: Presa Universitară Clujeană, 2022), 196.

[5] Ion Cocora, ["Anchetă cu oameni de teatru" ("Survey with Theatre Professionals")], in *Să nu privești înapoi. Comunism, dramaturgie, societate* (*Don't Look Back. Communism, Playwriting, Society*), ed. Liviu Malița (Cluj-Napoca: Presa Universitară Clujeană, 2022), 237.

According to Cocora, the postdramatic paradigm underpins this metamorphosis and is chiefly defined by its negating drive (despite the fact that Lehmann himself emphasizes that the postdramatic does not entail the disappearance of the text or of the playwright, but rather builds his entire argument around their reconfiguration).

Tompa Andrea, theatre critic and also professor at the Faculty of Theatre and Film in Cluj-Napoca, regards the postdramatic both as a contemporary paradigm and as a lens through which we also relate to the past – whether critically or in a spirit of recovery. She writes:

> "Mainstream theatres in Hungary and Hungarian theatres in Romania engage with the past [prior to 1989] only through more recent plays or postdramatic texts. [...] The paradigmatic shift in the performing arts toward postdramatic theatre influences attitudes toward any text. The dramatic text is no longer the exclusive foundation of performed theatre. [...] Contemporary performance culture is not a culture of 'well-made plays' aspiring to canonization, but a critical and postdramatic one."[6]

Her view draws a connection between postdramatic and postmodernism through their shared relationship with the past (either ironic or critical), hinting – implicitly – at techniques such as citation and pastiche as ways of engaging with previous texts. At the same time, the theorist highlights the dramaturg/ playwright-writer dichotomy (prevalent before '89 and still present in the 1990s) – a dramaturg / playwright understood as a socio-political agent, a practitioner operating outside the literary establishment. Between the lines, one can infer a potential problematization of the (necessary and desirable) rupture between theatre and literature, the latter being perceived as having ossified plays through its obsession with canonicity. This rupture is attributed to postdramatic culture, which alters the attitude toward the performance text and gives rise to a new kind of dramaturg/ playwright.

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6   Andrea Tompa, ["Micro-anchetă: Dramaturgia maghiară în comunism" ("Micro-Survey: Hungarian Playwriting under Communism")], in *Să nu privești înapoi. Comunism, dramaturgie, societate* (*Don't Look Back. Communism, Playwriting, Society*), ed. Liviu Malița (Cluj-Napoca: Presa Universitară Clujeană, 2022), 368-369.

Olivia Grecea, on the other hand – a director, theorist, and assistant professor at the Faculty of Theatre and Film – uses the postdramatic (sometimes alternating with "post-postdramatic," depending on the theoretical framework she operates within) as a conceptual frame, a contemporary paradigm encompassing new forms of theatre, including devised theatre, which she analyzes. For instance, she discusses the notion of the dramaturge-at-stage – *écriture de plateau* – whose popularity she explains through its inclusion in the postdramatic paradigm: "Anne Monfort sees postdramatic writing as a form of writing that draws on a multitude of matrices – whether visual, choreographic, or transdisciplinary."[7] It is also evident that, for Grecea, the postdramatic remains relevant, given that the redefinition of theatre in the early 1990s seems to take place in relation to it: "The notions of postmodern theatre, postdramatic theatre, performance art, and performance shape a new paradigm of contemporary theatre, which we may call the performative theatre paradigm."[8] The postdramatic, through the democratization it proposes on all levels, would suggest "a type of performance that is – paradoxically – more accessible than dramatic performance, because the stage form excludes the possibility of a single message."[9]

The most polarized and problematizing perspectives, however, are those of Miruna Runcan – critic and professor at the Faculty of Theatre and Film – and Alina Nelega. The former attributes the rupture between theatre and literature (or, more precisely, between stage practice – especially directing – and its contemporary dramaturgy) not to the concept of the postdramatic itself, but to the delayed import of postdramatic aesthetics (namely, of the formulas Lehmann labeled "postdramatic" decades after their initial emergence):

"If the distancing of theatrical performance from the tutelage of preexisting dramatic literature (hence the otherwise debatable concept of the 'postdramatic' introduced by Lehmann) was, throughout European-type cultures, a phenomenon that evolved naturally in the second half

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[7] Olivia Grecea, *Creația teatrală colectivă. Utopie, instrument și teatru politic* (*Collective Theatre-Making: Utopia, Method, and Political Theatre*) (Bucharest: Eikon, 2017), 126.

[8] Olivia Grecea, 234.

[9] Olivia Grecea, 207.

of the 20th century, nowhere did this distancing equate to the exclusion of dramatic literature from the stage – much less its exclusion from the field of literature itself. This 'Romanian' particularity was bound to provoke a reaction aimed at reinserting dramatic writing into the theatrical life of our country, and this reaction began to become visible, in various forms, after 2000."[10]

The theorist underscores both the fragile nature of Lehmann's concept and the double marginality of playwriting – an idea also highlighted by Liviu Malița: on the one hand, in relation to performance practices; on the other, in relation to literature (understood as prose and poetry). At the same time, the essayist describes the theatre movements of the 2000s and post-2000s as restorative efforts that respond to the growing gap between contemporary text and performance. However, the "reinsertion of dramatic writing" that Runcan speaks of does not necessarily imply a synchronous effort to return playwriting to the broader field of literature. She thus continues to problematize this second rupture, still unresolved:

"But what about the simple play, the classic play – simultaneously stageable and considered 'heritage literature'? In this case, there are, at best, few and scattered responses in both theatre and literary criticism, since only very recently (that is, in the year of the pandemic) did somewhat coherent and coordinated debates begin to take shape around this topic – a sign that it should be approached seriously and cohesively in the years to come. From my perspective, the theatre text with dual valence – both stage-oriented and literary – has, in fact, never disappeared; rather, it has been continuously undervalued and marginalized by theatre institutions."[11]

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[10] Miruna Runcan, "Dramaturgia și datoriile (amânate ale) criticii de teatru" ("Playwriting and the (Postponed) Duties of Theatre Criticism"), in *Să nu privești înapoi. Comunism, dramaturgie, societate* (*Don't Look Back. Communism, Playwriting, Society*), ed. Liviu Malița (Cluj-Napoca: Presa Universitară Clujeană, 2022), 608.

[11] Miruna Runcan, 611.

Runcan belives that a researcher could find, in the last 30 years, plays that are perfectly stageable and do not lose their literary value because of this. She also proposes to rethink the tools of theatre criticism in relation to devised theatre and to the need of supporting the circulation of dramatic texts.

Alina Nelega, on the other hand, was one of the key promoters of the "divorce" between literature and dramaturgy at the end of the 1990s. Both the position of the writer-dramaturg and that of the "functionary" serving the ideas of a director – as "dramaturg-at-stage" – were, for her, undesirable options, but lacked alternatives in the immediate post-Revolution period. The latter is explained by the theorist as being "in the spirit of what, a few years later, would be identified and named by Lehmann in his book – relevant for 20th-century theatre – as 'postdramatic theatre,' meaning theatre after the play."[12] Thus, one initial interpretation of the postdramatic is that it represents a paradigm specific to the last century. However, Nelega returns to this idea at the end of her essay, ultimately envisioning the theatre of the future as "postdramatic" and devoid of any authorial instance (whether that of the singular playwright or of the sovereign director):

> "One could say that theatrical writing is becoming less and less literary and more and more documentary or performative, while the one(s) generating it form a synchronized team, tailored as needed to the performance as a singular object – artistic or otherwise. We could open here a discussion about the extent to which theatre is still art today – or the extent to which art can still be produced or generated in another way. Can we still speak of an author? How do we relate today to the dramatic author, in a context where plays continue to be written based on character, situation, and story – texts that border literature and share their ever-shrinking territory with political theatre, with collectivism and leftist ideologies that generate performances built around a consciously assumed authorial dispersal? What do we do with a living, invisible, ever-changing theatre – a theatre that is not only postdramatic but also post-directorial?"[13]

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[12] Alina Nelega, 709.
[13] Alina Nelega, 723.

We see that the perspective supported by Alina Nelega actually involves much broader issues that deserve to be addressed and pursued further. In relation to these analyses of the terminological use of the postdramatic, my research now aims to crystallize several fundamental problems raised by such a loose interpretation of postdrama.

Problematizations. From a (Vaguely) Legitimatizing Concept to the 2000s Paradigm (The Dynamics of the Alternative Scene)

Thus, fractured by these local theoretical gaps, there are three major problems raised by the import and belated attempt to metabolize the postdramatic – an act of recovery in relation to the West.

a. On the one hand, we witness the simultaneous inclusion, for example, of both Silviu Purcărete (belonging to the 1980s generation) and Leta Popescu (from the 2000s generation) within the same postdramatic aesthetic/ paradigm, which leads to the erasure of obvious generational boundaries – at least at the level of theatrical practice. Silviu Purcărete works exclusively with canonized texts, often with mythical overtones, which he transposes on stage in a mannerist fashion (a style/aesthetic that consecrated him and which became a template, and thus classicized within the national theatrical establishment), in state theatres and through grand productions. In contrast, Leta Popescu has been trained and has directed predominantly within the independent sector, works exclusively with contemporary texts, sometimes commissioned or devised (adaptations of contemporary prose and poetry, plays by 2000s playwrights, texts developed in theatrical laboratories, her own writings), and she is an activist, a political and critical voice. Looking at Lehmann's list of postdramatic features, through a subjective interpretation, both could seem postdramatic. Yet, in practice and upon closer analysis, the differences prove much greater than the similarities. So what does *postdramatic* still mean, then? Is it a Procrustean bed that can fit almost anything?

b. On the other hand, while at the European level, postdramatic theatre emerged in the 1960s-1970s, and in Romania manifested itself through Purcărete's productions in the 1980s and more fully from the 2000s onward – can it reasonably cover the entire period 1980–2023, over 40 years? Are we still in the postdramatic?

If we refer to Lehmann's own examples, such a broad timespan might seem possible: Tadeusz Kantor (1915-1990) created postdramatic performances, as did the group Gob Squad (a company founded in 1995, after Kantor's death). The latter held a workshop with the independent theatre *Reactor de Creație și Experiment* in Cluj in 2022 (whose productions are, as this connection suggests, but also based on a repertory and performance analysis, postdramatic as well. The aesthetic specific to *Reactor* aligns with the postdramatic structures theorized by Lehmann, with a few exceptions: *Our Little Centennial* by Maria Manolescu, directed by Dragoș Alexandru Mușoiu; *All the Things Alois Took from Me*, by Cosmin Stănilă, directed by Andrei Măjeri, and others. Similarly, Cosmin Stănilă signs both the dramatic text, directed by Andrei Măjeri, and the dramaturgy of the devised performance *Part I. Love,* directed by Petro Ionescu.

Moreover, other texts by Maria Manolescu maintain a dramatic structure, such as *As Yourself*, while the latest text directed by Leta Popescu at the Cluj National Theatre – a revisitation of *The Taming of the Shrew* through an original, self-referential, and performative script that deconstructs the "fictive cosmos" of the stage and (re)problematizes the spectator-performance relationship in a metatheatrical manner – is clearly postdramatic. Alexandra Pâzgu, who assumes a poetic and formally postdramatic writing style (as evidenced by *Fluorescent Proteins* and *Supernovae*), nevertheless states that she is interested in how one can still construct narratives, how one can still tell stories today (so the focus remains on rethinking fabula – surely not in a classical-dramatic sense?). Can we then place her in a hybridized post-postdramatic space, which explores precisely these combinatory possibilities?

c. Last but not least, considering both the distinction that Lehmann operates with and the partial integration of the postdramatic into European postmodernism, one may ask: *Is Romanian theatre still postmodern, despite its thematic and aesthetic similarities with literature and cinema, which have already moved beyond postmodernism and clearly distanced themselves from it?*

Emerging paradigms in the literary field – such as intersectional feminism and gender studies, postcolonialism, ecocriticism, posthumanism and nonhumanism – also find areas of intersection with theatre (particularly with queer and intersectional community theatre, political theatre in all its forms, immersive theatre and installations, happenings, performance art, etc.).

Can these coexist with the postdramatic model? Does the postdramatic paradigm offer a discursive framework that allows space for these themes and aesthetic approaches? Examples such as Radu Afrim's production *The Heart and Other Meat-Based Dishes*, a stage adaptation of Dan Coman's volume, or *(IN)VISIBLE* by Leta Popescu, a collage of contemporary poetry, among many others, demonstrate the use of dramaturgical material with the same thematic and stylistic substance as contemporary Romanian literature. Thus, the theoretical or paradigmatic gap becomes more problematic.

The English translation of Lehmann's volume appeared in 2006, seven years after the first German edition, and only three years before the Romanian one. However, as Elinor Fuchs pointed out, American culture had not remained anchored in postdramatic aesthetics, but had instead evolved fluidly, oscillating naturally between the dramatic and the postdramatic.

The delayed integration of the postdramatic in the Romanian context is not necessarily due to the moment when the term itself – which retroactively legitimizes and unifies theatrical movements from 1960 to 1999 and anticipates later developments – enters the local theatrical vocabulary, but rather to a temporal gap in relation to European dramaturgical and performative practices. Its assimilation remains problematic, due to, on the one hand, the proven conceptual fragility and underlying vagueness of Lehmann's theory, as well as the incongruent views on what exactly constitutes the postdramatic, and, on the other hand, the lack of a proper discursive space to explore this paradigm. Nevertheless, theatre practitioners do employ the term, both as a means of legitimizing their work through a Western-validated theory and because experimental theatrical forms in the Romanian context are often of postdramatic lineage.

Faced with these challenges, and with the necessity of articulating a theoretical language for contemporary playwriting – where introducing another term, such as "postmodern theatre," would only further complicate the already fragile discursive framework – a clear definition of the Romanian postdramatic becomes imperative. What is and what is not postdramatic in Romania? My argument is that postdramatic theatre becomes operative in Romania only with the generation of playwrights emerging in the 2000s, and that it does not replace dramatic theatre but functions in parallel, at most as

a laboratory alternative to it. There is no actual dramatic/postdramatic rupture or final shift, but rather a short-circuiting of classicized models through increasingly assumed postdramatic forms.

In terms of periodizing the emergence of this new paradigm, what Lehmann identified as postdramatic in Romania – such as performances by Silviu Purcărete – or other productions from the 1980s in his vein, should, in my view, be seen at most as pre-postdramatic manifestations, where certain traits of the postdramatic appear mainly in the montage and directorial concept, not in the explicitly dramaturgical aspect. The text remains largely untouched, often classical or mythical in nature. In contrast, for the 2000s generation, the metamorphosis of the text often takes place simultaneously with that of the performance, within the rehearsal room, and is both structural and substantial. New texts written for the stage are frequently postdramatic from the outset.

Moreover, while I do not fully agree with philosopher and art critic Arthur Danto's view – quoted by Elinor Fuchs – that "unlike the fine arts, theatre is not progressive but oscillates historically between realism and various types of formalism"[14], I believe that problematizing the postdramatic as a form, rather than a clearly defined paradigm is essential in the Romanian context. It is currently operative, often hybridized with the dramatic, but we may ask, following Elinor Fuchs: "Can we expect the return of the text at some point?... Can drama absorb postdrama and move forward?" "Has theatre, like art in Danto's framework, definitively abandoned representation – or will the dramatic reabsorb these detours and continue in a transformed form?"[15] Have we moved beyond the postdramatic – or will we? And what could come next? The disappearance of the single creator, be it playwright or director, as Alina Nelega suggests? A hybrid, posthuman theatre?

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[14] Arthur Danto quoted in Elinor Fuchs, 71.
[15] Elinor Fuchs, 71.

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Independent Dance in Cluj-Napoca: Organizational Strategies and Audience Dynamics

Beatrice LUPU[*]

Abstract: With two primary research questions in mind, this study investigates Cluj-Napoca's independent dance culture: "How do available resources (human, financial, and logistical) influence the organization and operational strategies of dance studios?" and "How aware, interested, and involved is Cluj's audience, and what influences their behaviour as public or students?" The study reveals a varied but vulnerable sector through a questionnaire with 85 respondents and four interviews with cultural dance space managers. Sustainability is impacted by several factors, including a lack of consistent resources, difficulties with promoting the opportunities, lack of support from the local administration, and the strain of operating in uncertain and unpredictable circumstances. Every studio operates using its own flexible structure, and there is no set organisational model. Even though there is public interest, low visibility and restricted information available continue to be major obstacles to wider involvement. The results highlight the necessity of better coordination among cultural actors and more support from local authorities. The dance scene in Cluj-Napoca may have a more sustainable future if these ties are strengthened.

Keywords: independent dance, cultural management, audience engagement, Cluj-Napoca, sustainability, cultural participation, dance studios, community arts.

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Dance is a crucial form of artistic and social expression in the urban cultural landscape, contributing to social interaction, cultural identity, and personal growth. In Cluj-Napoca, a major cultural and academic hub in Romania, dance plays a vital role in its development. The city's dance scene is diverse and has significant untapped potential. To understand dance as both a performance and an institutional component, this study combines historical analysis with sociological and cultural management tools. Dance is deeply rooted in society's cultural realities, functioning as both a form of artistic expression and a social practice: "Dance history is primarily concerned with the understanding of past dance forms, explored within the context of their time and through the lens of the changes they have undergone," as June Layson explains in *Dance History: An Introduction*[1].

Independent dance studios, often operating without consistent public funding, face the challenge of balancing artistic goals with cultural entrepreneurship. According to Daigle and Rouleau, strategic planning can mediate managerial demands and artistic objectives, fostering internal coherence[2]. This challenge is particularly pronounced in Cluj-Napoca, where dance studios must preserve their vision while navigating a resource-constrained environment. This study, therefore, examines dance in autonomous settings from the perspective of organizational viability.

Cluj-Napoca boasts a variety of dance styles, from classical ballet and contemporary dance to Latin genres (salsa, bachata), urban styles (commercial choreography), and street-derived forms (hip-hop, breaking). Emerging trends like African dance and K-pop are gaining popularity, especially among younger audiences. While there is potential for collaboration, the interaction between styles remains uneven. Additionally, many audience members lack understanding of the cultural significance of different dance forms, limiting engagement. As an example, another barrier to audience engagement is the general lack of education regarding dance terminology and its cultural roots.

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[1] June Layson, "Historical Perspectives in the Study of Dance," in *Dance History: An Introduction*, ed. Janet Adshead-Lansdale and June Layson (London: Routledge, 1994), 3.

[2] Daigle, Pascale, and Linda Rouleau. "Strategic Plans in Arts Organizations: A Tool of Compromise Between Artistic and Managerial Values." *International Journal of Arts Management* 12, no. 3 (2010): 13-30. https://www.jstor.org/stable/41065025

A common misconception would be the conflation of street dance with urban dance. As explained by the STEEZY Editorial Team, street dance refers to styles that developed organically within specific communities (such as hip-hop, popping, or breaking) and are rooted in everyday life, often practiced in social settings like block parties, clubs, or public spaces.[3] These styles carry deep cultural and social meaning and are tied to the identities of the communities from which they emerged. In contrast, urban dance is a more recent choreographic form developed in studios or online platforms, such as YouTube or TikTok. It draws stylistic inspiration from various street styles, as well as from jazz, contemporary, or commercial dance, yet misses a distinct cultural identity. Rather than being grounded in social or community practices, urban dance is primarily performed for showcases, competitions, and video content.

This research uses qualitative data from interviews with studio managers and a survey of local audiences to map the challenges and suggest pathways for greater sustainability. The findings contribute to broader cultural studies discussions by offering insights into how independent dance spaces operate within urban cultural ecosystems. The study also seeks to offer practical guidance for cultural managers, artists, and policymakers. By understanding audience perceptions, it aims to improve cultural marketing strategies and community engagement. The research stems from a long-standing interest in dance's societal role, informed by direct engagement with Cluj's dance community. As the number of studios grows, a better understanding of the ecosystem's strengths and limitations is crucial. This study lays the foundation for further research into how dance is organized, communicated, and sustained at the local level, starting with a more systematic mapping of dance spaces and practices in Cluj-Napoca.

This research combines qualitative and quantitative methods to analyze the operating models of dance studios in Cluj-Napoca, the perspectives of managers, and the public's perceptions of the local dance scene. It focuses on the styles promoted, public knowledge of the studios' activities, and suggestions

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[3] STEEZY Editorial Team. "What Is 'Urban Dance." Accessed February 9, 2025, https://www.steezy.co/posts/what-is-urban-dance.

for improving the field's quality. The study approaches dance as both an artistic and cultural phenomenon, as well as a social activity within the local context. The research consists of two complementary components:

• **Qualitative investigation**: Semi-structured written interviews with dance studio managers, representing a range of styles (street dance, urban dance, contemporary dance, ballet).

• **Quantitative analysis**: An online questionnaire targeting both dance enthusiasts and non-dancers (including practitioners, spectators, and occasional consumers).

These approaches combine insights from studio management with audience perceptions.

Methods of data collection

1. Semi-structured interviews with managers

As for the qualitative component of the interviews, three written interviews were conducted, transmitted via email, WhatsApp or Instagram messages to the managers of the premises and one telephone interview which I processed according to the manager's responses. Interviews were initially sent to six managers, but I received responses from four of them. The selection of the spaces followed the diversity of artistic and organizational profile, so in the end we finalized the interviews about the following:

-*The Hive Dance Studio:* where urban dance (choreography, heels dance), modern African dance, K-pop, ballroom dance, etc. are promoted.

