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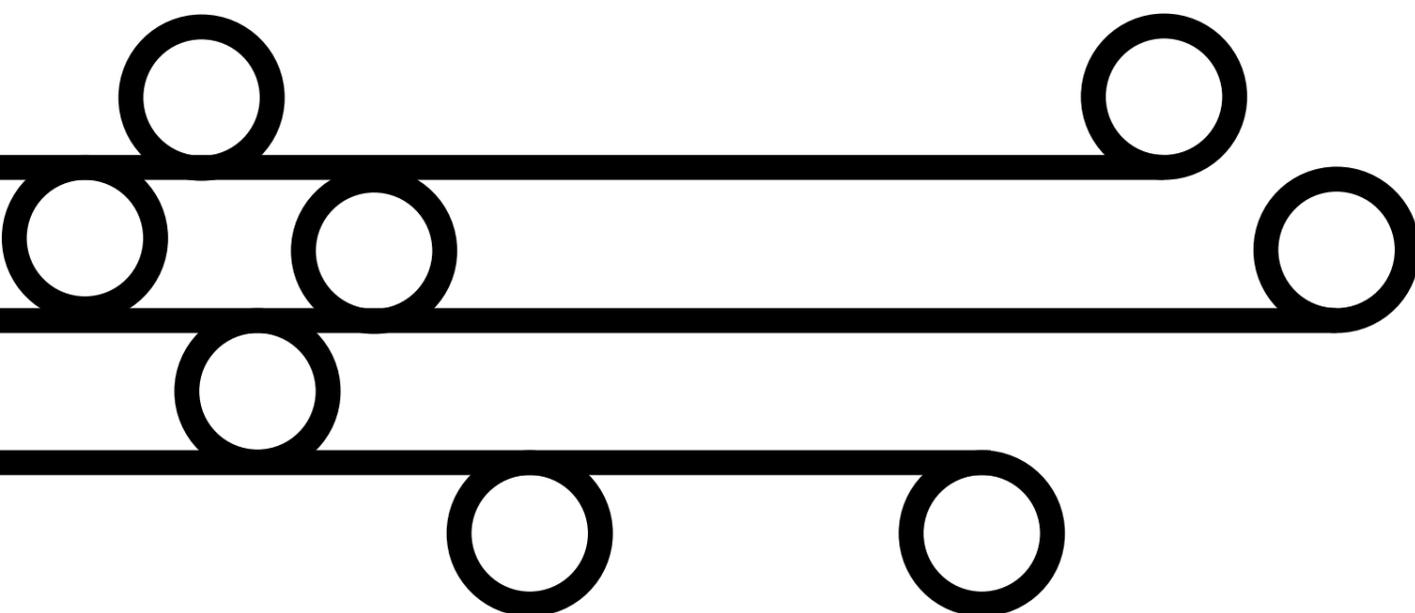
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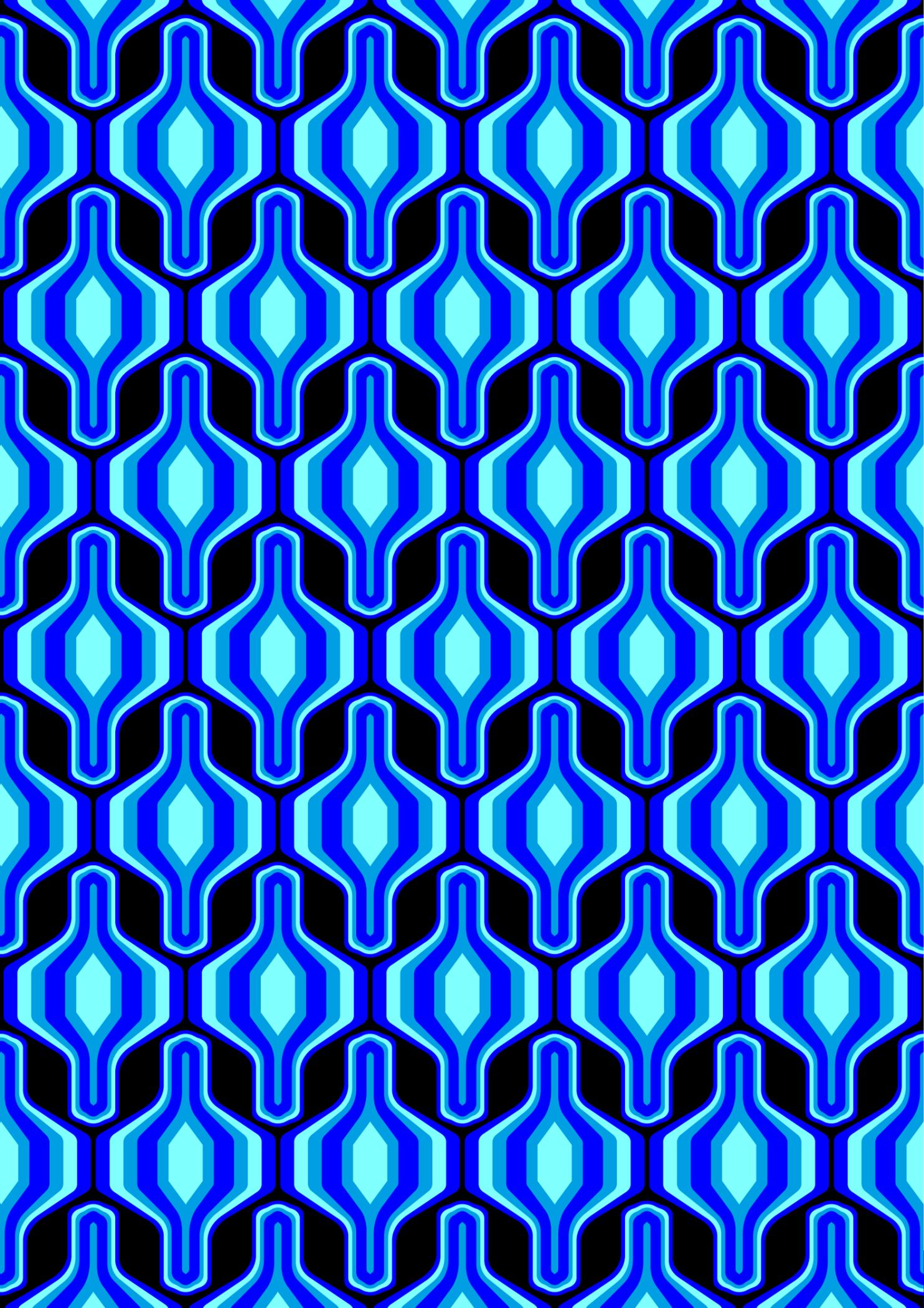
**Language and Performance:
Moving across Discourses
and Practices in a Globalised World**