-*Concrete Spot:* cultural center for street dance, especially break dance and hip-hop.

-*Genessis Dance Studio:* dance studio with a variety of styles, including contemporary dance, breaking, street dancing, commercial dance.

-*Hysteria Collective:* association promoting contemporary dance and performing arts.

Each interview included questions about the manager's professional background, internal organizational model (resources, team, legal structure), economic sustainability (funding, sources of income, partnerships), managerial

challenges and adaptation to the local cultural context. I mainly wanted to keep the same questions for each space but adapted them according to their specificities. The interviews were conducted through Google Docs and could be completed directly by the interviewers. Through these interviews I sought to figure out if there are any recurring patterns in the running of these dance spaces, common challenges and development strategies adopted.

2. *Questionnaire for the public*

The questionnaire called *Dance in Cluj-Napoca: How do you look at it?* was applied electronically, using the Google Forms platform. It was distributed on social networks, in groups and pages dedicated to dance (mainly on Instagram and WhatsApp), but also through dance instructors who agreed to help forward the questionnaire among the trainees. A sample of 85 responses was collected, mostly from young people aged 18-35, with the following categories from which respondents could choose: 14-18 years, 19-25 years, 26-35 years, 35-50 years, over 50 years.

The questionnaire consisted of 5 sections with a total of 20 questions, and the opening of the form consisted of a description of the purpose of the questionnaire and who is conducting it. The sections had the following headings: Introduction with the question "Describe in one word/sentence how you see/feel dance", Respondent profile, Perception of dance as an art form vs. recreational activity, Personal experience and exposure to dance and Dance in Cluj-Napoca - promotion and development.

The purpose of the questions was to capture:
- Public perceptions of dance
- Preferences about certain dance styles
- Opinions and knowledge about the local offer of dance courses and dance events
- Suggestions for improving the field

Thus, the interview approach was inductive, as I did not start from a fixed theoretical framework, but wanted the themes to emerge naturally from the managers' answers, adapted of course to the interviewing model which is a bit more rigid compared to capturing emotions and opinions face-to-face.

Quantitative data from the questionnaire was processed in Microsoft Excel, with frequency and co-occurrence analysis of some variables (interest in styles vs. perception of their promotion). The automatically generated Google Form charts were also used for the closed-ended questions (multiple choice and choice grid). From the open answers were extracted the main recurrent ideas on the dance field in Cluj-Napoca (lack of visibility of the field, high costs, lack of space, desire for community coagulation, etc.).

Limitations of the study

The following research limitations should be mentioned:

- The sample of the questionnaire is a convenience sample, with a predominance of young people, which limits the generalizability of the results to the entire population of the city and is limited to 85 responses.

- The interviews do not cover the whole institutional range (for example, the perspectives of public institutions, such as the Romanian National Opera in Cluj-Napoca, the House of Culture of Students, are missing) and the lack of managers' answers makes it impossible to carry out a very rigorous analysis. In total, perspectives were collected from four venues, including two successful dance studios, one urban cultural center and one start-up association.

- The possibility of a subjective selection bias: the research participants are largely people already interested in dance, which may lead to more positive or engaged views than the average public, and it is possible that this bias was also evident in the selection of dance studios, given my own individual involvement in the field.

- The qualitative analysis of the open-ended responses implies a degree of subjectivity in the interpretation as an inductive pattern was followed.

Field research

1. Interview Analysis with Dance Studio Managers

The first phase of the research involved interviews with managers from four dance spaces in Cluj-Napoca: The Hive Dance Studio, Concrete Spot, Genessis Dance Studio, and Hysteria Collective. The goal was to understand

both the organizational aspects of these studios and the broader cultural and social context in which they operate. Beyond visible elements like classes and events, the interviews explored how these spaces are imagined, sustained, and strategically shaped by their managers. These conversations revealed a strong sense of passion, courage, and hope for the local dance scene, despite its fragmented and often loosely defined "independent" or "alternative" nature. As Miki Braniște (professor and cultural manager) notes, this so-called independent scene is far from being cohesive or stable. Rather, it is marked by constant negotiation and adaptation.[4] Despite the enthusiasm and creative energy that characterizes this environment, Cluj's cultural sector continues to face systemic challenges: the absence of a coherent public infrastructure, limited institutional support, and persistent competition for visibility and funding. The managers interviewed pointed out the lack of support from local authorities, which place additional pressure on their work. In this precarious setting, cultural actors are forced to continuously reinvent themselves to survive. As Braniște puts it, this results in a fragile ecosystem sustained despite, not thanks to, any consistent cultural policy[5].

In the field of dance, this precarity is especially visible. Most studios operate either as independent, self-financed initiatives or as non-governmental organizations dependent on unstable funding streams and seasonal partnerships. But the functioning of a cultural space can't be fully grasped through organizational charts or managerial structures alone. As organizational theorist Charles Handy argues, the essence of how organizations function lies not only in formal processes but in the shared feelings, experiences, and informal dynamics that shape everyday life inside them.[6] Starting from this idea, I approached the interviews with an interest in how dance studios work, not only as physical spaces for training and performance but as emotional, expressive, and strategic environments shaped by the people who lead them.

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4 Miki Braniște, *Creativitatea-marfă: O perspectivă din interiorul scenei culturale independente clujene 2009-2019* [*Creativity as a Commodity: An Inside Perspective on the Cluj Independent Cultural Scene 2009-2019*] (Cluj-Napoca: Idea Design & Print, 2021), 21

5 Miki Braniște, *Creativitatea-marfă*, 21.

6 Charles B. Handy, *Understanding Organizations* (London: Penguin, 1986), 197.

Artistic Visions and Managerial Motivations. The Hive Dance Studio, manager Tudor Șchiopu

After entrepreneurial training, Tudor Șchiopu founded a dance studio in 2019, aiming to impact Cluj-Napoca's dance scene. Motivated by international trends, he applied to the European Start-Up Plus program to fuel his vision. The Hive Dance Studio became a vibrant, open space for dancers, blending creativity and professionalism. For Tudor, dance is both a lifestyle and a creative business. He said about himself and his passion: "I define myself as the soul of an artist, the brain of an entrepreneur and the body of a dancer. I'm a simple man who has had big aspirations from a young age and have enjoyed the sound of music ever since I learned to walk. Naturally, dance stuck with me, as it has always been part of my human experience,"[7] as a compelling synthesis that also guides his approach to studio management. He often advises those just starting out to actively connect these three dimensions (body, mind, and soul) to find the balance they are seeking.

Concrete Spot, manager Simina Poinar

Simina Poinar, an Economic Sciences graduate and breaking instructor, founded a cultural center in 2019 to support youth through art. Inspired by an Austrian model of non-formal education, she saw a gap for such initiatives in Cluj-Napoca and Romania. Concrete Spot operates on the principle "each one, teach one," central to Hip-Hop culture, reflecting Simina's commitment to passing on cultural values. Together with her team, she manages both Concrete Spot and the Concrete Rockers Association, focusing on community and the principles of breaking. Simina speaks candidly about what dance means to her: she's not entirely sure how it all happened, but she knows with certainty that she couldn't imagine life without it.[8]

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[7] Interview with Tudor Șchiopu, The Hive Dance Studio, conducted by the author, April 2025. Original quote: „ Mă definesc ca fiind suflet de artist, creier de antreprenor și corp de dansator. Sunt un simplu om care a avut aspirații mari de mic și care s-a bucurat de sunetul muzicii de când am învățat să merg. În mod natural, dansul s-a lipit de mine, ca și când a fost tot timpul parte din experiența mea umană."

[8] Interview with Simina Poinar, Concrete Spot, conducted by the author, April 2025. Original quote: „Nu știu exact cum s-a întâmplat dar sunt sigură că nu aș mai putea să trăiesc fără să am dansul în viața mea."

Genessis Dance Studio, Founder and Manager Diana Pop

Genessis Dance Studio's motto, "Dream. Dance. Dare." reflects the energy of its founder, Diana Pop, a dedicated and community-focused leader. With over 20 years of dance experience, Diana opened the studio in 2014 to expand Cluj-Napoca's dance scene and provide opportunities for dancers with limited financial means. Genessis is an inclusive, supportive space that cares for both students' dance development and their everyday lives. Diana describes Genessis as "a space of continuous rebirth, construction, and discovery, of oneself and others," and this philosophy is reflected in her management style.[9] One particularly meaningful discovery was learning that their administrative team includes a trained psychologist, while all instructors receive dedicated training on how to interact with students in a thoughtful and informed way. At Genessis, dance becomes more than physical movement, it is a form of emotional support and personal growth.

Hysteria Collective, Cultural Manager Alex Rădulea, President Hunor Varga

"Dance has always been present in Cluj, but only in phases, there have been interruptions, breaks in continuity, and over time, the audience has either lost touch or changed altogether,"[10] says choreographer Hunor Varga, president of Hysteria Collective. This emerging initiative in the field of contemporary dance began its journey with a strong debut: it's very first project received the highest score in a funding call by AFCN (The Administration of the National Cultural Fund). Guided by bold artistic aspirations rooted in contemporary performance, the collective is committed to building something long-lasting beyond the fleeting life of a single show. The members of the association, shaped artistically within the independent performing arts scene, have experienced firsthand the instability and lack of coherence characterizing

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[9] Interview with Diana Pop, Genessis Dance Studio, conducted by the author, April 2025. Original quote: „Genessis pentru mine înseamnă a renaște, a construi, a descoperi neîncetat, pe sine și pe ceilalți."

[10] Interview with Hunor Varga, Hysteria Collective, conducted by the author, April 2025. Original quote: „Dansul a existat dintotdeauna în Cluj, însă doar în etape și între astea au existat pauze, discontinuități, iar publicul s-a dezobișnuit sau chiar s-a schimbat."

the cultural field in Cluj-Napoca. "We want what we do to take shape over time, to carry a deeper meaning than just a performance that disappears after a few nights,"[11] one of the founders emphasizes. Their mission is to revitalize contemporary dance in Cluj, to rebuild the connection between artists and audiences, and to carve out a place within an independent scene that can often feel insular or difficult to access (whether in dance or theatre).

2. *Economic and financial structures*

The spaces operating under the legal form of an LLC are The Hive Dance Studio and Genessis Dance Studio. Concrete Spot works under the umbrella of the Concrete Rockers Association founded in 2019, which as of October 2022 has twenty-three volunteers working tremendously hard to achieve the association's goal to create a self-sustainable cultural center. Hysteria Collective is a self-managed NGO, founded just a few months ago.

Most dance studios in Cluj-Napoca, including those featured in this study, rely primarily on monthly fees from trainees, with additional income generated through grants, especially from the Administration of the National Cultural Fund (AFCN), and special events or international workshops. The Hive Dance Studio, for example, benefits from workshops that not only enhance its visibility but also bring in extra income. Creative funding strategies like donation campaigns and community fundraising events are also common. Concrete Spot, for instance, has been hosting the One May Jam Hip-Hop event for seven years, which unites the community, celebrates Hip-Hop culture, and serves as a platform for fundraising. I attended the event at Camping Colina, where the vibrant atmosphere included dance sessions, live concerts, and graffiti art. Similarly, The Hive Dance Studio hosts its annual Summer Showcase, offering students the opportunity to perform and generate income through ticket sales. Their troupes also perform at local events, such as fashion shows and weddings, providing both exposure and financial support. Newer initiatives like Hysteria Collective have also sought funding through AFCN, with a successful debut project receiving top marks in its funding category.

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[11] Interview with Hunor Varga, original quote: „Ne dorim ca ceea ce facem să se construiască în timp, să aibă un sens mai adânc decât un spectacol cu o existență efemeră."

In addition to grants, they explore other funding sources like corporate and private foundations. An example of this is Concrete Rockers Association's urban culture project *Flori de Ghetou*, funded by Kaufland and the Foundation for the Development of Civil Society. Afterward, the group continued independently with personal development workshops and member support. Genessis Dance Studio has developed a strong event calendar, including themed winter shows, summer camps, and the Genessis Urban Session festival, which combines dance competitions, performances, and community engagement. These activities not only generate income but also foster a strong sense of community.

As expected, studios face a series of recurring costs:

- rent
- salaries and compensation
- utilities and maintenance
- dance equipment
- licensing fees for music rights used in classes
- subscriptions for scheduling or communication platforms
- annual expenses such as website hosting and maintenance
- content production costs: photo sessions (The Hive, for example, organizes a seasonal photo shoot at the start of each semester), video projects, and collaboration with videographers.

A significant portion of the budget at Genessis Dance Studio and The Hive Dance Studio goes into marketing and communication efforts: maintaining websites, running campaigns, producing promotional videos, publishing regular social media content, and investing in visual branding. This is clearly reflected in their polished online presence and active digital engagement.

3. *Partnerships and Sponsors*

The Hive Dance Studio maintains a partnership with Red Bull, receiving promotional packages, energy drinks, branded items, and a display unit for both Red Bull advertisements and studio content. The studio also collaborates with student associations, organizing charitable events to support disadvantaged children in Cluj, offering free or discounted classes and facilitating donations.

Concrete Spot has partnered with local residential homes, providing free dance classes for institutionalized children, and works with organizations like Trick It Up (extreme sports), Kick In It (fashion and streetwear), and U-BT Cluj-Napoca. Genessis Dance Studio occasionally partners with public schools, such as organizing a flashmob for International Day for Tolerance, but faces a lack of formal sponsorship and support from local authorities. Despite over a decade of success, the studio has not received public institutional support, and Diana Pop highlights the burden on families, who cover all travel and participation costs. Hysteria Collective is exploring partnerships with independent cultural organizations in Cluj-Napoca, such as NON-Centre for Performing Arts and Dance, OM Choreographic Centre, and Reactor de Creație și Experiment (Reactor for Creation and Experiment). The OM Choreographic Centre, founded by Oana Mureșan, is dedicated to contemporary dance and choreographic research, although it's currently restructuring. Despite this, the center's values are strongly aligned with those of the local dance community, as reflected in responses from its active members.

4. *Managerial Organization and Operating Models*

In the case of the dance spaces examined in this research, organizational culture takes on varied and context-specific form (shaped as much by vision and values as by operational constraints). To better understand these variations, I will refer to the organizational culture typology developed by Robert E. Quinn and Kim S. Cameron, outlined in the chapter *The Competing Values Framework* from their book *Diagnosing and Changing Organizational Culture* (2005 edition). This framework offers a useful lens through which to analyze the implicit and explicit models of functioning present in the dance studios studied:

Clan Culture emphasizes collaboration, teamwork, and a strong sense of community. Leadership in this context is defined more by mentorship than authority, with managers acting as "facilitators or mentors" rather than enforcers. Personal involvement and emotional connection among members are highly valued. "The organization is held together by loyalty and tradition.

Commitment is high." Success is measured in terms of internal climate and concern for people.[12]

Adhocracy Culture is commonly found in startup or innovation-driven environments. Also referred to as a "creative culture," it fosters risk-taking and experimentation, where individuals are encouraged to generate original and unconventional ideas. "The organization is a dynamic, entrepreneurial, and creative place to work." Leaders are seen as innovators and risk-takers, and adaptability is a key goal.[13]

Market Culture is defined by its focus on results and competitiveness. Goals are performance-driven, and the emphasis is on productivity and goal achievement. Leaders tend to be tough and demanding. "The organization is results-oriented, with a major concern with getting the job done. People are competitive and goal oriented."[14]

Hierarchy Culture is characterized by structured procedures, formalized environments, and clear lines of authority. "The workplace is formalized and structured. Procedures govern what people do." Efficiency, stability, and control are the key values in this type of culture, with leadership focused on coordination and monitoring.[15]

The Hive Dance Studio has a structured team, with a main manager overseeing operations and an assistant manager handling finances and administration. The marketing team consists of four members, while events are coordinated by a designated person, supported by volunteers. The studio also employs a front desk receptionist, and the founder manages human relations, directly communicating with students and overseeing the community's well-being. Genessis Dance Studio follows a similar structure, with the founder acting as the primary manager, supported by an assistant manager, a receptionist, and a team of instructors. What sets Genessis apart is the inclusion of a psychologist in the management team, emphasizing emotional

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[12] Kim S. Cameron and Robert E. Quinn, *Diagnosing and Changing Organizational Culture: Based on the Competing Values Framework*, 2nd ed. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2005), 42-43.

[13] Kim S. Cameron and Robert E. Quinn, *Diagnosing and Changing Organizational Culture*, 40-41.

[14] Kim S. Cameron and Robert E. Quinn, *Diagnosing and Changing Organizational Culture*, 43-44.

[15] Kim S. Cameron and Robert E. Quinn, *Diagnosing and Changing Organizational Culture*, 37-38.

support for students. Diana Pop, the founder, stresses the importance of intrinsic motivation and relationship-building for long-term student engagement. Genessis also provides regular professional training for instructors, focusing on communication and age-specific pedagogy. Concrete Spot, operating under an NGO, has a core administrative team of three, complemented by approximately twenty volunteers across four departments. The team is committed to continuous development, offering training for instructors and facilitators. Hysteria Collective, on the other hand, follows a non-hierarchical and inclusive model, guided by a participatory artistic philosophy. The core team consists of six members, each with distinct yet complementary responsibilities covering the full spectrum of production and communication. These roles include choreography and performance (Hunor Varga), visual design and communication (Ștefan Zamfor), dramaturgy (Cleopatra Constantinescu), scenography and visual art (Zsofia Gabor), music composition (Mara Solomon), as well as project management and financial coordination (Alexandru-Florin Rădulea).

Due to this dynamic and value-driven setup, Hysteria Collective clearly embodies what Quinn and Cameron describe as the "clan culture" – an environment "similar to a family-type organization," where teamwork, participation, and personal engagement are paramount.[16] Looking across all the spaces included in this study, one can argue that "clan culture" is the dominant model. Team members tend to share close interpersonal relationships not only among themselves but also with their students. These studios frequently organize community-building activities such as movie nights, workshops, social events, or internal dance crews. However, at various points in time and under specific circumstances, elements of "adhocracy culture" (marked by experimentation and innovation) or "market culture" (focused on results and performance) may also surface. These cultural types often intersect and blend, forming hybrid models that allow the studios to adapt and remain functional.

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[16] Kim S. Cameron and Robert E. Quinn, *Diagnosing and Changing Organizational Culture*, 42.

Pieces of advice and final perspectives

After presenting the diverse profiles of each studio, the managers also shared a series of reflections and pieces of advice for those who wish to pursue this challenging yet deeply rewarding path of cultural entrepreneurship in the field of dance:

• "Believe in your vision and be prepared for disappointments, because unfortunately we can't avoid them. Still, if you have a heart of steel that can open when needed, maybe then you'll be able to find balance more easily in what it truly means to be an artist-entrepreneur in our era." (Tudor Șchiopu)

• "I believe that as long as everything is done with passion, success is guaranteed." (Simina Poinar)

• "I would say to make sure you have a solid foundation of knowledge regarding legal matters and financial education, because many people feel this impulse of 'yes, I want to open a studio,' but it's an enormous responsibility towards the people in front of you. What's even more important is being mindful of who you choose to work with, because I often see people who aren't properly trained to interact with various age groups and who don't approach others in the right way" (Diana Pop)

The success of a dance initiative relies not only on the manager's passion but also on the surrounding environment. Managers in Cluj-Napoca's dance community have highlighted a recurring issue of unhealthy competition, which undermines collaboration and stifles collective growth. This mindset often hinders the exchange of ideas and best practices, creating a barrier to progress. There is a clear need for more open communication and a cultural shift toward a collaborative spirit that would foster mutual support. On a positive note, the city's dance scene has become increasingly diverse, with new initiatives offering more opportunities for performers and audiences to connect and express themselves. However, the challenges facing emerging artists are significant – there is no structured support system, no centralized platform for guidance, and a noticeable lack of institutional support. Despite the presence of talented individuals in Cluj, isolation,

underfunding, and a lack of networking opportunities continue to impede growth. These obstacles can be especially discouraging for newcomers in the independent arts sector, where financial instability and a lack of mentorship create further barriers to success.

The survey "Dance in Cluj-Napoca: How do you see it?". Public perception

We are shifting our focus from managers to the public, the consumers, the ones who see what is happening inside dance studios and at the city level. Through this questionnaire I sought to better understand and expose how the public perceives dance from an artistic, educational and social point of view.

A total of 85 individuals responded to the survey, *Dance in Cluj-Napoca: How Do You See It?* The majority were young people: 72.9% were between 19 and 25 years old, 22.4% between 26 and 35, while 2.4% fell into the 14-18 and 36-50 age ranges respectively. Most respondents were either university students (50%) or young professionals (32%), and the vast majority were residents of Cluj-Napoca.

This demographic structure highlights that the results primarily reflect the perspective of the city's young and active generation, one that often engages with dance both as an audience and as direct participants.

Din ce categorie de vârstă faci parte?
85 de răspunsuri
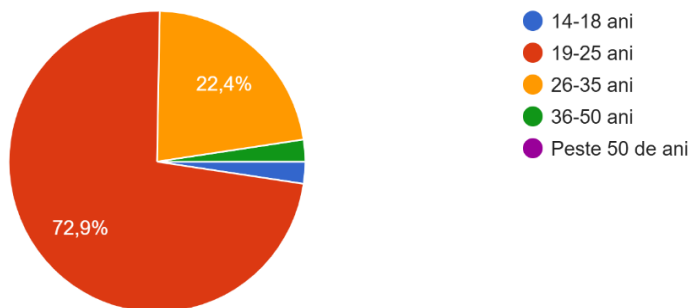
Fig. 1: What age category do you belong to?

It is worth noting that in response to the question, *what is your relationship with dance,* 43 participants indicated that dance is just a hobby, while 24 respondents described themselves as professionals in the field (either as instructors, members of dance crews, or individuals with long-term experience). Another 18 chose the option stating that they follow performances and dance events as audience members. Only 13 participants said they have no connection to dance. What emerges from the responses is a predominantly engaged and dance-aware audience. The high number of participants who describe dance as either a hobby or a professional pursuit point to a community that does not perceive dance as marginal, but rather as a meaningful and accessible part of everyday life. The fact that only a small percentage declared no connection to dance (13 out of 85) further reinforces the idea that dance in Cluj-Napoca has a tangible presence and cultural relevance, especially among the younger generation.
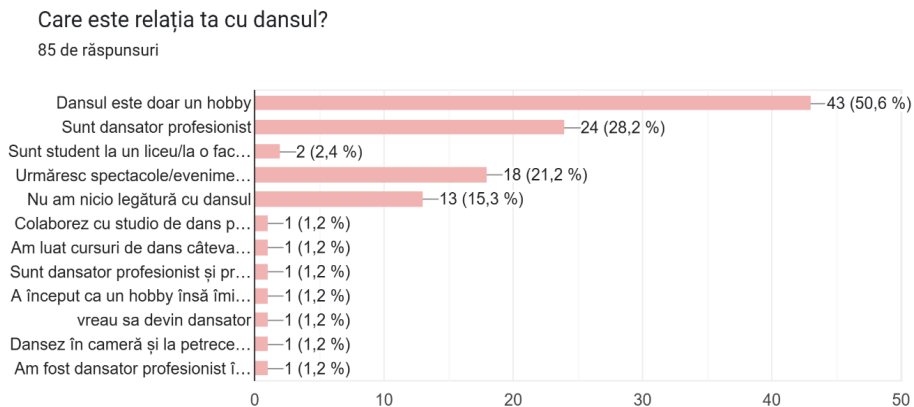
Fig. 2: What is your relationship with dance?

As for participation in dance classes in Cluj-Napoca, 27 reported having taken part at a professional level, 37 said they attended as a hobby, 18 selected the option *No, but I would like to,* and only 5 stated that they had never participated and had no interest in doing so. One respondent selected both *hobby* and *professional* participation, which suggests that their relationship with dance may have started as a recreational activity and later evolved into a deeper passion or even a professional trajectory.

Ai mai participat vreodată la cursuri de dans în Cluj-Napoca?
85 de răspunsuri
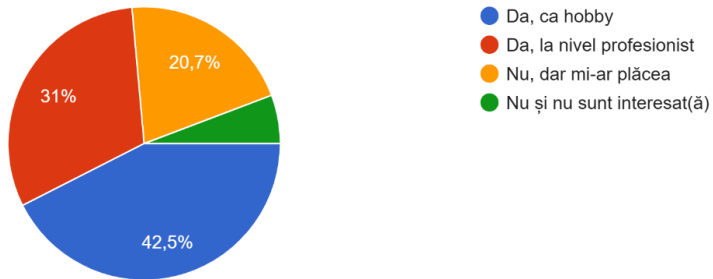
Fig. 3: Did you ever participate in dance classes in Cluj-Napoca?

As the managers noted, much of the local dance ecosystem operates independently, often lacking institutional support. The responses echo this reality: people are interested and involved, but access remains uneven and fragmented.

From a social and educational perspective, respondents were asked to select the factors they believe influence how dance is perceived as an art form. Multiple responses were allowed. The most frequently selected factor was *how dance makes you feel*, chosen by 60 participants. This highlights the emotional impact of dance on the audience and underlines its affective dimension as a form of expression.

The second most selected factor was *education and knowledge about dance*, chosen by 53 respondents. This reflects the role of artistic literacy in shaping perception as one understands the language and techniques of dance, the more one can recognize and appreciate it as a legitimate art form. Closely connected to this is the factor *the quality of performance and choreography*, selected by 48 participants. This choice reinforces the idea that appreciation comes with familiarity, and that creativity, execution, and originality all contribute to how dance is evaluated.

Another significant element is the *presence of dance in cultural institutions* (such as community centres, opera houses, theatres, and schools), which was selected by 40 respondents. This suggests that visibility in formal cultural settings contributes to the perceived legitimacy of dance as an art form.

In relation to public engagement and exposure to dance, respondents were asked whether they had ever attended a dance event or performance in Cluj-Napoca. The results show that while the dance scene in the city is relatively well known, there is still a considerable portion of the public that has not yet attended an event but would like to. Specifically, 35 participants reported attending events frequently, while 32 said they had not yet participated but would like to. Only two respondents stated that they were not interested, and 16 said they had attended occasionally.

These findings are encouraging, as they show that the Cluj-Napoca dance scene has successfully attracted a loyal segment of the public, while also suggesting strong growth potential. Among the events mentioned in the responses were ballet performances at the National Opera (such as *Swan Lake* or *The Nutcracker*), local competitions and showcases (*Women Fueled by Passion*, *Street Groove Jam*, *One May Jam*), as well as the annual showcases hosted by the studios interviewed earlier. Other events mentioned included contemporary performance pieces organized by NON Centru or OM Centru Coregrafic.

Ai mai participat vreodată la un eveniment/spectacol de dans în Cluj?
85 de răspunsuri

Legend:
- Da, de mai multe ori
- Da, dar doar ocazional
- Nu, dar mi-ar plăcea
- Nu și nu sunt interesat(ă)

37,6%
18,8%
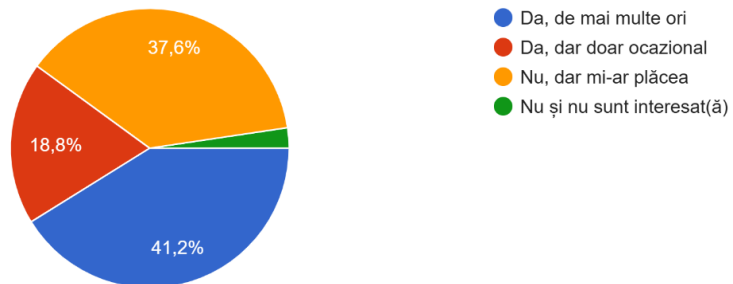41,2%

Fig. 4: Did you ever participate in dance performances or events in Cluj?

The presence of spectators who attend events and the interest expressed by those who have not yet joined a class suggest a significant untapped segment of the public, one that could be mobilized through better communication, more frequent public events, or stronger visibility of dance culture in urban life.

A significant portion of the questionnaire focused on public perceptions regarding various dance styles and how they are promoted. Respondents were invited to indicate both the styles they are most interested in and the ones they perceive as being best promoted in Cluj-Napoca. Topping both categories was *street dance*, including its related styles such as hip-hop, breakdance, and house. It was selected by 46 respondents as their preferred style, and by 59 as the most visible and well-promoted genre. In second place, in terms of popularity and perceived visibility, are *Latin American dance styles* such as salsa and bachata. These were preferred by 30 participants and considered to be well-promoted by 45. *Contemporary dance* came in third, reflecting its increasing presence on the Cluj scene. It was selected by 28 as a preferred style and by 23 as a style with good public visibility. This near alignment between the most popular and most visible dance styles suggests that there is a healthy balance between public demand and cultural offerings. The strong presence of street dance in Cluj-Napoca is also reinforced by comments from studio managers, who confirmed the genre's vibrant community and frequent events. While Latin and contemporary dance remain highly appreciated, respondents also highlighted the growing interest in *modern African dance styles*. These were selected by 24 participants as preferred style and by 26 as a well-promoted one. This growth is in part due to the efforts of The Hive Dance Studio, which actively supports the African community by offering beginner and advanced classes, and by hosting a dedicated Afro dance crew. This group performs regularly at events across the city, helping to share and celebrate the culture.

Following the analysis of the questionnaire, it becomes clear that the public is aware of and interested in the dance scene in Cluj-Napoca. Many already participate or express a desire to get involved. However, the lack of centralized information and the limited access to dance education contribute to the fact that this artistic field remains underdeveloped and somewhat out of reach for a broader audience. When asked to evaluate the current dance offerings in Cluj-Napoca, more than half of respondents (54.1%) described them as *fairly diverse, but with certain gaps.* Only 10.6% saw the scene as *very diverse,* while 9.4% felt it was *limited.* A notable share admitted they *don't really know what's available.* These results reinforce the idea that although the dance ecosystem has grown, it still lacks visibility and cohesion in the eyes of the public:

Ce stiluri de dans te interesează cel mai mult? (selectează maximum 3 opțiuni sau scrie răspunsul tău propriu)

85 de răspunsuri

Style	Value
Balet	15 (17,6 %)
Dans contemporan	28 (32,9 %)
Dans de societate (vals, tan…	15 (17,6 %)
Dansuri latino-americane (b…	22 (25,9 %)
Street dance și stiluri aferent…	31 (36,5 %)
Dansuri pe tocuri	14 (16,5 %)
Dansuri africane moderne	24 (28,2 %)
Dansuri urbane (hip-hop, bre…	14 (16,5 %)
Dansuri latino-americane (b…	8 (9,4 %)
Dans de societate (vals, tan…	7 (8,2 %)
Dancehall	2 (2,4 %)
Comercial	1 (1,2 %)
dans popular	1 (1,2 %)
Dansuri urbane (hip-hop, bre…	1 (1,2 %)
K-pop	1 (1,2 %)
Kpop	1 (1,2 %)
Kizomba/Urban Kizz	1 (1,2 %)
Street dace și stiluri aferente…	1 (1,2 %)
Contemplativ	1 (1,2 %)
Dansuri urbane (hip-hop, bre…	1 (1,2 %)

Fig. 5: What dance styles are you most interested in?

Care crezi că sunt cele mai bine promovate stiluri de dans din Cluj-Napoca? (Selectează maxim trei opțiuni sau propune răspunsul tău propriu)

85 de răspunsuri

Style	Value
Balet	10 (11,8 %)
Dans contemporan	23 (27,1 %)
Dans de societate (vals, tan…	10 (11,8 %)
Dansuri latino-americane (b…	35 (41,2 %)
Street dance și stiluri aferent…	41 (48,2 %)
Dansuri pe tocuri	15 (17,6 %)
Dansuri africane moderne	26 (30,6 %)
Dansuri urbane (hip-hop, bre…	16 (18,8 %)
Dansuri latino-americane (b…	10 (11,8 %)
Dans de societate (vals, tan…	6 (7,1 %)
Street dace și stiluri aferente…	2 (2,4 %)
Dansuri urbane (hip-hop, bre…	2 (2,4 %)
Nu stiu	1 (1,2 %)
Dansul este foarte slab prom…	1 (1,2 %)
Dansuri latino-americane (b…	1 (1,2 %)
Nu am cunoștințe în acest s…	1 (1,2 %)

Fig. 6: In your opinion, which dance styles are best promoted in Cluj-Napoca?

Cum apreciezi oferta de dans din Cluj-Napoca?
85 de răspunsuri
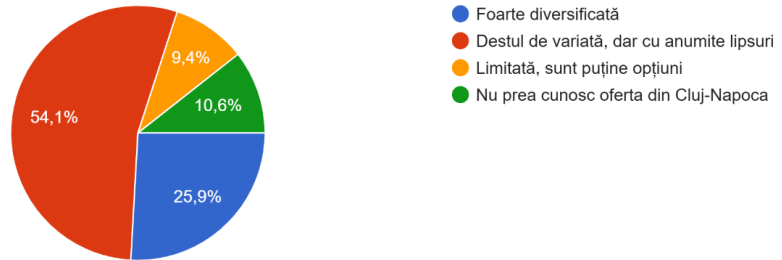
Fig. 7: How would you describe the dance offerings in Cluj-Napoca? With options: Very diverse, Fairly diverse, but with some gaps, Limited, with few available options, I'm not very familiar with the dance scene in Cluj-Napoca

Conclusion

The first research question addressed in this study was: "How do available resources (human, financial, logistical, etc.) influence the organizational structure and operational strategies of dance studios in Cluj-Napoca? Is there a general model of organization, or does each manager decide what works best for their space?" "Each studio attracts its participants through the people they work, especia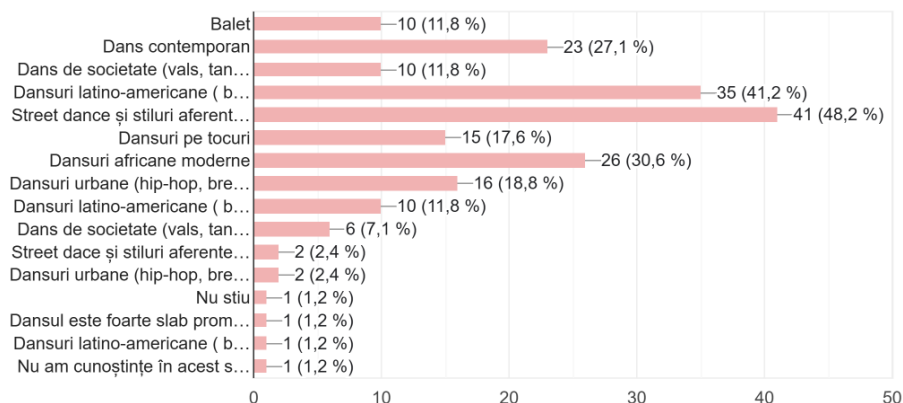lly the instructors, who have a particular kind of energy and therefore attract a specific type of people. If I look around Cluj, you can always see that in certain groups, people resemble each other based on their values."[17] From interviews and observational insights, it is clear there is no universal model for how a dance studio should operate (beyond basic administrative and legal requirements). While at first glance many studios seem to follow similar frameworks (course subscriptions, a general structure of manager-assistant-marketing roles, etc.), the reality is far more nuanced.

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[17] Interview with Diana Pop, manager of Genessis Dance Studio, April 2025. Original quote: „Fiecare studio îşi atrage cursanţii prin oamenii cu care lucrează, asta înseamnă instructorii studioului care au un anunit fel de energie şi atrag un anumit fel de oameni, pentru că dacă mă uit în Cluj, de fiecare dată vezi în anumite grupuri vezi oameni care se aseamănă pe baza valorilor lor."

As Tudor Șchiopu, founder of The Hive, simply says it: "The personal touch gives the vibes to a place."[18]

The idea that a space is defined by the people behind it, by their energy, commitment, and vision, was echoed repeatedly by interviewees. These are not just spaces for dance practice, but ecosystems shaped by care and intention, where the values of the team trickle down into how classes are taught, how community is built, and how the atmosphere is sustained. This is precisely what the interviewed managers expressed when speaking about managing their spaces and communities: a constant balancing act of handling people, resources, finances, and well-being, all while preserving artistic identity.

The second research question shifts focus to the audience: "What is the level of knowledge, interest, and participation of Cluj-Napoca's public regarding the local dance offerings, and what factors influence their behavior as spectators or course participants?" As the survey results suggest, dance is not perceived as mere entertainment. For many respondents, it is a powerful emotional and artistic form. "Describe in a word/phrase how do you feel and see dance:" freedom"," confidence"," therapy"," Dance is the silent whisper of the heart, spoken through footsteps and sighs of rhythm." Dance is experienced through how it makes one feel, how educated one is about its language and form, the quality of performance and choreography, and its presence in public institutions.

Within the limitations of this study, Cluj-Napoca's audience expressed a strong appreciation for the diversity of dance styles being taught and promoted across the city. The desire to engage with dance exists. However, a lack of centralized information and the absence of well-developed strategic interventions or culture policy are clearly reflected in the responses. Among the audience's recommendations were noted: increasing dance promotion, making it more accessible to new audiences, building a stronger presence in student communities and on campuses, strengthening the dance community through collaboration, integrating dance culture into schools, encouraging the viewing of documentaries about dance, organizing outdoor community

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[18] Interview with Tudor Șchiopu, manager of The Hive Dance Studio, April 2025. Original quote: „Omul sfințește locul."

events, and spreading awareness about the physical and emotional benefits of dancing. There is a noticeable gap in dance education, felt through hesitancy, lack of interest, and the fear of trying something new.

Although the art of dance is felt and appreciated, problems of collaboration and knowledge between the studios in Cluj-Napoca can limit the impact of dance on a more diverse and wider audience. Gertrude Prokosch Kurath, an American dancer and one of the pioneers in the study of dance ethnology, emphasizes in her article, "Panorama of Dance Ethnology," the importance of good connections between spaces and communities. She talks about the need to recognize and systematize dance as a complex form of social communication. In this sense, studios should not only be seen as places for training or performance, but also as cultural centers that can connect people and connect these communities to city life.[19] Moreover, these places should not only be seen as such but actively supported to have a real impact.

Ultimately, this research is a first step toward mapping dance spaces and practices in Cluj-Napoca, with the aim of inspiring larger-scale studies, broader surveys, and the development of informed cultural policies rooted in the local context.

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Employing Theatrical Techniques in Documentary Film

Ada-Maria ICHIM[*]

Abstract: This paper examines the intersection between documentary filmmaking and theatre, arguing that this fusion transcends traditional objective representations of reality. By incorporating elements of theatre, such as narrative structure, performance, and audience interaction, documentaries can offer deeper, more artistic explorations of complex realities and the human condition. Through the analysis of several films that exemplify this approach, the study demonstrates how theatrical techniques in documentary not only broaden the genre's artistic possibilities but also provide unique insights into historical, social, and personal contexts. This approach transforms documentaries into powerful tools for emotional and intellectual engagement, capturing the transformative journey of performers and their impact on both the film's subject and the audience, ultimately expanding the scope of documentary filmmaking.

Keywords: theatre, documentary, social impact, trauma representation, history revisited.

Documentary filmmaking has, recently, expanded its means of expression by creatively incorporating theatrical techniques as new aesthetic ways of exploring reality, moving beyond traditional objective representations towards more meaningful artistic expressions. This approach not only depicts reality but also incorporates original narrative lines and audience reaction, while

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expanding the anthropological and observational perspective to include the creators of the performance (actors, amateurs, or professionals) and the director[1]. The film narrative is amplified and its look benefits from capturing specific performances. This storytelling device expands the artistic possibilities within the genre, offering filmmakers new tools to engage with the complexities of the world.

Leading into this analysis are a few films that demonstrate the power of theatrical techniques in documentary filmmaking, confirming that the approach can provide unique insights into complex realities, making concrete elements such as war trauma, passage of time, social contexts. The case study films not only explore a range of difficult subjects but also offer a deeper understanding of the human condition by examining the transformative impact of performance on both participants and audiences. It also provides innovative and expressive tools for examining otherwise inaccessible past events. Through this more subtle, indirect approach the film offers a more nuanced and empathic perspective, as it finds a just tone for not preaching, but travelling through the characters' past and present experiences. The chosen case studies exemplify different dramaturgic approaches and their specific outcomes, according to the context they are in, historical, social, national or personal.

Theatre and documentary, while both potent mediums, engage audiences in distinct ways, employing different aesthetics and evoking varying emotional responses. Theatre offers a singular, immersive experience for a live audience, fostering immediate emotional and intellectual engagement through the shared presence of performers and spectators. The aesthetic of theatre is rooted in the immediacy of performance, the physicality of the actors, and the dynamic interplay between the stage and the audience, often prioritizing emotional intensity and catharsis.

Documentary, in contrast, extends engagement beyond the confines of a single performance by reaching a wider audience through the medium of film. Its aesthetic, rooted in cinematic techniques like editing, cinematography, and sound design, constructs a narrative that often incorporates factual and

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[1] Susannah Radstone, "Performing Documentary: The Blurring of Boundaries between Fact and Fiction in Documentary Film." *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 70, no. 4 (2012): 497-509; Bill Nichols, *Documentary Theory and Practice*, 2nd ed. (Los Angeles: SAGE Publications, 2017).

historical context, traditionally aiming to present reality in an objective way. While documentaries can evoke strong emotions, they generally aim for a reflective or analytical engagement, balancing emotional impact with intellectual understanding. Crucially, when theatre is used as an aesthetic tool within a documentary, it broadens the film's scope to include both the audience and, significantly, the performers themselves as integral characters. By closely documenting the creative process, the performers' journey is captured in the film, transforming the performance's development into a profound character arc.

The focus of this paper are those specific documentaries that follow the buildup of a performance or that transform narrative elements with theatrically inspired techniques, such as the "tableaux vivants".

In the first category, three films are included, that use as a starting point the work on a text as a source material that creates an independent artistic entity. In 2019, theatre director Roza Sarkisian created *H-Effect*, a performance based on the classic *Hamlet* by Shakespeare, the modern *Hamlet Machine* by Heiner Müller and the dramatic experiences of five Ukrainians during the 2014-2018 war. The experience of bringing to life the complied text as well as the show is followed in *Hamlet Syndrome* (*Syndrom Hamleta*, 2022) written and directed by Elwira Niewiera and Piotr Rosolowski. In *Srbenka* (2018, written and directed by Nebojsa Slijepcević) the camera follows the rehearsals for a special performance, based on the text *Aleksandra Zec*, written and directed by the Croatian director Oliver Frljić, a play that challenges the Croatian official perspective of the war. In *Cesar Must Die* (*Cesare deve morire*, 2012, directed by Paolo and Vitorio Taviani) the starting point is Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* performed by inmates of Rebibbia, an Italian high security prison. These documentaries use as a starting point existing texts on which to graft the real, often traumatic experiences of the performers in order to enhance their political and social impact[2]. These films explore the cathartic potential of role assumption and the actor-spectator dynamic, extending beyond mere stage portrayal.