GUEST EDITORS
MAŁGORZATA SUGIERA
KAREL VANHAESEBROUCK
TIMMY DE LAET

Editorial Introduction



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Within a globalised world, language can act both as a barrier and facilitator for the circulation and visibility of peoplehoods, practices, knowledges, or traditions. The twentieth and twenty-first century have witnessed an arguably unprecedented diversification and spread of local cultures due to the rapid development of digital technologies and online networks, the expansion of transnational migrations, and the commercialisation of relatively affordable travel. Paradoxically, however, the increased exposure to foreign influences only seems to have reinforced the tendency toward ‘cultural homogenisation’ already identified by the socio-cultural anthropologist Arjun Appadurai back in the mid-1990s (Appadurai 1996). At its best, this kind of homogenisation recognises indigenous hybridity while striving to promote internal cohesion between diverse populations; at its worst, it flips into nationalist leanings that aim to reinforce borders and protect ‘imagined communities’ (Anderson 1983). In these evermore complex societal and political realities, language either serves to enhance communication between people or it is used as leverage to implement exclusionary ideologies.

It is against this backdrop of a deeply diversified and often divided global stage that the Essays Section of this issue of the *European Journal of Theatre and Performance* wants to reconsider the fairly expansive debate on the relationship between language and performance, which has surfaced repeatedly yet in various guises in the field of the performing arts. The various articles collected in this Essays Section critically inquire into how language is a central tool in the creation and reception of performance works, how artistic practices inform scholarly discourse or vice versa, and how local traditions position themselves toward international tendencies in both the arts and academia. The overarching aim of the issue is to shed new light on the intricate connections between language and performance by focusing on the various ways in which performance always operates on the microlevel of concrete practices as well as in dialogue with the macrolevel of larger socio-political and cultural contexts.

It is indeed striking that the main running thread throughout the Essays Section is that all authors devote particular attention to the political implications of probing the role of language in performance. This is a remarkable development that clearly aims to go beyond the focus of previous debates, which typically strove to delineate the medium specificity of performance with regard to language (see, e.g., Walker 2007; Hamilton 2009; Worthen 2010). In contrast, the articles presented here testify to a joint and critical endeavour to tie the manifold uses of language in performance back to the socio-cultural realities, ideological assumptions, and even ethical promises that emerge from specific artistic practices. If taking up arguably ‘old’ questions for ‘new’ purposes might teach us something about our current time, it is clear that the role of language in performance is no longer solely a formal matter but a topic that has taken on a distinct political urgency.