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[2] Anne Bogart, "Theatre and Trauma: Performance in the Aftermath of Violence," *Performance Studies Quarterly* 1, no. 2 (2015): 110-123; Nicholas De Jongh, "Documentary, Theatre and the Politics of Memory: Revisiting Historical Traumas," *Theatre Journal* 65, no. 4 (2013): 501-515.

In films such as *Hamlet Syndrome*, *Srbenka* and *Cesar Must Die* the stage becomes a space for trauma processing, fostering empathy through witnessing the actors' journeys. The initial texts narratives offer the space for confronting with performers' own issues and past. Rehearsals facilitate personal transformation and self-exploration, revealing the human-actor duality and extending the audience beyond the actual stage[3]. *Srbenka* sees performance's text emerge from actors' stories and real-life events, *Hamlet Syndrome* blends life experiences with the well-known lines – the classic "to be or not to be" bearing a different weight for survivors of life-death circumstances –, and *Cesare* intertwines inmates' past situations as Mafiosi with Shakespearean themes of murder and betrayal. These documentaries offer a multifaceted exploration of rehearsals and actors – social, therapeutic, theatrical, and cinematic – extending engagement beyond live theatre. They focus on catharsis from actor-role and actor-spectator interactions. The stage becomes a trauma-processing space, fostering audience empathy through protagonists' journeys. Rehearsals reveal the human-actor duality.

Another category focuses on building visual references, glimpses into the past or the imaginary. By staging different *tableaux vivants* based on historical photos or testimonies, documentaries like *For Me You Are Ceausescu* (*Pentru mine tu ești Ceaușescu*, 2021, directed by Sebastian Mihăilescu) and *Arsenie. An Amazing Afterlife* (*Arsenie. Viața de apoi*, 2023, written and directed by Alexandru Solomon) reinterpret historical narratives using diverse official documents, searching for the TRUTH in a past distorted by the present. Here, the contemporary reactions of the performers serve as societal mirrors, the "actors" becoming representative for a whole slice of the population.

By following the intricate process of constructing and deconstructing performances, these films invite viewers into a collection of human experiences and creativity. Through the documentary lens, theater emerges as not only a subject of study but also a powerful vehicle for addressing complex societal issues and facilitating personal transformation.

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[3] Thomas Leahy, "Documentary Performance: The Transformation of the Real through Rehearsals," *Theatre Research International* 45, no. 3 (2020): 267-281.

War, Trauma, and Theatrical Expression

Theatre and documentaries humanize complex issues like war, allowing individuals to confront their suffering and reorganize their lives. Each protagonist in *Hamlet Syndrome* grapples with their own trauma, seeking resolution and purpose beyond the stage. The film documents the collaborative process of creating director Roza Sarkisian's *H-Effect*, a theatrical performance that integrates the personal narratives of five individuals – professional and amateur actors and war survivors from the 2014 Russo-Ukrainian conflict. It highlights the integration of lived experiences within the dramatic representation, using them on stage, but also as a psychological purge, a way of facing trauma. The resulting performance is presented only in fragments in the film that follows loosely the chronological evolution of rehearsals, inviting the audience of each of the protagonists' personal road. The aesthetic modernity and impact of *H-Effect* performance, despite being the actual goal, becomes secondary in the film's narrative arch.

Sarkisian integrates the protagonists' personal stories into the performance, drawing mental parallels between their wartime experiences and the text. She serves as both a catalyst for communication and as a character in the film, facilitating trust and managing difficult moments. The five stories are treated in a similar way and constitute a mosaic of perspectives. Slavik, captured and brutalized, was forced to choose between his friend's life and his own, a moment of dehumanization captured on video and replayed online. In the play, he is Hamlet, as he grapples with reclaiming his lost dignity and life. Katya, chose, after Maidan, to become a soldier, armed and ready to die rather than be captured, fighting with a grenade strapped to her chest, she bears both a physical scar and the emotional weight of her mother's potential rejection for her life choices. Roman, a paramedic, haunted by the grotesque reality of war's casualties, is viscerally thrown back into war and has a panic attack when a body bag is used as a prop, reliving the moment he found an exploded corpse lying in its own excrements. Rodion, an openly gay man, seeks refuge outside Ukraine from homophobia, only to find it persists, with the added pain of maternal rejection. Oxana, an actress, disillusioned with post-Maidan Ukraine, finds her liberal ideals in stark conflict with those who fought for a homeland,

such as Katya, Slavik or Rodion. Their conflict, within the confinement of theatre, reflects the wider one, in the Ukrainian[4] society.

"Trauma is not easy to talk about. Despite the efforts and expectations of the «listeners», it cannot be squeezed into a ready-made narrative form. It breaks through into consciousness in the form of shattered fragments. It does not give in to logic and chronology, escapes from linearity. The construction of the performance is therefore a mosaic: a mosaic of stories, events, quotations from reality, memories and images," explains Sarkisian when talking about the project. "The background of this whole story is the war. You cannot run away from it, you cannot talk about it, but you cannot remain silent about it either."

In *Hamlet Syndrome* we follow the birth of a new text inspired by both Shakespeare and *Hamlet Machine*, as well as the lives of the participants. The classic text meets the extreme situations they have endured, and the concrete elements of the director's vision become trigger points onto which their own memories are grafted. For the protagonists, it is not easy to speak about the past and without these prompters, they would probably never have done it. The documentary extends the quest for a language that can talk empathically about trauma. As Sarkisian builds her *H-Effect* around war, she looks for a "proper language for it, as for trauma." She tries to look beyond "stereotypes, lies and understatements." and asks valid questions. The process is "like moving through a mine field, as it is said in the show: «You can't go there – a trap. You can't go here – death.» Talking about war is like war itself."

But, more than the actual performance, the film breathes in a different way, as it has the ability to show also the cathartic experience of the actors involved. The camera follows them as they walk out into the light of day, finding closure to past conflicts, being able, even if they are hurt, to assess what is happening. The film alternates stage interiors with open space exteriors creating a visual rhythm that expands the scope of the process, following the protagonists as they are journeying back into real life, while the traumatic past remains mostly confined in the stories told in rehearsals.

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[4] The performance was constructed in 2019-2020. Due to the pandemic restriction, it was initially released as an online version in 2020, based on footage shot by DOP Piotr Rosolowski. *Hamlet Syndrome* developed from that footage.

Rehearsing Tragedy: Writing and Performing History

In *Srbenka*, the documentary uses space differently. Without stepping outside the theater building until the last sequence, a feeling of claustrophobia builds up. As in *Hamlet Syndrome*, war and death are central to the performance. Even if the actors themselves, or the director have not been confronted to actual war experiences, by centering on personal narratives of the creative team we gain a profound understanding of the human dimension amidst community issues.

Oliver Frljić chose to tell the story of the tragic murder of a Serbian girl, Aleksandra Zec, together with her family, by Croat militia men during the war. Her story not only offers insight into the complexities of conflicts, the destruction of war, but also serves as powerful tool in dismantling stereotypes and nurturing empathy. In 1991, Alexandra Zec and her family were killed by a group of Croats, belonging to the national militia. Despite being discovered and captured relatively quickly and the fact they confessed to the crime, providing detailed information, they were not tried and sentenced. Because they were interrogated without a lawyer present, they were rapidly released without any subsequent conviction.

The documentary sets a confessional and exploratory context from the first frame, a close-up of a spectator with her face hidden by long hair. "I am from Croatia, but of Serbian origin," she says, as her face crumbles into tears, recalling the abuses suffered because of this, in her childhood. We are in a theater hall, at the end of a performance. A space where the scenic events have crossed the barrier to the spectator, extending into the society's collective traumatic past.

The film follows the creation of a performance that confronts the present with the horrors of war, 25 years later. Oliver Frljić transforms the murder of Aleksandra Zec, the child of Serbian origin, who was only 12 years old when she was shot in the head, in a striking stark performance. His approach, sparked controversy. The film, *Srbenka* follows the casting and rehearsals process. Hidden traumas come to light in the rehearsals that become collective psychotherapy. As the camera focusses on the young actress Nina, 12 years old, we find out that anti-Serbian prejudice is still very much alive. Nina does

not have the courage to say in school that she is Serbian, she "feels as if the war never ended." In contemporary Croatia, Serbs are condemned and most of them hide their origin.

We observe the construction of the performance, deciphering, with the help of the actors and the theater director, the connection to the present. On stage, actors study photographs of Aleksandra's exhumation, documents from the police investigation. The trauma is distanced in time. The dramaturgy of the performance, the text, starts from the real fact and materializes in the bodies and voices of the actors. The director physically brings soil onto the stage. The rehearsals are intense, and Frljić becomes a character in the documentary, as he is deeply involved, emotionally touching those around him. He aims to depict on stage the horror of a child's last moments, being taken to a mass grave, being told she would be killed. "The political context is important, but so are the individuals," he says.

In the film, both the director and the actors take center stage, assuming roles as protagonists in the narrative. The camera discreetly shadows Frljić as he navigates the process of selecting a young actress to portray Aleksandra Zec. In this intimate moment, we glimpse a semblance of normalcy: a group of 6th and 7th-grade girls engage in candid conversations about their friendships, school life, and perceptions of Serbs. Their casual dialogue strikingly echoes the essence of Aleksandra's character. These girls, the same age as the tragic victim, embody her spirit. The documentary is not telling Alexandra's story in a straightforward manner, but uses the casting to multiply her as a character, as each and every one of the girls could have been at the center of the story.

The adult actors, too, grapple with their own challenge of bringing to stage the criminal actions of their characters, such as the murderous Croat Militia men, adding a supplementary layer of complexity to their portrayal. We are not dealing with imaginary murderers, such as Macbeth, or Brutus, but with real people and this weight becomes a burden about which actors find it difficult to talk. The space has a poetic resonance, blurring the lines between reality and fiction. One of the actors is from Vukovar, a city marked by a camp that witnessed the tragic demise of 86 Croatian children.

Nebojsa Slijepcevic, the documentary director, makes the aesthetic choice of including the theatre building as a silent witness to the process. With the camera as an indiscreet, yet omnipresent observer, we follow actors

into their dressing rooms, where their vulnerability is starkly captured. The camera fluidly traverses the vacant stage as they recount, off screen, their own struggles. The voices resonate throughout empty corridors, over the dark boards, floating over the ethereal dance of dust particles under the spotlight. Once more, the theater becomes a sacred place, a space where one can lay bare their vulnerabilities, exposed yet secure within its protective walls.

For Frljić, the ethnicity of the murdered child does not matter, but the fact that she was killed does. A profound humanist discourse emerges from the antagonism between dramatic creation and society, as right wing protesters gather at the building's entrance, condemning the play and the fact that it is based on the story of a Serbian, not Croatian, child.

The documentary tracks the cathartic odyssey. However, it is not offering a definitive resolution to the age-old inquiry: can art truly serve as a healing force? Probably not, as in the last image of the film, Nina runs away from the theater, on the streets full of people, terrorized that, during the performance, she has revealed her own Serbian descent.

In both *Hamlet Syndrome* and *Srbenka*, the film courageously confronts the intimate narratives of its protagonists – be they professional or amateur actors – and juxtaposes them with society's reaction to recent historical events. Here, the theater serves as a crucial interface through which the complexities of the past are filtered and examined, though it's acknowledged that this filtration process does not inherently guarantee social healing.

Shakespearean Drama in Unconventional Settings

Cesar must Die, by the Taviani brothers, falls in a distinct cinematic category. Here, the cathartic role of theater is more concrete, clearer, simpler. By participating in the theatrical act, the protagonists are spiritually elevated from their status as social outcasts to that of artists. We are not dealing with a social or political message but with the pure pleasure of discovering, through theater, one's self. The choice of text – *Julius Caesar*, by William Shakespeare – was certainly not random: "the characters are assassins, tyrants. It's about friendship, but also about betrayal. And because it takes place in Rome, we thought about how prisoners felt before entering prison. When we spoke to the inmates about Shakespeare, they said he was their comrade," comments

Taviani. The director of the performance is Fabio Cavalli, who is not at his first experience of prison staging. Starting first as a volunteer, he has been working with the Rebibbia prison for almost three decades. "I thought that theatrical art is a pale imitation of the power of life lived. Aristotle says so. He could not have foreseen that, after two millennia, a gang of criminals would take over the scene, revolutionizing and giving concreteness to his idea of «catharsis»: the purification of the soul through the art of representation."[5]

While the actions of the protagonist inmates are compelling, it's the film's aesthetics that truly captivates. The documentary's visual language is refined and potent, using high-contrast black-and-white imagery – a stark juxtaposition of infinite white against deep black – to vividly convey the "violence of reality," as explained by the Taviani brothers themselves[6]. The striking visual beauty significantly enhances the film's dramatic impact, prompting an exploration into the technical processes employed to achieve such a profound effect. The DOP is Simone Zampagni and it was his first digital production, due to the need for speed and flexibility when filming within the prison walls.

The documentary is aesthetically elaborate, following the long career of Taviani brothers as fiction film directors. Zampagni explains that selecting RED cameras was crucial, as they "exacerbate the bright parts."[7] He created a specific LUT[8] that drained all color and maximized contrast. A further step in color grading increased the contrast, exaggerating the whites and blacks to their utmost, and eliminating, as much as possible, the mid-tones. "This was combined with the use of a lighting system that relied on single light sources, without diffusion." The harshness of the light, strong contours matched the strong features of the hardened criminals that were acting in the play. This is particularly powerful in the casting sequence, where each inmate had a personal introduction including their impressive sentences: 14 years and eight months for criminal organization, 17 years for drug trafficking, life for

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[5] Linda Russo, "Fabio Cavalli and the incredible power of theatre in prison", October 9, 2023, https://www.spazio50.org/fabio-cavalli-e-lincredibile-potenza-del-teatro-in-carcere/

[6] Patricia Thomson, "The Bard Behind Bars", *American Cinematographer*, February 2013.

[7] Patricia Thomson, "The Bard Behind Bars".

[8] LUT – a digital color filter applied to the raw image, which selectively processes the image according to a table, altering only certain colors.

murder... Each "actor" speaks with their native accent, lending authenticity and natural power, further defining them as characters. Few minutes later, the same tough men, burdened with a heavy conscience, rejoice like children over receiving the parts in the play.

The film follows the rehearsal process, even when inmates are by themselves or in the shared prison cells. The rehearsing takes over the sun-drenched courtyard, where other inmates observe from the grated windows. But Shakespeare's words sometimes ring so true, with their stories of murder and betrayal, that the protagonists forget they are enacting a work of fiction, four centuries old, and real violence erupts. The fragility of the theatrical endeavor becomes apparent. Temperaments flare dangerously, reminding us of the situation's volatility. Shakespeare's expression, "men of honor," takes on different connotations here – "uomini d'onore" refers to members of the Calabrian Mafia. The Taviani brothers' film documents more than a play, it looks into the human nature and is also an homage to the power of words, the power of theatre, transforming the film into a metaphor about the redemptive quality of art. Cavalli, too, bares witness. Even if the recidivism percentage of people who come out of prison is 70%, "Then there is the cathartic power of Art. Of the 2000 cases I have followed in 20 years, the recidivism rate of inmate-actors does not reach 15%. It will be a case. It will be luck. It will be a sleight of hand."[9]

"Tableaux vivants" and Historical Figures

The "tableaux vivants" can be considered precursors of certain forms of theatre, as scenes were staged to tell mythological stories in the 18th century. In this modern take, the "tableaux" are used as ways to investigate significant moments in the lives of two prominent historical figures: Nicolae Ceaușescu, the Romanian dictator, and Arsenie Boca, a priest and monk that is on its way to being sanctified by the Romanian Orthodox Church. An intrinsic parodic tone is central to this documentary approach, due to not only the careful selection of source materials and the semi-improvised construction of the poses themselves, but also to the casting process and the collaborative

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[9] https://www.spazio50.org/fabio-cavalli-e-lincredibile-potenza-del-teatro-in-carcere/

interaction between the film's director and the chosen ensemble cast. The focus shifts dynamically, from documented history to placing emphasis on the journey of the performing participants – a microcosm of society.

For Me, You are Ceaușescu sits on the border between fiction and observational documentary. The debut film of director Sebastian Mihăilescu follows a group of teenagers who, through an extensive casting process, spanning two weeks, attend auditions for the role of Nicolae Ceausescu in his youth, in the mid-1930s, trying to find the motivation behind his actions. With each passing day, Mihăilescu brings up new (for the participants) biographical details, sourced from documentary materials used to build Ceasușescu's mythical image as hero of the communist movement before 1989. The young future actors transform the official documents into fictionalized scenes. The formative years of Nicolae Ceaușescu are expanded through biographical details that track a troublesome rebellious youth: group outings at the city pool, his encounter with Lenuța Petrescu, his future wife, the early joining of the Communist Party, his subsequent imprisonment at Doftana become stepping stones in the film narrative. Emil Bobu, Vasile Luca, Emil Botnăraș and other communist figures, names that once carried weight, now drift through the air, meaningless to a generation unfamiliar with their own history.

Without knowing too much, the young cast is transforming, through their own perspective, sometimes loaded with clichés of commercial cinema, appropriating Ceaușescu's life characteristics, according to their own resonating points. Mihăilescu's approach is neither critical, nor ironic but instead embraces a fresh and uninhibited playfulness. The result is less a portrait of Ceaușescu and more a picture of a new generation and an image of the too quickly forgotten legacy of the past.

The use of long lenses in filming records the candid conversations between the youngsters struggling with unfamiliar history and the enigmatic character of Ceaușescu. This truncated rediscovery of history is framed by the elaborated "tableaux vivants," captured in color, reproducing as well as possible the light, where the protagonists are roughly dressed like the characters from the photographs they emulate.

Juxtaposition highlights the ethical dilemmas and choices faced by the generation born after the year 2000, with regards to their own past, mirroring the challenges that the 1920s generation faced as they came of age in the tumultuous interwar period, just prior to the outbreak of World War II. The image of a young participant, reading on the steps of the entrance, amidst the ruins of the former socialist factory, in a white designer jacket, engulfed in a book about Ceaușescu, while simultaneously searching for references on his very up-to-date phone is a memorable one. This image epitomizes a generation for whom the communist past is as remote as ancient history, yet they are driven by a curious hunger sparked by their involvement in this theatrical and cinematic exploration. Director Sebastian Mihăilescu maintains a subtle presence in the film but emerges at the end, when, with his back to the camera, he presents himself as a guide to knowledge, discovery, and investigation, watching alongside one of the protagonists a sky obscured by clouds, pierced by an eclipsed sun. Was this ending a metaphor for the fact that communism was a historical eclipse for the Romanian people, a moment when the destiny of a nation was overshadowed, leaving behind only the ruins of a factory and a partially faded slogan that concludes with "...răiască tovarășul Nicolae Ceaușescu" ("…Ong live Comrade Nicolae Ceaușescu")?

In a less controlled way, director Alexander Solomon leads a bus load of pilgrims in his quest, *Arsenie. Viața de Apoi*. In the more and more conservative Orthodox Romanian society, the figure of Arsenie Boca has gathered power and strength becoming one of the most important one in the Christian panoply of recognized or future saints.

We witness the deliberate casting process, where the filmmaker assumes the role of both director and orchestrator. From the outset, he declares this his personal and creative journey in deciphering the mystery surrounding the creation of a new mythology around the real Arsenie Boca. Unable to access and engage with representatives of the Orthodox Church, Solomon transforms the documentary-exploration into a social one.

The casting becomes itself a well-defined process, as the director does not aim for a slice of the society, but more for worthy companions, that have both experience in pilgrimages and filming, that can assist him in the journey. The chosen individuals become characters – protagonists of the documentary, a slice of social interaction that would never happen again. The director

himself steps into the film, serving as the rational counterpoint to myth-making. The film crew is also visible, part of this physical journey by bus to the sites, where they are systematically denied access and the right to film on church premises. Driven by necessity, Solomon proposes to the protagonists the creation of "tableaux vivants" that reproduce the mythical event adjacent to the respective location.

Forced by circumstances to film largely outdoors, albeit accompanied by makeup artists and costume designers, the scenes have an air of improvisation, ready to unravel at any moment, to be blown away by the wind, a constant of the journey. The framing is elaborate and chosen with humor by the director on three layers: while in the background other "pilgrims" try on costumes and check poses suitable for the "tableaux vivants", in the foreground, against moving draped curtains, the protagonists take turns in telling their own stories to the camera. They bring the "reality" into the film, as they talk about financial difficulties, their spiritual relationship with Arsenie Boca, disappointments, and hopes, building a social fresco.

The director is always present in frame or off-screen and challenges his interviewees with questions, logic and inviting them to an open dialogue. Day by day, he becomes increasingly intertwined with the phenomenon, until he enters the circle of discussions himself, becoming the antithetical protagonist who brings his own Jewish background into the conversation, considering that Boca was an Iron Guard (Romanian fascists) admirer, included on the list of martyrs on the Poarta Albă monument, most of them also "legionaries".

The film contains numerous socio-historical references from recent years, often necessitating explanations or footnotes to provide context for the protagonists' statements that highlight the significant social changes that have occurred over the past three decades of social and economic turmoil. This led to a greater need for religion, for faith and contributed to the development of the legend surrounding Arsenie Boca. For instance, the Caritas phenomenon, a Ponzi scheme left many people impoverished, as they lost all their savings from the communist era. By giving the "pilgrims" milestones in the Arsenie Boca story, Solomon builds a coherent chronological structure, on which he paints a portrait of the current society, its fears, crazy beliefs, where actual facts are refuted.

Conclusion

By filming the process, the documentary films based on stage plays extend an engagement to a wider audience, allowing people who may not have access to live theater to experience the story and connect with the issues depicted. This also provides the background for a wider discussion, as society itself, in most cases, is put on trial. The use of theatrical techniques in documentary filmmaking, moves beyond traditional objective representations to offer more artistic and nuanced explorations of reality. By incorporating elements of theatre, documentaries can engage audiences on a deeper emotional and intellectual level, capturing not only the subject matter but also the transformative impact of performance on both participants and viewers. This trend expands the artistic possibilities within the documentary genre, providing filmmakers with new tools to address complex themes and offer unique insights into the human condition. Rather than centering on the theatrical performance per se, these films dig into the cathartic potential born from the quasi-ritualistic interchange between the individual and the role assumed, as well as the dynamic between actor and spectator. This exploration, through lens, extends further to encompass the broader relationship between the stage – perceived in its capacity as place of human actor-character interaction – and the societal fabric.

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Navigating the Middle Ground:
The Necessity of Middle Films *for Audience Engagement in Romania*

Ioana LASCĂR[*]

Abstract: In the contemporary digital landscape, audiovisual consumption patterns and film marketing strategies have undergone significant transformations, strongly influenced by the proliferation of social media and streaming platforms. Audiences now engage intensively with personalized and interactive content across diverse digital channels, prompting distributors to rethink traditional marketing approaches. Particularly in territories like Romania – categorized by the EU as *low-capacity* in film production – the lack of *middlebrow* cinema that effectively bridges artistic and commercial appeal poses substantial challenges. Historically dominated by internationally acclaimed auteur films, the Romanian industry now confronts a critical disconnect with local audiences, who perceive these films as inaccessible and overly intellectual. Conversely, influencer-driven commercial films have surged in popularity but frequently compromise artistic quality, highlighting the urgent need for balanced "middle" productions. Drawing on expert insights from leading Romanian film professionals and case studies of recent local successes such as *Două lozuri* (*Two Lottery Tickets*) and *Anul Nou care n-a fost* (*The New Year That Never Came*), this paper analyses innovative marketing campaigns leveraging targeted social media strategies, influencer engagement, and community-driven promotional efforts. It argues that developing middlebrow cinema accompanied

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by sophisticated digital marketing can enhance audience diversity, support sustainable growth of the Romanian film industry, and reconnect domestic viewers with locally-produced content, bridging the persistent gap between international critical acclaim and genuine public interest.

Keywords: Romanian films, *middlebrow cinema*, audience reach, digital era, marketing.

One of the biggest questions in nowadays film industry is if the spectator still holds the capacity and desire to watch films as we were used to since the beginning. And this question stems from how films are perceived today. A film is not just a "film" anymore, but a product that is linked to millions of other products, in "real life" or online. An array of films, series, vlogs, reels, merch and other derrivative products or content have enabled us to live in a "multiverse" due to the huge expansion of digital technologies and Hollywood trend. Two main events have changed irreparably the paradigm of film development, production, distribution and especially consumption, over the last decade.

Firstly, the widespread popularity of social media platforms has significantly increased, boosted by greater internet accessibility since its popularity and first wave of accessibility from the 90's. Long gone are the days when films such as *The Blair Witch Project* (1999) did incredible performances based on a unique strategy to use the internet as a main platform. Today, not only that it's very much expected to use internet as the main tool – particularly social media platforms – but it has offered the perfect landscape for billions of people to become the *auteurs*. Nowadays, particularly notable are short-form video formats like Instagram reels, YouTube shorts, and TikTok videos, which have captured the public's attention more strongly in recent years. It is assumed that everybody has an alternative life that is being lived online, and this has forever impacted the way in which we see, think, create, share films.

Secondly, the socio-cultural landscape was dramatically influenced by the Covid-19 pandemic and an overwhelming influx of content delivered via streaming platforms, alongside pre-existing online materials such as vlogs, reels, or "day in the life" videos. These factors have collectively reshaped

consumption patterns, notably elevating the popularity of serialised content after Covid-19. Audiovisual formats have consequently become increasingly difficult for mainstream audiences to differentiate clearly. Drawing from my experience as an active practitioner in the European film industry, I frequently notice considerable confusion regarding traditional audiovisual categories. Netflix's business model has particularly driven this shift toward an intensive consumption style, ironically one that even Netflix began to criticise several years ago. This problematic consumption model – which is both producing massive amounts of content and sharing it all at once – contributed to other media giants such as HBO deciding to shut down original content production in most Central and Eastern European countries, including Romania.

Serialised content is now regularly consumed similarly to "traditional" feature films, blurring distinctions between formats originally intended for distinct mediums. Such viewing habits affect how these audiovisual products achieve their intended market goals and diminish the specific cultural and economic value traditionally attributed to each format. Many viewers now commonly refer to most audiovisual content simply as "movies", demonstrating an eroded capacity for critical and nuanced differentiation. Consequently, there is limited understanding of the distinct identities of auteur-driven cinema, commercial feature films, serialised streaming content, or traditional "TV drama" formats, as the British call it. Miniseries, for instance, are often viewed as elongated films, illustrating a prevalent belief among audiences that they are merely "longer movies," without recognising their unique narrative structures and distinct production contexts.

My practice experience is solely based on film production, as I have been professionally activating in the industry for the last 12 years. So one relevant step ahead in my career was to educate myself about the new landscape, while developing a series project so it would be beneficial on both ends. In this sense, during 2023-2024, after several rounds of pre-selection processes, I was selected to participate to a project development programme supported by the EU (MIDPOINT Series Launch)[1] with focus on offering a strong networking platform for professionals that have a series in development. Second program,

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[1] Midpoint Institute, 2023 https://www.midpoint-institute.eu/en/project/vertebrae-9ffCeR

supported by both the EU and by Netflix Fund for Creative Equity, was EWA Series Accelerator[2], more inclined to career-driven classes, lectures and network to be offered. Besides managing to properly develop the series project, together with the author-writer who participated as well for the first programme – I could finally see and get the insights. My reasoning was that by understanding what is happening on that "side of the world", would offer the perspective to understand the changes that are happening where I felt like "at home" – respectively in the film industry.

The development and production of serialized content is currently undergoing significant transformations, especially regarding the creative aspects of these projects. Due to the oversaturation caused by the hybrid formats offered by streaming platforms, two primary creative trends have emerged, as identified within the lectures attended in the previously mentioned programmes. These insights were particularly emphasized by experts such as Gabor Krigler, who brings over 25 years of industry experience, including eight years as a development executive at HBO Hungary, and Steve Mathews, whose similar extensive expertise includes nearly a decade at HBO UK as a script consultant and executive for scripted content, and who presently serves in a senior position at Banijay Group, a major French entertainment conglomerate.

Firstly, at the European level, there is a deliberate return to the narrative structures and dramatic formats typical of iconic TV series from the "golden era"[3] of television in the 1990's. This trend became evident through the specific selection of case studies and compulsory viewing material, where, instead of choosing very popular contemporary series but often considered ephemeral, examples like *The Wire* or *X-Files* were preferred to illustrate enduring dramatic serialised excellence. Secondly, streaming platforms aim for deeper penetration into Eastern European markets, where traditional television networks still hold significant influence in producing serialized content and maintaining viewer engagement. This strategy is primarily motivated by economic expansion; however, it typically involves creating original local-language content, which

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[2] European Women's Audiovisual Network, 2024 https://www.ewawomen.com/ewa-netflix-series-accelerator/

[3] McGrath, Charles. "The Triumph of the Prime-Time Novel." *The New York Times Magazine*, October 22, 1995, 22-25

has the potential to foster valuable cultural productions. Nevertheless, the key challenge identified by regional industry representatives – despite the inherent difficulty of generalizing such an observation – is the frequent duplication of successful television formulas and formats, merely transposed to streaming platforms.

This phenomenon is clearly exemplified by Netflix's first Romanian Original series, *Subteran*. Based on private discussions with representatives from ProTV/Voyo, there is a consistent strategic effort to produce scripted formats targeted at an audience predominantly composed of males aged 45-50 and older, with lower to mid-level education. Consequently, Netflix's approach with *Subteran* appears intentionally aligned with popular local shows such as *Groapa* or *Clanul*, inevitably leading to similar creative content. Clearly platforms have significantly altered media consumption patterns, resulting in both market and production processes becoming increasingly dynamic compared to the period preceding the Covid-19 pandemic.

Given all the above, it becomes obvious that the last few years marked significant changes in digital marketing, driven primarily by evolving consumer behaviors and substantial transformations within online platforms. AI-generated content has rapidly proliferated on streaming services, consumer engagement has become increasingly challenging to secure, and social media algorithms have shifted to prioritize authentic interactions over mere content reach.[4] Consumers now spend nearly 141 minutes daily on social media, using an average of seven different platforms each month.[5] Consequently, companies can no longer rely solely on a single-channel approach – customized presence across multiple networks has become essential for maximizing consumer reach and activation. At the same time, audiences, particularly younger generations, have grown intolerant of traditional intrusive advertisements. Over 52% of Americans currently use an ad-blocker, significantly up from 34% in 2022, while 99% of Generation Z consumers skip video ads at the

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[4] Sprout Social. "29 Influencer Marketing Statistics for Your Social Strategy in 2025." https://sproutsocial.com/insights/influencer-marketing-statistics/

[5] Sprout Social. "Social Media Statistics You Need to Know in 2024." https://sproutsocial.com/insights/social-media-statistics/

earliest possible moment.[6] Such a consumer environment has compelled distributors to reevaluate traditional marketing strategies; unilateral, generalized advertising no longer yields satisfactory results, necessitating more innovative approaches. Social media remains a cornerstone of contemporary promotion, and the year 2024 has further solidified this trend. A global survey indicates that 91% of marketers utilize Facebook for advertising purposes, 86% use Instagram, and 66% rely on Twitter (X).[7] Each major social media platform – Facebook, Instagram, Twitter (X), TikTok, and YouTube – features distinct demographic attributes and unique content formats, requiring marketers to tailor messages carefully for optimal audience impact.

So in this global context, how can one create and market an auteur film, coming from a low-capacity European teritory, as Romania is labeled by the EU when it comes to film production? The same as it's being done for the so called "commercial films", especially when it comes to targeting the right audience. Personalization targeting involves leveraging data to segment audiences and deliver content tailored to each group's specific interests and needs. For instance, marketing campaigns on platforms like Facebook or Instagram can showcase products based on a user's previous searches or views. Interactivity, on the other hand, encourages audience participation through methods such as Instagram Stories polls, live Q&A sessions, contests, or challenges that allow consumers to contribute their input.

Modern consumers are adept at identifying fabricated or exaggerated content and tend to place greater trust in genuine opinions over promoted advertisements. A study by Nielsen revealed that 92% of consumers worldwide trust recommendations from friends and family above all other forms of advertising. This preference for authenticity has led to a notable rise in influencer marketing and niche content creators, including in regions like Romania. Budgets allocated to influencer partnerships have increased substantially; as of February 2024, 26% of marketing agencies and brands globally have dedicated more than 40% of their marketing budgets to influencer

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[6] New Digital Age. "Gen Z Don't Want to Watch Your Ads."
https://newdigitalage.co/advertising/gen-z-dont-want-to-watch-your-ads/
[7] Hootsuite. "33 Social Media Statistics Marketers Need to Know in 2024." Hootsuite Blog 2025. https://blog.hootsuite.com/social-media-statistics/

campaigns.[8] The internet serves as a "democratic" form of mass media due to its participatory nature and its ability to provide rapid access to commercial, cultural, and entertainment information. Unlike traditional mass media, which primarily follows a one-way communication model, the internet facilitates multidirectional, personalized communication, enabling direct user involvement in content creation and distribution. But first, they have to hear about the film, be engaged to watch the film, then talk about the film.

In the film industry, the current revenue generation model relies on "distribution windows", a staggered system where movies are initially released in theaters, followed by availability on streaming platforms, then cable or pay-per-view services, and eventually free-to-air television. While this traditional sequence is common, there are numerous exceptions, such as films produced exclusively for streaming platforms (straight-to-VOD), which follow a distinct strategic approach. Film exploitation strategies often vary by region. Territories with a strong historical performance in theatrical film consumption, like the United States or France, tend to adhere to the traditional model, as box office success enhances negotiating power with streaming platforms and television networks after the theatrical releases. The interest and licensing fees from these secondary channels often increase when a film performs well in theaters. Typically, the theatrical release window continues to generate the highest profits for commercial films or those with significant audience potential. Subsequently, films are distributed through secondary channels – ranging from digital on-demand services to television broadcasts. The physical sale of DVDs or Blu-Rays has become less common or it's not even a practice anymore. These secondary channels usually yield lower profits based on single licensing practices rather than performance-based revenue. However, they offer extended exposure and a longer monetization period, as strong streaming performance can lead to additional television broadcasting opportunities within a next window of release.

Auteur films often begin their journey on the festival circuit, generating revenue through per-screening licenses. Despite differences in initial

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8   Statista. "Share of Marketing Budgets Spent on Digital Worldwide."
     https://www.statista.com/statistics/268641/share-of-marketing-budgets-spent-on-digital-worldwide/

distribution, the exploitation models for various film types share similarities. Distribution windows can be exclusive or non-exclusive, which significantly impacts distribution strategies and licensing costs. Theatrical releases typically involve exclusive screening rights, followed by exclusive secondary windows on streaming services or pay-TV channels, which offer higher licensing fees compared to non-subscription television channels. The principle of territoriality applies, meaning that various distribution models coexist throughout a film's lifecycle. So the whole strategy of making the films visible for the audience – besides the actual action of *finding* the right audience – is to exploit each distribution window by coupling it with marketing and communication tools before each "new" release.

Over the years, major film studios and cinema chains have continually clashed over the timing and approach of movie releases, particularly due to the rise of digital streaming platforms, which have introduced alternative models like straight-to-VOD strategies. Large studios argue that transitioning films rapidly onto streaming services – or bypassing theaters altogether – helps combat piracy and enhances the effectiveness of early-stage marketing investments. Yet, the ascension of streaming platforms, coupled with an expanding array of consumer choices, has fundamentally altered the cinema industry, a transformation amplified by the growing influence of social media.

Before the advent of social networks, motivations behind media consumption were primarily explained through the uses and gratifications theory. According to Katz, Blumler, and Gurevitch,[9] people engage with media to satisfy various psychological and social needs. These needs aren't met in isolation but rather through interactions within broader social contexts. Thus, media consumption naturally involves social interactions that shape perceptions, behaviors, and interpersonal relationships. In the social media era, the phenomenon known as Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) has gained increasing attention. FOMO manifests as anxiety experienced by individuals who fear missing enjoyable social experiences others are having.[10]

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[9] Elihu Katz, Jay G. Blumler, and Michael Gurevitch. "Uses and Gratifications Research." *The Public Opinion Quarterly*, vol. 37, nr. 4 (1973): 509-523.

[10] Hephzibah Cohen. "FoMo: Do You Have a Fear of Missing Out?" *The Telegraph*, 17 mai 2013. https://www.telegraph.co.uk/women/womens-life/10061863/FoMo-Do-you-have-a-Fear-of-Missing-Out.html

Primarily triggered by events and activities shared via social platforms, FOMO compels users – particularly younger demographics – to frequently check their accounts, even when this habit may negatively impact their well-being.

Beyens, Frison, and Eggermont noted that the urge to belong and the desire for social popularity significantly fuel the FOMO phenomenon, thus increasing social media use.[11] This insight is particularly valuable when studying moviegoer behavior because it underscores the effectiveness of social media-based marketing campaigns. Cinema audiences are deeply embedded in digital cycles of social validation, enabling film marketers to strategically exploit this tendency. Individuals derive meaningful satisfaction when sharing collective experiences – whether it's a popular TV show, a trending meme, or a newly released film. Such collective experiences, disseminated across platforms like Facebook and Twitter, enable users to validate their movie preferences and feel part of a shared online community. Moreover, widespread acceptance of constant connectivity and deep technological integration into daily life, emphasizes the pivotal role social media now plays in influencing audience emotions, cultural preferences, and consumption patterns.

Among social platforms, TikTok stands out as particularly influential in engaging young audiences due to its dynamic, brief, and easily shareable content format. The current content paradigm heavily depends on active user participation, as viral successes now stem from both targeted promotional investments and the collective creativity of user communities. TikTok and similar platforms allow film producers and distributors to interact directly with their target audience ahead of release dates, fostering anticipation and generating early excitement for upcoming films.[12] The highly interactive nature of this platform fundamentally shifts the traditional relationship between producers and viewers, enabling users to actively contribute to promotional narratives.

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[11] Ine Beyens, Elien Frison, and Steven Eggermont. "'I Don't Want to Miss a Thing': Adolescents' Fear of Missing Out and Its Relationship to Social Needs, Facebook Use, and Facebook-Related Stress." *Computers in Human Behavior* 64 (2016): 1-8.

[12] Dingqi Xue. "A Study of Evolution of Film Marketing in the Digital Age." *SHS Web of Conferences* 193 (2024): 1-5.

While influencer-driven marketing and digital platforms like TikTok offer considerable advantages, they also bring specific challenges and potential risks. Despite their overall effectiveness, these approaches need a certaint limitation of narrative control given to content creators, who may intentionally or unintentionally alter official messages.[13] Additionally, Xue highlights that excessive exposure can lead to audience saturation, consequently reducing interest and diminishing campaign effectiveness. Therefore, digital marketers must maintain a clear, up-to-date understanding of audience engagement with promoted content, carefully balancing authenticity, creativity, and narrative oversight to maximize campaigns' viral potential on platforms such as TikTok. In conclusion, the rise of streaming platforms and social media has significantly reshaped cinema distribution strategies and audience interactions. Traditional models involving sequential theatrical releases have increasingly faced disruption as studios embrace alternative, digital-first distribution strategies. Social media, driven by concepts like FOMO, has created fertile ground for targeted promotional campaigns that capitalize on collective digital experiences. Yet, digital marketers must navigate this landscape with precision, balancing user-generated creativity and authenticity against the risks of overexposure and message dilution. Effective cinema marketing in the digital era demands nuanced strategies, adapting to continuously evolving consumer behaviors while leveraging social media's unique potential to cultivate audience engagement and anticipation.

Launching a film theatrically involves complex marketing strategies that must be carefully tailored to a relatively short window of audience attention. To maximize impact, major studios typically initiate promotional activities well before filming commences, adjusting tactics continuously based on evolving market dynamics and public response. Social media platforms have become indispensable to film marketing due to their unique benefits compared to traditional media. These advantages include real-time interactions with audiences, the simultaneous sharing of multimedia content such as text,

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[13] Renira Gambarato Rampazzo, and Geane Carvalho Alzamora. "Evidence from the Official Spider-Man Movie TikTok Account." *Convergence: The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies* 30, nr. 1 (2024): 1-14.

images, and videos, and the ability to receive instant feedback. Such interactive engagement allows users to influence others through reviews and personal recommendations, significantly enhancing promotional effectiveness.

European cinema is now implementing similar strategies, encouraged by the Creative Europe MEDIA Sub-program,[14] which promotes innovative techniques – including intensive social media campaigns – to attract younger, more diverse audiences. This strategic shift reflects ongoing challenges faced by European cinema, such as fierce competition from Hollywood productions, limited budgets, linguistic barriers, and the necessity to articulate and disseminate a coherent cultural identity. Most European governmental film funding bodies now require producers, right from the application phase, to demonstrate clear strategies for production, distribution, and marketing. This mandatory practice has compelled many producers to rethink how they position auteur films, as our practice as auter film producers shows us a disconnection between these films and their target audiences.

For instance, the Creative Europe MEDIA Sub-program initiative demands comprehensive marketing strategies within funding applications, clearly defining primary and secondary audience segments, detailing methods for engaging "digital" audiences, specifying digital outreach tools, outlining distribution channels, and describing how European values will be communicated transnationally. Similarly, Eurimages, the Council of Europe's[15] cultural fund supporting co-productions among its member states, mandates detailed plans for production, distribution, and marketing. It further requires filmmakers to highlight how their projects reflect European principles, such as diversity, anti-discrimination measures, and sustainability practices. Social media's usage in European cinema can significantly enhance a shared European identity, helping to overcome obstacles posed by rising nationalism and Euroscepticism. Initiatives by principal European funds like Creative Europe and Eurimages advocate for a unified European cultural identity while recognizing and preserving distinct national traditions and social contexts. Film festivals and other industry stakeholders actively explore new

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[14] European Commission. "Culture and Creativity." https://culture.ec.europa.eu/

[15] Council of Europe. "Eurimages." https://www.coe.int/en/web/eurimages

approaches to promote universal values, utilizing innovative digital strategies to reach transnational audiences effectively. Therefore, communicating a shared European identity through social media has become both a challenging and crucial task, essential for strengthening Europe's global competitiveness in cinema.