This introduction, then, serves to unfold the main reasons why we, as editors, wanted to return to the longstanding issue of language in/and performance as well as to lay out the rationale behind the different themes that structure the Essays Section. It should be clear from the outset that the contributions to this issue are by no means intended to provide a comprehensive state-of-the-art or exhaustive enquiry on the relationship between language and performance in all its variations, if that were ever possible. Instead, they offer a vivid image of how not only recent scholarly research but also performance practices (both historical and contemporary) continue to tackle the abiding question of how verbal discourse interacts with embodied enactment.

Why Language and Performance?

Even in a postdramatic era allegedly marked by the deprived status of text in theatre, neither writing nor language have disappeared altogether from performative practices (Borowski and Sugiera 2010; Boyle et al. 2019). On the contrary, language remains vital to many aspects of the performing arts, ranging from creation, production, and performing to spectating, reception, and scholarship. Likewise, whereas dance conventionally foregrounds the moving body as its primary medium, leading to what Rudi Laermans describes as a ‘body humanism’ (2008), both written and spoken words are essential and widely used means for creating and transmitting choreography (Franko 2011). Common belief nonetheless holds that the actual experience of performing or watching a theatre, dance, or performance piece can never be fully captured within the limited means of linguistic expression. To the extent, however, that embodied, verbal, and sensory communication lies at the heart of the performing arts, language and discourse remain crucial to understand

how performance engages the senses and generates meaning (Nellhaus 2010; Blair and Cook 2016). Moreover, the endeavour to clarify the dynamics of what Mikhail Bakhtin aptly termed the ‘dialogic imagination’ (1975) acquires a distinct political urgency in a world in which dialogue and mutual understanding are increasingly under pressure.

In various ways, the disciplinary development of the adjacent yet distinct fields of theatre, dance, and performance studies has exacerbated the dichotomous tension between language and performance. For each of these domains, language served as a splitting surface to claim its distinctiveness and to become identified as a specific field of research and practice: whereas theatre studies sought to distance itself from literary studies, performance studies gained its contours in opposition to theatre studies while also dance studies differentiated itself from the former two through its outspoken focus on movement and the dancing body (e.g., Pavis 2001; Bottoms 2003; O’Shea 2010). As such, the stance toward language became part of discursive operations that were shaped by an entangled myriad of intra- and interdisciplinary dynamics. While these legacies still impregnate current views on the role of language and discourse in performance scholarship and practices, they remain to be excavated, particularly with regard to how transnational influences steered local traditions, both artistically and intellectually.

As primarily embodied and time-based art forms, the performing arts have a fraught relationship with languages and discourses, becoming subject to the ‘epistemic violence’ with which Western regimes of thinking have traditionally relegated practical, corporeal, and often tacit knowledges to an inferior status (Conquergood 2002). The attempt to counter this tendency has often isolated bodily knowing from the interaction between embodiment and language as one of the foundations for the acquisition of techniques or skills in training and performing. Conversely, the steady growth of artistic research especially in European

contexts has been raising renewed interest in the question of whether and how the performing arts need discourse to become validated as knowledgeable practices in their own right or whether there might be other formats more suitable for the dissemination of artistic knowledges (e.g., Spatz 2015; Bal and Chaberski 2020; Blades et al. 2021).

Recent scholarship in theatre, performance, and dance studies has directed attention to multilingualism and migration as two major cultural forces to be reckoned with in both research and practice, often with the aim to undermine pernicious postcolonial, decolonial, and hegemonic legacies still permeating the arts and societies at large (e.g., Cox 2014; Meerzon and Pewny 2019; Damsholt and Hoppy 2020). In the midst of these concerns, the current field of the performing arts, as well as academia, appears to be governed by two contradictory movements: whereas globalisation has contributed to a larger international outreach of both practitioners and scholars, the dominant position of English as the main communal language runs the risk of either flattening out onto-epistemic and culturally diverse backgrounds or dividing the field into centres and peripheries. Various countries with a vivid artistic scene and producing prolific scholarship still experience difficulties in finding their way into a more global network of peers, raising the question to what extent the performing arts can resist reigning political, economic, and social power relations.

Subthemes of the Essays Section

We have organised the Essays Section in four parts, each corresponding to a specific subtheme. These subthemes do all but cover completely the wide array of subjects and questions concerning the complex and intricate relationship between language and performance. They allow the reader to navigate through four clusters of conceptually related articles loosely sharing connected research questions. The structure of the Essays Section aims to orient the reader rather than to demarcate this issue's subject matter. Most importantly, the four subsections propose a broad sample of the current state-of-the-art research within the vast field of language and performance, organised along four distinct research lines.