Today, successful film campaigns rely not solely on significant financial resources but also on the creativity and strategic insights of marketing teams capable of developing original, engaging messages that can rapidly gain popularity across social media channels. Production companies, distribution companies, and marketing agencies collaborate closely to build anticipation and stimulate public interest surrounding film launches, often by actively involving viewers in the promotional process. Such participatory approaches have gained considerable importance in the current digital era, where personalized recommendations and vibrant online communities profoundly shape audience behavior. For independent films produced with smaller budgets to achieve commercial success, leveraging digital platforms efficiently is critical. By adopting robust strategies and adhering to innovative marketing principles from a project's early development stages, film producers and distributors can significantly improve a film's visibility and commercial potential. This strategy ensures that independent cinema remains relevant and competitive in an increasingly crowded market.

Historically, Romanian films did not perform well commercially and Romanian audiences start with the premise that most Romanian films are auteur films, "boring", "unreachable", "obscure", "too social" films. The Romanian New Wave (Noul Val Românesc), also referred to as the Romanian New Cinema (Noul Cinema Românesc), is a cinematic movement that emerged in Romania in the early 2000s, characterized predominantly by minimalist aesthetics, realism, and a focus on social and historical issues of post-communist Romanian society. Prominent filmmakers of this generation, including Cristi Puiu, Cristian Mungiu, Cătălin Mitulescu, Radu Muntean, and Corneliu Porumboiu, achieved significant international recognition between 2000 and 2015, winning prestigious awards at renowned festivals. Films such as *The Death of Mr. Lăzărescu*, *4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days*, and *12:08 East of Bucharest* quickly garnered critical acclaim abroad, leading publications like *Positif* to identify

this as a "New Wave." However, the reception of these films domestically differed substantially from their international success. Romanian audiences exhibited a persistent reticence towards "festival films," perceiving them as inaccessible, overly complex, and disconnected from entertainment value, despite their notable artistic achievements.

As part of a wider reasearch that I conducted, I discussed with several national experts in the marketing and communication field. One of them being Anca Macoviciuc, a cultural communication expert with a wide experience, more recent being the promotion of the festival acclaimed and commercially successful Romanian film *The New Year That Never Came* directed by Bogdan Mureșanu. Macoviciuc notes: "In the last 10, 15, 20 years, in Romania, the number of spectators watching Romanian films – part of the first wave, second wave, and subsequent wave of Romanian cinema – has decreased alongside the number of international awards these films have received."[16] So paradoxically, international recognition fostered an expectation of success domestically, yet failed to convert into actual viewership.

Marketing and communication expert Cătălin Anchidin – the communication guru of very successful films like *Child's Pose* by Călin Peter Netzer, *Aferim!* By Radu Jude, *Sieranevada*, by Cristi Puiu – describes this paradox further, emphasizing that festival selections and international accolades became a form of cultural expectation, thus diminishing the impact it has on audiences: "The thing is, we used to think that if a film was selected at some festival, it was, wow, something incredible. But once you stepped outside this bubble, there was this reaction – which still persists in public perception – that festival films are heavy, unwatchable, you know. And it also became somewhat expected that every Romanian film had to go to a festival. So basically, everything I'd done up to that point had turned into a kind of curse. Because if you had a Romanian film that didn't get selected for a festival or didn't win an award, it was automatically considered bad. Yet if it did get into a festival, it was still seen as inaccessible and indigestible for

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[16] Anca Macoviciuc: "În ultimii 10, 15, 20 de ani, în România, numărul spectatorilor care au văzut filme românești – parte din primul val, al doilea val și următorul val al cinematografiei românești – a scăzut odată cu numărul de premii pe care acestea le-au obținut în străinătate."

audiences. This perception existed back then, and honestly, I don't think it has changed much, if you ask me."[17]

Cristi Puiu is frequently cited as initiating this cinematic trend, beginning with *Stuff and Dough* (2001), acclaimed for its realism and naturalistic acting, although domestically it had minimal audience reach (1,919 viewers).[18] His later film, *The Death of Mr. Lăzărescu* (2005), widely recognized internationally and recipient of the Un Certain Regard prize at Cannes, had comparatively strong domestic box-office performance (25,000 spectators),[19] aided by strategic marketing focused on its Cannes success. His subsequent film, *Aurora* (2010), however, exemplified the disconnect, reaching only niche audiences domestically despite international acclaim. Cristian Mungiu's films reinforced the global presence of the Romanian New Wave. His Palme d'Or-winning film *4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days* (2007) attained unprecedented international exposure, grossing over $10 million worldwide and drawing significant Romanian audiences (70,900 spectators) due to strategic promotional campaigns highlighting its international prestige.[20] His later films, including *Beyond the Hills* (2012) and *Graduation* (2016), sustained critical acclaim, though audience engagement varied domestically, influenced heavily by controversial themes or cinematic styles deemed demanding by mainstream viewers.

Other prominent filmmakers such as Cătălin Mitulescu and Corneliu Porumboiu further diversified the New Wave, integrating poetic realism and absurdist humor respectively. Mitulescu's films like *The Way I Spent the End*

[17] Cătălin Anchidin: "Povestea este că nouă ni se părea că dacă un film merge la nu știu ce festival, este mamă, ceva *wow.* Dar când ieșeai în afara acestei bule, era această reacție, care în continuare se păstrează la nivel de percepție a publicului, că filmele de festival sunt filme grele, de neconsumat, mă rog. Și era cumva și un dat, că părea că orice film românesc trebuie să meargă la un festival. Și cumva tot ce făcusem eu până atunci devenise, practic, un blestem. Pentru că dacă aveai un film românesc care nu mergea la un festival și nu lua un premiu, era, implicit, un film prost. Dar dacă mergea la festival, era oricum un film de neconsumat, de nedigerat pentru public. Această percepție exista în momentul respectiv și nu cred că s-a schimbat foarte mult, dacă mă întrebi pe mine."

[18] Cinemagia. "*Marfa și banii* (2001)." https://www.cinemagia.ro/filme/marfa-si-banii-10/

[19] Cinemagia. "*Moartea domnului Lăzărescu* (2005)." https://www.cinemagia.ro/filme/moartea-domnului-lazarescu-11273/

[20] Cinemagia. "*4 luni, 3 săptămâni și 2 zile* (2007)." https://www.cinemagia.ro/filme/4-luni-3-saptamani-si-2-zile-18011/

of the World (2006) received international accolades but modest local reception. Porumboiu's satirical approach to historical and social themes, exemplified by *12:08 East of Bucharest* (2006) and *Police, Adjective* (2009), solidified his international profile, yet his domestic box-office numbers remained modest. Ultimately, despite international success, the Romanian New Wave faced persistent challenges domestically, including limited cinema infrastructure and public skepticism towards art cinema. Nonetheless, these filmmakers established a significant international reputation, transforming Romanian cinema into a recognized global phenomenon characterized by strong authorship, realism, and social critique, even as it struggled to reconcile international prestige with domestic popularity. While films of this movement brought significant international prestige to Romania through critical acclaim and awards at festivals like Cannes and Berlin, domestically they were met with limited enthusiasm and even skepticism. As observed by *The Guardian* in 2013, despite substantial critical acclaim abroad, Romanian films consistently performed poorly in terms of domestic box-office revenues, capturing only a marginal share (around 2.5% in 2010) of the national market. This lack of support from local viewers raised concerns about the sustainability of this cinematic movement, encapsulated succinctly by *The Guardian*'s headline: "Romania's new wave could dry up if it doesn't get home support."[21]

This paradoxical situation created tension within the film community: internationally celebrated filmmakers felt frustrated at their inability to engage local audiences. While international recognition through awards and prestigious festival appearances increased Romania's cultural visibility globally and attracted funding from European partners, domestically these successes did not translate into public interest or attendance. A split in Romanian cinema soon became evident: films that succeeded commercially in Romania rarely gained international acclaim, while festival hits were largely ignored locally. Commercial films like *Minte-mă frumos* (2012) and *Selfie* (2014) found domestic audiences, whereas award-winning New Wave films struggled to achieve even moderate local attendance. This raised critical questions about the future of Romanian

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[21] Phil Hoad. "Romania's New Wave is riding high – but for how long?" *The Guardian*, March 12 2013. https://www.theguardian.com/film/filmblog/2013/mar/12/romanian-new-wave-after-hollywood

cinema and whether the industry could sustain these two divergent paths. The debate then broadened to whether Romania could even claim a genuine "film industry," given its relatively low production output compared to other European countries such as France or Germany. From 2007 to 2016, Romania produced fewer than 400 films – far fewer per capita than its European counterparts.[22] This statistic highlighted a serious shortfall in creative and commercial diversification essential for a fully functioning film industry.

Another significant shift emerged with the rise of influencer-driven commercial films that targeted mainstream audiences, successfully exploiting social media and digital marketing. Films led by influencers such as *Teambuilding* saw unprecedented box office success domestically, reflecting public appetite for entertainment films, though their artistic quality often remained questionable. Producers and industry insiders acknowledged the market's need for commercial cinema but expressed concerns regarding quality and oversaturation. Producer Anamaria Antoci, well-known for producing films like *Illegitimate* by Adrian Sitaru, *Fixeur* by Adrian Sitaru, *Men of deeds* by Paul Negoescu – mentioned in our discussion: "It's good that this trend emerged. I think it was necessary after many years – perhaps twenty years – in which arthouse films earned a very significant place in global cinema and revitalized the Romanian film industry. However, I believe there wasn't enough attention given to audience perceptions or preferences. As producers and filmmakers, we should also try to offer audiences something different. The initial success of a small number of films, like *Two lottery tickets*, was simply due to their novelty, and they naturally resonated with viewers. I didn't expect this phenomenon *[films made by influencers]* to expand so rapidly, with so many films being produced in such a short span of time. Unfortunately, if you start releasing two films a week, it's not impossible for audiences to struggle to keep up. To me, the quality of these films remains questionable, and I believe it's time to move forward by paying more attention to storytelling, execution, and cinematic details overall."[23]

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[22] Julio Talavera. *Film Production in Europe: Production Volume, Co-production, and Worldwide Circulation*. Strasbourg: European Audiovisual Observatory, Council of Europe, 2017. https://rm.coe.int/filmproductionineurope-2017-j-talavera-pdf/1680788952

[23] Anamaria Antoci: "E bine că a apărut acest curent. Cred că era nevoie după mulți ani. După 20 de ani, poate în care filmul de autor și-a câștigat un loc foarte important în cinematografia mondială. Și a restabilit și industria de film din România. Cred că nu prea s-a ținut cont de

Anchidin offers a different perspective, suggesting that the trend of influencer-driven films is already declining. His conclusion draws on the previous experience with arthouse films – once the public repeatedly encounters the same type of discourse and positioning, attention inevitably shifts towards what the market currently lacks, namely the *middlebrow films:* "It seems to me that right now we're squeezing the sponge until the very last drop – squeezing it until there's nothing left. That's exactly what will happen with commercial films, because if we look at what's currently happening in cinemas with the latest releases, despite having all the right ingredients – top influencers, a storyline, whatever you want – they barely manage to surpass 100,000 viewers. If we compare this with *Teambuilding* or *Miami Bici*, films that attracted more than half a million or even over a million viewers, it becomes clear that the appetite just isn't there anymore."[24]

Currently, discussions within the Romanian film community revolve around the need to bridge the gap between purely artistic festival films (*highbrow*) and commercial influencer-driven movies (*lowbrow*), by developing so-called *middlebrow films*. These films balance artistic integrity with accessibility and broader audience appeal. Examples cited include *Men of deeds, Two lottery tickets* and *Libertate*. The term middlebrow, from which middlebrow films originates, was popularized in the cultural and intellectual context of the

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percepția publicului, de ce își dorește publicul. Și noi ca producători și realizatori de filme să încercăm să le aducem în meniu și altceva. Succesul acelor foarte puține filme inițiale, de genul *Două lozuri* – pur și simplu erau altceva și automat au funcționat. Nu mă așteptam, poate, să ia așa amploare în sensul în care să se producă atât de multe filme într-un timp foarte scurt. Dacă începi să le servești două pe săptămână, din păcate nu e imposibil ca publicul să nu poată să țină pasul. Calitatea lor rămâne pentru mine chestionabilă. Și cred că ar fi momentul să facă un pas înainte către mai multă atenție la poveste, la realizare, la detalii ce țin de cinematografie, în general."

[24] Cătălin Anchidin: "Mi se pare că în momentul de față, stoarcem buretelele până la ultima picătură. Stoarcem până nu mai rămâne nimic. Cam asta se va întâmpla și cu filmele comerciale, pentru că dacă ne uităm acum la ce se întâmplă în cinematografe cu ultimele lansate, care au toate rețetele date, influenceri de top, poveste, ce vrei tu, abia reușesc să depășească 100.000 de spectatori. Dacă ne uităm la *Teambuilding*, la *Miami Bici*, filme care au trecut de milioane sau de jumătate de milioane, constați că apetitul nu mai e acolo."

United States during the 1920s, although its definitive usage was established by Russell Lynes.[25] In his article *"Highbrow, Lowbrow, Middlebrow,"* published in *Harper's Magazine* in 1949, Lynes introduced a detailed classification of cultural tastes: highbrow (consumption of sophisticated visual art, avant-garde literature, and experimental, elitist cinema, generally rejecting popular culture as superficial), lowbrow (the opposite of highbrow, characterized by appreciation for popular culture, accessible entertainment, and rejection of cultural elitism), and middlebrow (defined by aspirations toward cultural understanding, yet expressed in a more popular and accessible manner, thus constituting a cultural product situated "in the middle"). Lynes subtly employs satire to criticize snobbishness and highlights the arbitrary nature of social constructs. These terms were later adopted into cinema discourse, especially middlebrow (films situated between art cinema, often considered highbrow, and commercial, mainstream films typically viewed as lowbrow). Ultimately, the future sustainability of Romanian cinema depends significantly on its ability to develop and support middlebrow films that can bridge the gap between artistic and commercial demands, thereby creating a balanced, culturally rich, and commercially viable national film industry.

A notable example is Paul Negoescu's second feature who fits exactly this middle segment which reached audiences by building up on the power of its cast, organically reaching its audiences through a strong word-of-mouth, but also using smart marketing tools by making use of what was back then the "go to" platform – Facebook. *Două lozuri* (*Two lottery tickets*), directed by Paul Negoescu, is a Romanian comedy released in 2016, starring Dragoș Bucur, Dorian Boguță, and Alexandru Papadopol. The film humorously depicts the misadventures of three friends from a small provincial town who win the lottery but lose their winning ticket, embarking on a chaotic journey to recover it. Loosely inspired by I.L. Caragiale's classic novella *Două loturi*, it presents a contemporary take rather than a direct adaptation, updating the original theme with modern comedic situations and characters. Produced

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[25] Russell Lynes. "Highbrow, Lowbrow, Middlebrow." *The Wilson Quarterly* 1, nr. 1 (1976): 146-158.

independently with minimal budget and without support from Romanian Film Center, the film unexpectedly became a sensation within Romanian cinema, bridging the gap between commercial and art-house films. In this polarized landscape, *Two lottery tickets* emerged as an independent outsider that successfully combined commercial appeal with artistic merit. Created by the main actors through their own production company (Actoriedefilm.ro), following earlier collaborative films such as *Love Building* (2013), this production marked a turning point in Romanian cinema by reintroducing accessible yet artistically conscious comedy.

The year 2016, in particular, saw a rise in diverse genre films such as *Câini*, *Afacerea Est*, *Sieranevada*, and *#Selfie69*, reflecting a shift away from exclusively realist dramas. Premiering at the 2016 TIFF, *Two lottery tickets* cleverly capitalized on this growing appetite for accessible entertainment among local audiences. Its recognizable stars, previously associated with New Wave dramas, transitioned effectively into lighter roles, embodying middlebrow cinema – films designed to engage broad audiences while maintaining subtle artistic and cultural references. Thematically, the film humorously explores everyday failures, absurd luck, and naïve dreams of quick wealth. The three protagonists, Dinel, Sile, and Pompiliu, embody relatable, endearing failures caught in absurd situations triggered by losing their lottery ticket. Comedic scenarios mock small-town superstitions, conspiracy theories, and irrational optimism, delivering light-hearted commentary on societal attitudes towards effortless success. Critics praised the film's accessible humor and likable characters, although there were some predictable gags reminiscent of TV sketches. Nevertheless, this straightforward, feel-good comedy resonated strongly with audiences seeking relatable humor. Aesthetically, Negoescu intentionally departs from the bleak minimalism typical of Romanian New Wave films, instead favoring a vibrant, colorful visual style (cinematography by Ana Drăghici), highlighting provincial settings and the comic juxtaposition with urban chaos. Its simple yet effective cinematography and brisk editing enhanced accessibility, contributing significantly to audience engagement.

The film's innovative marketing strategy further amplified its success. Without extensive financing, the production team leveraged the personal popularity of its stars and direct community engagement through promotional tours and unconventional publicity stunts. Notably, they launched humorous initiatives such as "We'll give your money back if you don't laugh," which encouraged skeptical audiences to reconsider their aversion to Romanian cinema. Additionally, a widely popular promotional contest featured a restored vintage Dacia 1300 car as the main prize, directly tied to the film's narrative and cleverly blurring the line between marketing and entertainment. Interestingly, even attempts at negative publicity, notably online trolling campaigns targeting specific casting choices, were cleverly turned into promotional opportunities. These controversies sparked public curiosity and media attention, ultimately boosting ticket sales and transforming potential scandals into marketing triumphs. Commercially, Two lottery tickets exceeded expectations, becoming the highest-opening Romanian film in over two decades, drawing more than 27,000 viewers in its debut weekend and ultimately surpassing 100,000 spectators – a remarkable achievement for local cinema. Awarded the Audience Prize at the 2017 Gopo Awards, its success indicated both popular acceptance and critical recognition.[26]

Internationally, the film participated in festivals and achieved distribution in the United States, reflecting its broad appeal beyond Romania's borders. Its success prompted a sequel in 2023, *Another lottery ticket*, though it did not replicate the original's triumph. Nonetheless, the original film remains significant as a successful middlebrow cinema exemplar, bridging popular entertainment and artistic credibility in contemporary Romanian film culture.

The New Year That Never Came (2024), directed by Bogdan Mureșanu, is a significant Romanian film that successfully bridges the gap between festival prestige and public popularity. As Mureșanu's debut feature, the film expands upon his acclaimed short *The Christmas gift* (2018). Set during the chaotic final days of Nicolae Ceaușescu's regime, it weaves the interconnected stories of six characters navigating the absurdities of life

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[26] Cinemagia. "*Două lozuri* (2016)." https://www.cinemagia.ro/filme/doua-lozuri-1072073/

under a collapsing dictatorship. Combining historical drama with satire, the film offers a humorous yet emotionally profound depiction of a pivotal moment in Romanian history.

Premiering internationally at the Venice Film Festival in the prestigious Orizzonti section, known for innovative cinematic expressions, the film earned significant recognition. It secured four major awards: the Orizzonti Prize for Best Film, the FIPRESCI Award for Best Debut, the Bisato d'Oro for Best Screenplay, and a Special Mention for cinematography (for Boróka Biró). Such acclaim placed the film prominently within the international festival circuit, eventually leading to screenings at over 35 international festivals and accumulating 19 awards. This culminated in a nomination at the 2024 European Film Awards, further elevating the film's international profile.

Unlike many Romanian films praised internationally but ignored domestically, *Anul Nou care n-a fost* resonated strongly with Romanian audiences. Distributed by Forum Film – a company traditionally associated with mainstream blockbusters – the film was strategically marketed to attract both arthouse audiences and mainstream moviegoers. It opened in Romania with impressive numbers, drawing over 20,000 spectators during its first weekend and eventually grossing more than 2.4 million lei,[27] becoming the most successful recent Romanian film on the topic of the 1989 Revolution, surpassing comparable films such as *Libertate* and *Metronom*. At the 2025 Gopo Awards, Romania's most prestigious film honors, the film received an impressive 13 nominations, highlighting its industry-wide recognition.

The film's domestic success was significantly boosted by an innovative marketing campaign that emphasized both its critical acclaim and its broad accessibility. Leveraging the film's historical relevance and satirical tone, the campaign targeted various age groups through tailored messaging. Promotional strategies included special screenings at prominent cultural events like Noaptea Alba a Filmului Romanesc, along with regionally targeted showings featuring direct interactions between filmmakers, actors, and the audience.

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[27] Cinemagia. "Anul Nou care n-a fost (2024)." https://www.cinemagia.ro/filme/anul-nou-care-n-a-fost-3314975/

Furthermore, partnerships with influencers, particularly in digital and gaming communities, were effectively employed to reach younger demographics unfamiliar with traditional Romanian festival films.

The ensemble cast, featuring prominent Romanian actors such as Adrian Văncică (famous for the popular TV series *Las Fierbinți*), Iulian Postelnicu, Nicoleta Hâncu, Mihai Călin, and seasoned performers Marian Râlea and Tora Vasilescu, significantly contributed to the film's appeal. This diverse and widely recognized cast attracted different audience segments, helping to bridge the gap between the arthouse film and mainstream entertainment. Despite its success, *Anul Nou care n-a fost* also encountered criticism, particularly around its satirical treatment of sensitive historical events, which some argued trivialized the seriousness of the 1989 Revolution. Nonetheless, its balanced approach – both accessible and thoughtful – illustrates the growing trend in Romanian cinema towards middlebrow films, which successfully combine artistic merit with popular appeal. In this sense, Mureșanu's debut is not only a landmark film in its own right but also signals a broader shift in the Romanian film industry, demonstrating that artistic films can find significant domestic audiences without sacrificing critical acclaim.

Romanian filmmakers are gradually acknowledging the critical role middlebrow films play in establishing a sustainable and diverse cinematic industry. An industry, after all, is more than merely the sum of its procedural operations, stakeholders, institutions, and professional actions – it is fundamentally defined by its ability to reflect diversity, creativity, and an active connection to its audience. For many years, Romanian cinema has been polarized between internationally acclaimed auteur films, often perceived locally as inaccessible, and purely commercial productions with limited artistic ambitions. This polarization has hindered the development of a fully functional industry capable of both artistic expression and commercial viability. The rise of middlebrow films, which blend thoughtful narratives with accessible storytelling, marks a crucial step towards bridging this divide and achieving long-term industry sustainability.

In an era dominated by intense digital transformation, heavily influenced by social media dynamics and the overwhelming volume of serialized content provided by streaming platforms, filmmakers face unprecedented challenges.

Audience consumption patterns have evolved significantly, with attention spans shortened and viewer expectations raised by personalized, algorithm-driven digital experiences. Hollywood, through expansive franchises and cinematic universes and multiverses, has further set a high bar by successfully combining artistic branding with massive commercial appeal, reshaping audience engagement standards worldwide. For Romanian cinema to remain competitive and culturally relevant, it must strategically adapt to these evolving dynamics without compromising its core values and artistic identity.

Consequently, Romanian filmmakers must carefully reconsider their approach towards development, production, and marketing strategies to better navigate this complex digital landscape. Personalized digital marketing campaigns, strategic leveraging of social media platforms, and understanding nuanced audience segmentation have become essential tools. Authenticity, originality, and targeted audience engagement should underpin every aspect of film creation – from conceptual development to promotional campaigns – ensuring visibility amid a crowded media environment. Maintaining authorship and cultural specificity remains equally vital, allowing Romanian cinema to assert its identity distinctively amidst globalized digital consumption. Ultimately, the deliberate cultivation of middlebrow films provides Romanian filmmakers with the best opportunity to build a robust and dynamic national industry. This pathway offers not only economic resilience and cultural relevance but also fosters greater diversity in content and form. Embracing this middle ground encourages filmmakers to preserve their unique narrative voices while simultaneously reaching and resonating deeply with their audiences.

One of my all time favourite quotes comes from film critic A.O. Scott who was writing about *Avengers: Infinity War* after its release. Scott was suggesting in his article from 2018 – "It's Marvel's Universe. We just live in it" – that Marvel's superhero-universe penetrated so well our "universe" since it generated a complete maddness for the spectator to even imagine a life without experiencing what Marvel was offering. This was coming one year earlier of Marvel releasing the last film of the "Infinity Saga" which lasted more than 10 years and spectators were going mad because of the uncertainty of not knowing what will happen next. Scott concluded the article by saying:

"This universe is coming to an end. And then where will we be?"[28] I believe it encompassed the exact state of that pre-pandemic world, and it inspires me to ask the same question about the current Romanian industry: our cinema is very well established as an auteur cinema, but after this big infusion of commercial films which came as a reaction to the auter films – "where will we be?"

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[28] A. O. Scott. "Avengers: Infinity War: It's Marvel's Universe, We Just Live in It." *WRAL.com* (from *The New York Times*), April 26, 2018. https://www.wral.com/-avengers-infinity-war-it-s-marvel-s-universe-we-just-live-in-it-/17508746/

IOANA LASCĂR *is a Romanian film producer who has been active in the European film industry for the last 12 years. Her portofolio consists of 25 films produced, with a wide array of approaches and formats, from fiction and documentary, to animation, be it short or feature-length. Her films were officially selected in acclaimed film festivals like Venice, Locarno, Karlovy-Vary or San Sebastian, and were implemented with the support of national and international state-owned or private funding bodies. She taught Film Production and Film Marketing classes at the Film Department, Faculty of Theater and Film, Babeș-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, for the last six years.*

MISCELLANEA

« Le travail de l'historien constitue en somme un défi, d'autant plus difficile que les objets d'étude sont évanescents. »

Ştefana POP-CURŞEU[*] iD
en dialogue avec Prof. Renzo GUARDENTI

Renzo Guardenti est professeur d'Histoire du théâtre à l'Université de Florence. Il a enseigné comme professeur invité à l'Institut d'Études Théâtrale de l'Université de Paris 3-Sorbonne Nouvelle, à l'Université de Caen-Basse Normandie. Spécialiste d'iconographie théâtrale, ses recherches se sont concentrées sur la Commedia dell'Arte en France et le Théâtre de la Foire, sur l'iconographie d'acteur entre XVIIe et XIXe siècle. Il dirige l'archive numérique d'iconographie théâtrale *Dionysos* (Département SAGAS, Université de Florence), la collection *Quaderni di Dionysos* (Bulzoni editore) et la revue « Drammaturgia ». Parmi ses écrits on peut signaler les volumes *Gli italiani a Parigi. La Comédie Italienne (1660-1697). Storia, pratica scenica, iconografia*, Roma,

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Stefana Pop-Curseu : *Je profite de cette belle occasion de votre séjour à Cluj pour vous poser quelques questions sur les directions contemporaines de la recherche dans le domaine théâtral et aussi, plus précisément, dans celui de l'histoire du théâtre, puisque c'est votre champ de prédilection. Je commencerai par vous demander quelles sont les directions de vos recherches actuelles, vos intérêts et préoccupations ?*

Renzo Guardenti : Je suis en train de travailler à la publication de trois comédies de Pierre-François Biancolelli, un des plus importants auteurs du théâtre de la foire et de la Comédie Italienne de Paris du début du XVIIIe siècle. En même temps, je continue mes recherches sur l'iconographie théâtrale et en même temps je suis en train de relancer l'archive Dionysos, qui a eu de problèmes d'obsolescence, même à travers la création, très récente, de la plateforme internet Dionysos. Laboratorio e Archivio di iconografia teatrale (https://www.dionysos.unifi.it/) dédiée à l'étude des sources iconographiques et aux rapports entre arts du spectacle et images. Je crois que, au moins en Italie, dans les dernières années les études théâtrales ont changé de paradigme, se concentrant plutôt sur les *performance studies* et sur l'actualité du théâtre contemporain que sur l'histoire, ce qui contredit, d'un certain côté, les origines de la moderne histoire du théâtre et du spectacle. Mais il s'agit, tout conte fait, de l'esprit du temps qui semble refouler la notion même d'histoire et nous oblige à vivre dans un présent continu, presque sans racines.

Ş.P-C : *Est-ce que ces directions sont les mêmes que celles que vous aviez lors du commencement de votre carrière universitaire ? Qu'est ce qui vous a attiré vers la recherche et l'enseignement théâtral ?*

R.G. : Oui, ces directions de recherche sont au peu près les mêmes. J'ai commencé ma carrière universitaire en travaillant sur l'iconographie de la Commedia dell'Arte en France et donc ce domaine de recherche a orienté

constamment les recherches suivantes jusqu'aujourd'hui. Disons qu'au début j'ai eu un parcours assez irrégulier… Après le lycée je me suis inscrit au DAMS (Disciplines de l'art, de la musique et du spectacle) de l'Université de Boulogne, le premier cours d'études en Italie axé sur les arts et le spectacle. Il était très à la mode à l'époque et, en plus, ces années-là étaient agitées par beaucoup de turbulences politique : Boulogne était le centre de la contestation juvénile et donc je suis laissé prendre par ce milieu-là. C'est seulement quand je suis passé à l'Université de Florence que j'ai découvert mon intérêt pour l'histoire du théâtre, grâce à Cesare Molinari, qui a été le fondateur de la discipline en Italie : j'ai été particulièrement fasciné par sa manière d'aborder l'histoire du théâtre, orientée vers la reconstruction des formes scéniques, des spectacles, de l'art de l'acteur, à travers une méthodologie fondée sur l'analyse rigoureuse des sources, notamment iconographiques. Le travail de recherche mené par Molinari est capable de « faire revivre », grâce à la reconstitution historique, des épisodes et des figures d'un art parmi les plus éphémères et évanescentes.

Prof. Renzo Guardenti pendant la conférence sur *La commedia dell'arte et sa diffusion en Europe*, Faculté de Théâtre et Film, UBB Cluj, printemps 2025.

Ş.P-C : *Est-ce que vos intérêts de recherche se reflètent dans la matière des cours que vous avez tenu au long de votre carrière universitaire. Comment ?*

R.G. : Oui, bien sûr, mes intérêts de recherche, dans la mesure où les structures universitaires actuelles le permettent, se reflètent dans mes enseignements (*Histoire du théâtre et du spectacle*, *Histoire du théâtre moderne et contemporain*, *Fondements de la mise en scène*). L'approche historique des arts du spectacle par l'analyse des sources iconographiques constitue l'un des axes fondamentaux de mes cours universitaires. Par ailleurs, une large place est accordée, dans le cadre du cours *Histoire du théâtre et du spectacle*, à l'étude du théâtre moderne en Europe entre le XVIe et le XVIIIe siècle. Il me semble essentiel d'insister sur ces aspects, car je suis convaincu que ce travail sur les formes scéniques du passé peut fournir aux étudiants les outils méthodologiques nécessaires pour mieux interpréter le théâtre contemporain.

Ş.P-C : *Quelle est l'attitude des étudiants italiens par rapport à la recherche dans ce domaine ? Avez-vous perçu des changements au cours des années ?*

R.G. : Il faut préciser qu'en Italie, l'organisation actuelle des études universitaires – structurée en une *licence* de trois ans, suivie d'un *master* de deux ans – rend difficile, en particulier dans le domaine des sciences humaines et au niveau de la licence, un réel encouragement à l'activité de recherche. On peut dire que la *licence* vise à transmettre aux étudiants les bases fondamentales de la discipline, tandis que le *master* leur permet d'amorcer un parcours de recherche avec le mémoire de fin d'études. Le doctorat représente, bien entendu, une tout autre étape, au cours de laquelle les étudiants peuvent approfondir et développer une véritable vocation à la recherche. Au cours des vingt dernières années, on a assisté à une transformation significative de l'attitude des étudiants vis-à-vis de la recherche : de manière générale, il me semble que l'intérêt pour l'histoire du théâtre a diminué, au profit des disciplines liées au cinéma. Je dois également souligner que les nouvelles générations manifestent un intérêt croissant pour le théâtre contemporain et les *performance studies*, ce qui reflète peut-être les tendances actuelles d'une partie non négligeable de l'historiographie théâtrale italienne. L'intérêt pour l'étude historique du

théâtre, notamment en ce qui concerne les formes scéniques du passé, semble décliner, mais ce qui se diminue est l'intérêt pour l'histoire tout court : ce qui est un trait pertinent de la société actuelle.

Ș.P-C : *Vous avez aussi enseigné à l'étranger, en France notamment. Avez-vous perçu des nuances dans l'attitude des jeunes chercheurs et des étudiants par rapport aux demandes de la recherche théâtrale ?*

R.G. : Comme vous avez dit, j'ai principalement enseigné en France, où, sous certains aspects, les études théâtrales privilégient la dimension esthétique au détriment de la dimension historique, tandis que dans d'autres pays, comme le Brésil – où j'ai également enseigné – les études théâtrales ont une finalité presque exclusivement pratique. Je dois toutefois préciser que dans les dernières années, en France aussi, on constate chez de jeunes chercheurs un intérêt pour les arts du spectacle qui se décline du point de vue historique, à travers l'étude des contextes de production, des techniques d'interprétation, des parcours artistiques d'acteurs, chanteurs, danseurs, performeurs, ainsi que des relations entre théâtre, musique et arts visuels. Je pense notamment à l'expérience de *ThéParis* (*Les Théâtres en France sous l'Ancien Régime : transversalité des pratiques, circulation des personnes, enjeux esthétiques et poétiques*), dirigée par Emanuele de Luca (Université Côte d'Azur), Barbara Nestola (Centre de Musique Baroque de Versailles) et Bénédicte Louvat (Sorbonne Université).

Ș.P-C : *Pour nos étudiants, la recherche semble de moins en moins attrayante, car difficile, bien qu'elle soit beaucoup plus aisée qu'avant l'invention de l'internet, des bases de données, et des bibliothèques en ligne avec accès à un nombre de plus en plus grand de documents numérisés. Que faudrait-il faire pour les attirer plus vers la recherche fondamentale ? Des masters internationaux de recherche seraient-ils plus intéressants ?*

R.G. : La question est particulièrement complexe, car elle touche à des aspects qui dépassent nos disciplines et concernent la société contemporaine dans son ensemble, fondée sur des principes de rentabilité immédiate, alors que la recherche nécéssite des temps longs. C'est là, peut-être, l'une des raisons qui découragent les jeunes de s'engager dans la recherche. Il existe en outre

une sorte de « schizophrénie » entre la masse d'informations accessibles via les bases de données et les bibliothèques numériques, et le manque d'outils critiques et méthodologiques chez les étudiants pour les exploiter de manière éclairée. Il faut également souligner que les systèmes universitaires actuels sont davantage fondés sur des critères quantitatifs que qualitatifs, favorisant ainsi la rapidité des parcours de formation, ce qui rend difficile la naissance, en un temps réduit, d'un véritable intérêt pour la recherche. Bien entendu, la création de *masters* internationaux pourrait stimuler l'intérêt pour la recherche, mais le problème fondamental reste d'ordre politique : il est lié aux ressources et aux financements que les États choisissent d'allouer à la recherche. Il s'agit là d'un enjeu global et structurel, qui ne concerne pas uniquement les études théâtrales, mais le futur de l'ensemble de la communauté scientifique – et plus largement, de notre société.

Prof. Renzo Guardenti pendant les discussions autour de *La commedia dell'arte et sa diffusion en Europe,* Faculté de Théâtre et Film, UBB Cluj, printemps 2025.

Ș.P-C : *Vous nous avez tenu deux magnifiques cours : l'un sur l'histoire de la Commedia dell'arte et sa réception en Europe, avec des documents iconographiques très riches, magnifiquement choisis, et l'autre, justement, sur l'emploi scientifique de ces images et la recherche iconographique, avec toute la technique et le savoir-faire demandé. Pourriez-vous me faire le portrait dans le sens de profil professionnel d'un jeune chercheur ou chercheuse à même de continuer et de développer la recherche dans la direction que vous avez dessinée ?*

R.G. : Je crois qu'un jeune chercheur doit avoir un véritable sentiment de l'histoire. Sans ce désir de comprendre les formes et les phénomènes du passé, il est pratiquement impossible de faire de la recherche dans nos disciplines. Les historiens du spectacle sont avant tout des historiens, et à ce titre, ils doivent s'inscrire dans les temps longs de la recherche, s'engager dans des recherches d'archive longues et fatigantes, ils doivent identifier et analyser de manière critique un large éventail de sources, parmi lesquelles les sources iconographiques occupent une place particulière, à condition de toujours faire preuve d'une rigueur méthodologique constante. Il est aussi fondamental de s'ouvrir aux contaminations disciplinaires : non seulement le théâtre, mais également la musique, les beaux-arts, l'architecture, les technologies, les sciences sociales et politiques, car tous ces domaines forment le terrain dans lequel naissent et se développent les arts du spectacle.

Ș.P-C : *En quoi consiste la valeur de ce patrimoine iconographique et théâtrale pour nous et pour les jeunes d'aujourd'hui ? Valeur à comprendre, à partager et à préserver…*

R.G. :.. La documentation iconographique, et plus généralement l'ensemble des sources relatives aux arts du spectacle, a une valeur considérable, d'autant plus grande qu'elles témoignent de formes d'expression artistique éphémères, soumises aux lois inéluctables de la durée et du temps. Ce sont des fragments, que l'historien doit assembler pour restituer l'image la plus rigoureuse possible d'une forme scénique, d'un spectacle ou du parcours artistique d'un acteur ou d'un performer. De ce point de vue, l'iconographie théâtrale assume un rôle fondamental : elle nous rappelle avant tout que les arts du spectacle sont,

en premier lieu, des arts visuels et nous offre, même de manière fragmentaire, une image du phénomène. Le travail de l'historien constitue en somme un défi, d'autant plus difficile que les objets d'étude sont évanescents. Mais c'est précisément pour cette raison qu'il est essentiel de préserver, d'analyser et de diffuser la mémoire des arts du spectacle.

Ș.P-C : *Je vous remercie et j'espère que ces valeurs inestimables convaincront les jeunes chercheurs à se consacrer à leur mise en lumière et à leur transmission.*

Prof. Renzo Guardenti en compagnie de Ștefana Pop-Curșeu, Prof. Anca Măniuțiu, Francesca Guardenti et Filip Odangiu, Faculté de Théâtre et Film, UBB Cluj, printemps 2025.

A Journal Entry about Developing a Street Theatre Play for Amnesty Luxembourg *Related to the Subject of the Intersection between Human Rights and Climate Change*

Dana RUFOLO[*]

When I wrote Street Theatre plays for Amnesty Luxembourg 15 years ago, the group I worked with was constant over three or four years. Now, I can't keep the same participants for more than a matter of months. I've seen a Syrian participate drop out because he finally found a job, an Iranian participant drop out because her mother in Tehran is ill and she can't risk having an Iranian border controller find something in her record that associates her with Amnesty International, and tragically a Luxembourger trumpet player who accompanied the song that began and ended our 2024 street play on human rights needed to drop out after a diagnosis of terminal cancer. These are all understandable reasons. The new recruits have to agree to stay in the group until we've performed in the city on July 1, 2025. I've no plans for long-term theatre projects; it is a compromise. I don't know why people are shy about joining a theatre group that promotes human rights. Present-day Amnesty members prefer to write letters protesting unfair incarceration or to participate in women's day or LGBTQ marches – extremely important activities, but they involve less private initiative.

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Street theatre workshop Amnesty Luxembourg. Outside tongue twister practice session.

I guess theatre isn't valued in this highly capitalistic country, top heavy with banks and European institutions. Not many people here read the proclamation on World Theatre Day 2025 by Jeffrey Eric Jenkins, the president of the International Association of Theatre Critics where he stated that, "This global celebration calls on us to reaffirm our commitment to the stage as a place of truth. Theatre is not merely a cultural expression – it is an act of resilience in a world too often silenced by fear… While the authoritarian regimes consolidate power and distort cultural narratives to suit their own ends, the role of theatre as a vehicle for truth-telling has gained new urgency." The truth is there is little money to be gained in doing theatre. I'm a volunteer, and so are all the actors. They are members of Amnesty Luxembourg who volunteered to join the theatre group.

Everyone in the latest Amnesty Street theatre group is an amateur. This is an additional problem in a country that feels little affinity to theater as a form of expression. People will want perfection when they watch our performance, and that is not what they are going to get. I realized after giving my first workshop in acting skills to the theatre group that nowadays Street

Theatre for political objectives – in this case to foster consciousness about human rights – requires professional actors or their equivalent. It requires hours of training during short intervals of time to produce actors capable of producing a street play that is convincing to spectators who are not deeply committed to a cause such as defending human rights. This is what I have learned, and this is why I conclude that human rights education is not best served by Street Theatre if the actors are amateurs.

Street theatre workshop for Amnesty Luxembourg. mirroring movement exercise.

The Workshop and its Goals

In late March, I offered a (cost-free, naturally) workshop to develop acting skills in my garage to the Amnesty Theatre Group participants so as to prepare the 2025 Amnesty Luxembourg Street Theatre play I wrote and which is called *When the Nonhuman Arrives*. The objectives were to teach voice projection, articulation, movement, and improvisational skills. The final activity was to then start working on the script.

Warm-ups consisted of mirroring each other in groups of two; both in acting and in art therapy this exercise is common. The participants mirrored one another's movements to oldies jazz-inspired music, and then they incorporated sounds into the mirroring of movements. Each person in the mirroring pair was the leader initiating the movements for five minutes each. Response was slow, with the leader's initial movements reflected back after a delay of a second or even more; the man-woman couple, people who had never met before, was particularly unable to synchronize their movements. When participants were invited to add sounds to their mirroring movements, a participant from a conflict-ridden area of East Europe imitated the sounds of military personnel issuing orders; she spoke loudly and aggressively although otherwise she is softspoken. All this is valuable information if one is running an art therapy session, but considering that these people were going to be acting in a play soon, it was not particularly comforting to see how much work would be required to teach the group to coordinate their movements.

Work on tongue-twisters was more successful, perhaps because everyone had in hand a paper with the tongue-twisters printed on them, and holding a paper made the participants feel more secure. The tongue-twisters were in English, the common language of the group. To give the Frenchman amongst us a sense of equality since he pronounces English words with an overpowering French accent, I asked him to lead us in reciting French tongue-twisters; we did so outside, for it was a balmy day. Leading us did give him a sense of authority, and he was adamant about correcting our pronunciation. It was finally an exercise where the group seemed to come together as one body.

I again took over to lead anaerobic breathing exercises and vagus nerve exercises. The group was happy to learn something new.

I'd prepared two poems, one by Walt Whitman and one by Theodore Roethke for the group to read. I meant for them to choose which of the two they preferred to prepare and recite, but immediately each participant asked to recite a personal favorite poem and they searched for the poem on their phones and recited the poem holding their phones and not a sheet of paper in their hands. Only one participant created a movement sequence that reinforced

the words and message of the poem; the others showed no knowledge yet of how to transform words they have read into a performance. Again, I saw that hours of training would be required before rehearsals began, and I knew it was impossible to increase the skillset to an acceptable level for none among us was able to meet as often as would be necessary.

When the participants were asked to prepare and then perform a dramatic reading of a sample from their own writings (which they had been asked to bring along), again the participants' fuzzy speech, soft voices, and reluctance to interpret the lines showed that they were mentally still rooted in a world measured by literature and sub-vocalized reading. I saw no evidence that earlier work that day on voice projection and articulation had been assimilated.

Lastly, I had the group watch the "globe scene" in Charlie Chaplin's film *The Great Dictator*. I told them that an enactment of this scene was to open my street play for Amnesty Luxembourg titled *When the Nonhuman Arrives*. In it, aliens are observing Earth. They are applauding the self-destructive actions of human beings. The aliens are gleeful, because soon the humans will have exterminated themselves and they can take over the Earth and turn it into a hospital planet where their own sick and dying can recuperate or turn into humus. The aliens become infuriated, however, when they observe a crowd of protestors on the Earth who are marching for human rights and recognition of climate change. They send one of their kind down to Earth to tell the protestors to quit protesting, as they do not wish to wait a moment longer than necessary to take over the Earth.

I had selected the two most accomplished participants to play the aliens who enact the scene of holding an inflated globe I offered as a prop and playing with it in an ecstasy of possessiveness. Quite possibly because the model scene derived from a film and not from literature, the participants showed genuine enthusiasm in playing with the globe and imitating the hand movements of Charlie as the dictator. This sign of interest is heartening and will sustain me during the development of the street play in time for the July 2025 performance, but I also once more understood that to fully exploit the physical aspects of the street play would require many more hours of work together than was available.
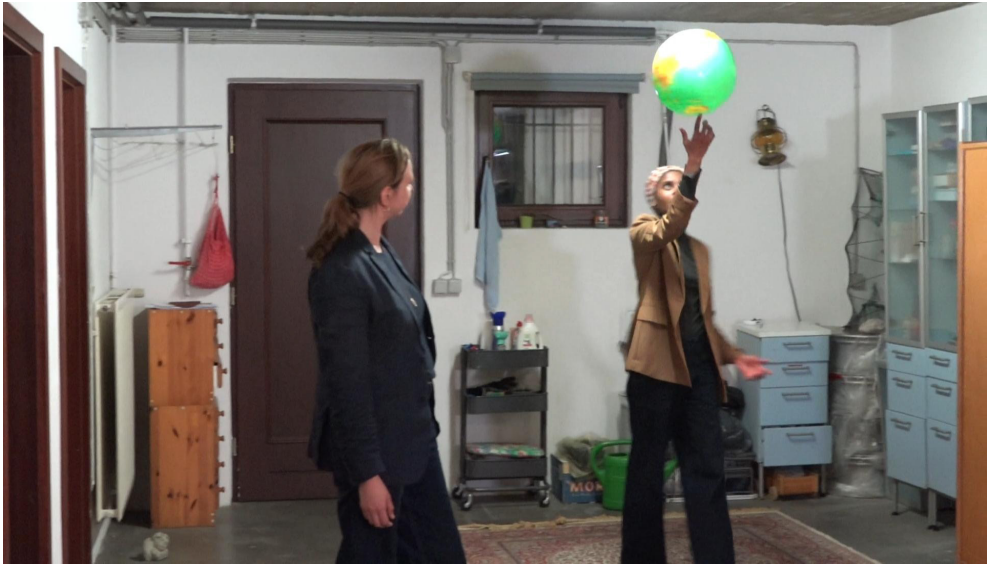
Street theatre workshop for Amnesty Luxembourg. Playing with the world.

In conclusion, I realize that I have kept companies like the Bread and Puppet Theatre or the San Francisco Mime Troup alive in my imagination, but the kind of company which attracted people who share a passion for theatre or even also a shared passion for human rights is not possible to build in the milieu in which I am working. No students have ever asked to join the Amnesty Luxembourg theatre group, and the participants either struggle with immigrant status and worry about making ends meet or else they have high paying jobs and many additional commitments. It is no longer an era where amateur groups can take center stage in the midst of a public space and expect to have their sentiments of justice resonate with the passing crowd. In terms of cultivating activists, theatre is not the most effective these days in wealthier European countries like Luxembourg. We need to remember that Street Theatre was and can again be a valuable form of pubic provocation, but for the time being it is better to use more conventional forms of teaching critical thinking and fostering tolerance.

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As director of the Theater Research Institute of Europe (www.theater-research-institute.eu)
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Rufolo belongs to the International Association of Theatre Critics, the League of Professional
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Rufolo's dramatic poetry performances I am Viola da Gamba *(poetry and music) premiered
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PERFORMANCE AND BOOK REVIEWS

The Avatars of Trauma in Art

BOOK REVIEW:
Anca Hațiegan, *Ciulei și spectrul tatălui. O psihobiografie*, București, Editura Litera, 2024
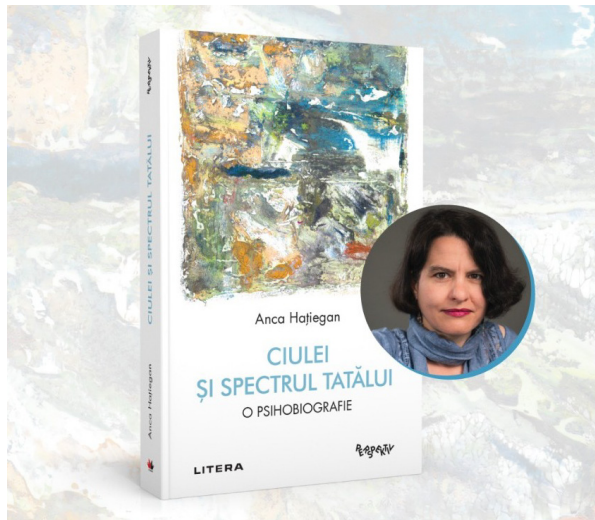
Without a doubt, the volume *Ciulei și spectrul tatălui* (*Ciulei and the Specter of the Father)*, subtitled *A Psychobiography* and published in 2024 by Litera Publishing House in the Perspektiv collection, stands out as a landmark editorial release in the field of dramatic arts in Romania. This is not only because it recalibrates the public image of one of the most prolific Romanian theatre figures of recent history, but especially because the author displays a filigree-like meticulousness, capturing the facets and nuances of a Renaissance-like personality in a complex lacework full of revelatory beauty and rough edges.

Anca Hațiegan takes on a courageous epistemic mission by openly embracing and rehabilitating biographism – a method she knows entails the risk of fictionalizing speculation. Yet, the success is all the more remarkable as the final product maintains a flawless balance between scientific rigor and the almost novelistic suspense of the actual reconstruction. Thus, a rare feat for a scholarly book, *The Specter of the Father* becomes a fascinating read both for the researcher or theatre professional used to thorough documentation, and for the more casual reader seeking a literary interlude in daily routine.

Beyond these elements, the book also serves as a valuable theatre studies tool, not only because of the vast and well-founded information it contains, but especially due to the analytical model it proposes. This model hones the reader's observational skills and axiological instincts beyond the narrow domain of aesthetics.

There is, however, a secondary, though not accidental, dimension to this research: the portrayal of an era, with its oppressive atmosphere and the anticipatory effervescence typical of turning points or transitional periods. The specific case of the Ciulley family, though not necessarily representative or typical of interwar or postwar Romanian society, reflects in mirror shards a broader historical context, which can be reconstructed in the background of an otherwise exceptional story. The public uproar around the homicide trial involving the father of the future theatre man – the newspaper reports, the petty satisfaction of the public in trampling through the tabloid press into the intimacy of a family on the brink of dissolution – did not occur in a vacuum. On the contrary, they resulted from a tangible social tension and extended a collective mindset in search of escapist diversions. Similarly, Liviu Ciulei's artistic destiny unfolds against a backdrop of collective trauma and constant ideological pressure. By tracing the persecutions endured by the director-actor-scenographer, Hațiegan's reconstruction naturally leaps from personal biography to a larger historical perspective.

Demonstrating a keen dramatic instinct herself, the researcher organizes the volume into two main sections, playfully titled "Life-Work" and "Work-Life," depending on where the authorial emphasis is placed. The merit of this structure lies in using the investigative suspense of the first part to spark interest in the more technical approach of the second. By organizing her text

into two acts with multiple sub-scenes (to use a dramaturgical metaphor), the author uses gripping narrative to justify the detailed analysis that follows. The initial contextualization is so well executed, and the argument for biographical determination so convincingly formulated, that the reader's interest in understanding the creative mechanisms is far greater than it would have been with a fragmented, zigzagging explanation of causes and effects.

The decisive influence of Liviu Ciulei's father extended well beyond the expected dynamic of a demanding, respected father-son relationship. In fact, the authority the engineer exuded likely made the shock of his indiscretion resonate, in his son's destiny, like the fall of a marble idol from a great height. Using period press materials, testimonies, and complementary memoir fragments – and avoiding delivering a definitive judgment – Anca Hațiegan conducts her own journalistic investigation (often bordering on a gripping detective style) into the death of Mr. Ciulley's mistress and the public spectacle surrounding the engineer's indictment. Tita Cristescu, daughter of communist leader Gheorghe Cristescu, a young and beautiful aspiring actress – thus easily cast in the role of tragic heroine – dies by poisoning on Christmas night, 1935, triggering a collective blame mechanism that Ciulley himself would fall victim to. Initially suspected of the scandalous crime, he was forced to expose his private life in a very public trial. Hațiegan's book not only recreates the insatiable tension in the courtroom but also advances various theories and sketches portraits of the people involved, in a revelatory slideshow sequence. Ciulei's preference for arena-type theatrical spaces thus reveals, both explicitly and implicitly, its origin – the author links it to the haunting image of the courtroom.

The second part of the volume reconstructs the artistic personality of theatre man Liviu Ciulei, with all the roles he claimed through his (at least) fourfold specialization. Thus, we witness the father's specter subtly permeating the architect's, scenographer's, actor's, and director's work. Each facet reveals the depth of the foundational trauma – some examples are more convincing, others seemingly speculative. However, the argument largely benefits from pertinent explanations that clarify correlations which might initially appear far-fetched. There is a slight structural imbalance, as Ciulei-the-architect and Ciulei-the-scenographer (the latter highly prolific) are clearly underrepresented

in favor of a deeper and lengthier analysis of Ciulei-the-actor and Ciulei-the-director. This choice, however, is justified by the relevance of each of these four facets to the book's central thesis.

The author's hypothesis is that Ciulei, perhaps unconsciously, engaged in a kind of psychodrama, attempting to exorcise through theatre the demons born of that defining early experience. This tendency is most visible in the types of roles he chose or the themes favored in his directing; but also, more broadly, in the aesthetic he practiced, regardless of his assumed role.

This book therefore has a clear premise and a concrete stake. The premise can be summarized as the observation that Ciulei's oeuvre reflects the influence of decisive formative events, a claim that becomes increasingly difficult to refute after reading. The stake lies in the fact that theatre professionals are often victims of reductive perceptions, with collective thinking subordinating them to the dramatic author, a mindset Hațiegan deconstructs in order to highlight the unjust indifference toward the biographies behind the art. Consequently, *Ciulei and the Specter of the Father* also aims to correct a clear case of misclassification.

Throughout the volume, the finality of the spectatological analysis intensifies, ultimately penetrating the mysterious laboratory of the theatre creator into the chiaroscuro realm of motivations, contextual references, and, not least, formative environments. Because this latter aspect, even when avoided by "serious" studies, even when it manifests only in subtext, in silences, or in resonant absence, continues to assert its claim over the artist's work, as Anca Hațiegan so compellingly demonstrates.

Of course, not all theatre creators have such exceptional destinies or such unique biographies as to justify this approach. Nevertheless, where a director's style is so clearly defined, and where their artistic trajectory exhibits undeniable coherence, a dedicated researcher cannot ignore the dark side of the moon, even when the subject of the inquiry has spent a lifetime cultivating discretion.
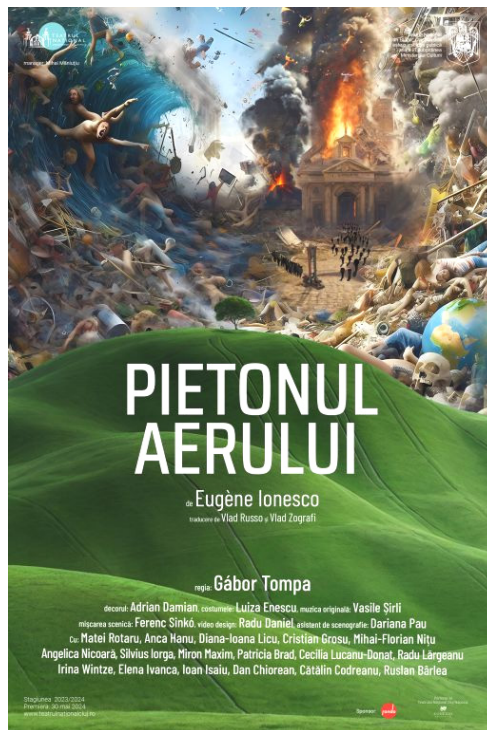
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The Inflated, Absurd World of a Liberating Dream

PERFORMANCE REVIEW:

Eugène Ionesco, *Pietonul aerului* (*The Air Walker*), by Gábor Tompa, "Lucian Blaga" National Theatre, Cluj-Napoca, premiere: May 30, 2024

Eugène Ionesco confessed that he perceived the world as being emptied of meaning, and reality, most of the time, as unreal. The feeling of unreality was expressed through his characters, who wander, tormented by anxieties,

failures, regrets, and the emptiness of their lives, or are depicted as lost beings in the meaninglessness of existence. His plays are a blend of fantasy, poetry, and nightmare on the one hand, and social and cultural critique on the other. They contain the turmoil of someone who realizes that life is hellish, and yet loves it with all its hellishness. A being that wants to be free, in a world that resembles a prison from which it cannot escape. Ionesco and his characters appear to be stunned by the absurdity of the universe, by the individual's inability to know and understand. They experience the revelation of Death, of Evil, and of an inadmissible existential condition. The identities of his characters are not clearly defined; they melt into others, change ages and roles, and evolve in an uncertain space and time, reproducing the vagueness of memories from a dream. In a dream, another kind of reality appears, in which the characters try to integrate by accepting conventions; the images become incoherent, overlapping, shifting from one plane to another. In the theatre of the absurd, the dreamlike follows its own laws, like in a game of mirrors, where characters have the freedom to act, in a constant state of mobility and transformation, where the irrational takes control.

foto: Nicu Cherciu © TNC

A perfect connoisseur of Eugène Ionesco's works, whose texts he has staged memorably in *The Bald Soprano*, *Jacques or Submission*, *The Chairs*, *The New Tenant*, and *Rhinoceros*, director Gábor Tompa creates a true poetic dream in *The Air Walker*, a production of the "Lucian Blaga" National Theatre in Cluj. Written in 1962, during the Cold War, the play serves as a warning, recognized at the time and still relevant today. Drawing from Ionesco's stage directions, but in harmony with the geometry of the directorial concept, the geometry of space, brilliantly imagined by set designer Adrian Damian, coexists with the spirit of the text. "Immediately to the left, a country house in the English style [...] The house, as well as the landscape described below, must offer a dreamlike atmosphere. At the same time, this dreaminess must be created mainly through the means specific to a 'primitive' painter, a craftsman mimicking amateurism, and less through the means of the surrealist artist. [...] Everything is bathed in light, with no shadowed corners, no veils, etc. The rest of the stage represents a meadow with tall, very green, and fresh grass, on a hill that overlooks the valley; [...] The sky is very blue and very clear. A few trees on stage, etc.," notes Eugène Ionesco in his stage

foto: Nicu Cherciu © TNC

directions, which are deeply sophisticated in their illustration by Adrian Damian, alongside the eloquent, vividly colored costumes by Luiza Enescu. The inflatable mattress with trees and columns, which appear and disappear effortlessly, serves the Ionescian universe through images reminiscent of naive paintings, while also suggesting the lack of consistency in the ideologies promoted by various groups, through the sudden deflation at the end. An inflated, absurd world, a universe of forms devoid of substance.

foto: Nicu Cherciu © TNC

In the dialogues of *The Bald Soprano*, as well as in Gábor Tompa's 1992 staging, the characters become entangled in language, in its banality. In *The Air Walker*, Ionesco recontextualizes themes from *The Bald Soprano* through the group of characters who speak without saying anything, in a time without time, in another tragedy of language. The initial dialogue, convivial and akin to a textbook for learning a foreign language, cultivates the same expression of preciosity, the contradiction of appearance vs. essence, form without substance. As a tribute to the 1992 performance, in which the protagonists – puppets – emerged from a music box, in *The Air Walker*, the

opening sounds imitate the music box with the chords of the United Kingdom's anthem, and the characters are presented in a marionette-like manner, in a harmony of sound and movement. The remarkable songs, which span the entire performance, were composed by Vasile Șirli, accompanied by plastic, suggestive movements conceived by Ferenc Sinkó. In *The Air Walker*, director Gábor Tompa also shapes the character profiles in symbiosis with Ionesco's universe, where the anti-heroes appear as: "Puppets. Beings without faces. Rather: empty frames to which the actors can lend their own faces, their own persona. [...] In the endless and senseless words they speak, they can say whatever they want, they can express whatever they want, comedy, drama, humor, themselves." Thus, Cristian Grosu (The Journalist), Mihai-Florian Nițu (The First Englishman), Angelica Nicoară (The First Englishwoman), Silvius Iorga (The Little Boy, their son), Miron Maxim (The Second Englishman), Patricia Brad (The Second Englishwoman), Cecilia Lucanu-Donat (The Little Girl, their daughter), Radu Lărgeanu (John Bull), Irina Wintze (The First Old Englishwoman), Elena Ivanca (The Second Old Englishwoman), Ioan Isaiu (The Uncle-Doctor), Dan Chiorean (The Funeral Employee), Ruslan Bârlea (The Judge, The Executioner, The First Assessor), with expressiveness and craftsmanship, give shape to the characters, shading them with traits, sometimes with humor, defining the universe of absurd banality.

The main character is attributed biographical elements similar to those of Eugène Ionesco. Bérenger, subtly and inventively shaped by Matei Rotaru, is a famous playwright, with a wife and a daughter, a family to whom he feels very connected, differing from the other bearers of the same name, Bérenger, from *The Killer Without Salary*, *Rhinoceros*, or *The King is Dying*. He is less naive, more lucid, and at the same time more playful, at one point even approaching the age of his daughter Marthe, a mature little girl in her approach to things, full of affection for her father and mother, convincingly portrayed, with scenic intelligence, by Diana-Ioana Licu. The figure of the wife and that of the daughter, from the playwright's real life, are projected onto the images of the female characters Joséphine and Marthe. The text contains moments of marital harmony, serving as mirrors of the author's own couple.

The central image of the play is, however, flight, the act of moving through the air, an image that originates in a dream, a dream that is also connected to the mythological motif of Icarus, entering the sphere of archetypes and the logic governing the collective unconscious, as discussed by Jung. The foundation of the play lies in the idea that, in the past, humans were capable of flying, whereas modern man has lost this ability, which Bérenger tries to regain. Bérenger's flight is a liberating dream. What Bérenger sees from above (terror, wars, massacres, catastrophes) is the critical aspect of the social context, associated with the dreamlike substratum. Gábor Tompa, through his faithful interpretation of Ionesco's text, brings to the stage the essential data of the human condition, where the real and the unreal, the conscious and the unconscious, the concrete world and the dream intertwine. Joséphine, Bérenger's virtuous wife, portrayed with a wide range of stage abilities by Anca Hanu, aside from embodying the playwright's wife on stage, integrates within her emotions a part of the author's anxieties – fear of death, disappearance into nothingness, despair at the loss of loved ones. Joséphine is haunted by the image of her dead father, but the character of

Uncle-Doctor says he would still be alive. The sequences in which Joséphine appears are sometimes tragicomic, while others alternate with those typical of a dream, such as scenes in which her nightmares appear. The climax is reached at the moment when Joséphine is subjected to an "absurd trial," Kafkaesque in nature, presided over by a giant judicial panel, with nightmarish-fantastic traits, an inspired video projection created by Radu Daniel, who is responsible for the video design of the production.

foto: Nicu Cherciu © TNC

We also encounter the theme of the "biblical garden." At certain moments, sometimes comedic, sometimes lyrical or tragic, the absurd alternates with religious symbolism; the silver bridge, the tree of the sky (*Axis Mundi*), which appears and disappears, or the Edenic gardens that will be restored according to Martha's hopes at the end: "Maybe everything will be sorted out... maybe the flames will be extinguished... maybe the ice will break and melt... maybe the abysses will be filled... maybe... the gardens... the gardens..." The column, the tree, or the bush, the silver ladder are symbols

meant to signal the supernatural of divine nature. The pedestrian from the Anti-World (Cătălin Codreanu), conceived with transparent meaning by Gábor Tompa, evokes the image of a Christ from an overturned world, coming from a space that is the essence of eternal Evil.

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