The first subsection explores the complex interwovenness of language and (local) identity through the lens of performance. It proposes three detailed case studies which investigate how a specific group or specific groups perform their multiple identities through language uses. How does language perform identity? How can language re-activate cultural memory? How can multilingualism question or reaffirm identities? Yana Meerzon, who explores the issue of multilingualism in contemporary theatre practice, analyses how language can function as a marker of authenticity while at the same time challenging paradigms of nationalism. In the world of global migration, language, Meerzon argues, performs specific identities endowing them with an aura of realness, while at the same time enabling and stimulating transnational encounters. Focusing on performance in languages on the verge of extinction, Sarit Cofman-Simhon explores how Jewish languages function not merely as a means of communication but as vibrant theatrical material in itself. She describes how the use of Ladino, Yiddish, Maghrebi, Juhuri,

Judeo-Aramaic, Bukharan, Judeo-Iraqi, and other languages in theatre and other forms of cultural expression trigger complex historiographic reflections, simultaneously articulating considerations about cultural identity. Postvernacular cultural practices, in which members of a community might have inherited a specific linguistic variety from preceding generations without actually using it in everyday life, allow members of specific communities to perform complex cultural identities and to reflect upon their diasporic roots. Language thus becomes a carrier of closely interwoven aspects of remembrance and identity both allowing for nostalgia (through the evocation of auditive soundscapes reminiscent of a shared past) and resistance (through the refusal of an all too monolithic, essentialist conception of Israeli identity). Finally, Aikaterini-Maria Lakka closely analyses carnival rituals and theatrical performances in Kozani, a city in Northern Greece. She describes how these rituals and performances foster identity through language and simultaneously question national identity and politics. Here, hyperlocal language performances allow for the construction of a shared historical and cultural memory, while at the same time carnivalising identity constructions.

Language is a tool of empowerment but also of domination and thus a source of tension. It can both reinforce hegemonic identities as well as subvert these very same constructions. The second part of the Essays Section explores specific cases in which language in theatre practices both exploits and questions dominant representational regimes in a given context. Kati Röttger describes how the theatre language of the Colombian collective Mapa Teatro uses complex aesthetics based on the idea of 'mapping' reality as a tool to question the contingent status of both history and the present state of affairs. Through the dramaturgy of 'pasticcio', Mapa Teatro criticises and deconstructs colonial mimesis: their performances denaturalise Western historiographic conceptions of time and modernity and thus articulate a fundamental critique of dominant systems of historical and mythological representation.

Tracing back the work of Mapa Teatro to what Röttger calls the ‘Colombian dramaturgy of decolonisation’, she analyses the collective dramaturgy of three performances, showing how this dramaturgy allows for the creation of new theatrical languages of decoloniality. Exploring the interplay between language and queer performance, Alejandro Postigo takes a closer look at the phenomenon of *Copla*, a Spanish musical theatre genre developed by progressive artists in the early twentieth century, domesticated and then censored by Franco’s regime and subsequently rejuvenated by LGBTQ+ collectives after 1975. Taking his own artistic explorations of *Copla* as his starting point, Postigo discusses how this specific cultural practice grew into a subversive folklore, bringing together an international audience of diverse cultural backgrounds and promoting multilingualism as a space of encounter. More specifically, he shows how his own show *The Copla Cabaret*, a performance lecture directly based on the historical *Copla* traditions, allows for reflection upon the experience of migrant and queer minorities. Finally, Berenika Szymanski-Düll takes us back to the second half of the nineteenth century. During this period of rapidly increasing modernisation, actors started to travel the world, eagerly living experiences of cultural and linguistic encounter and displacement, most notably in the USA (one could think of the American tours of Rachel, Ristori, and Bernhardt). This new kind of professional tourism, Szymanski-Düll argues, transformed theatre into a transnational business, even though the attitude towards language was all but unambiguous. The process of translocation of languages raised opportunities both of conflict and encounter, oscillating between the desire for national unity on the one hand and the acceptance of multi-layered identity constructions on the other hand.

Previous discussions on the complex connections between language and performance focused predominantly on the medium specificity of performance with regard to (natural) language, in effect leaving aside the performativity of various kinds of (not always natural or articulate)

languages within and about performance. This has become increasingly important after historical and current performances started to be seen in larger socio-political and cultural contexts. One question remains pertinent to all performance forms, be it theatre (re)enactment, dance, or installation art: whose language is spoken as a part of concrete practices in performance, and how is it analysed and commented upon within the discursive sphere of academia and the mass media? The third part of the Essays Section intends to shed new light on this issue, starting with Klaas Tindemans’s article that returns to J. L. Austin’s speech act theory and its key notion of ‘(in)felicity conditions’ in order to compare law and performance as connected discursive practices but of fundamentally different consequences. The article focuses primarily on how formal requirements of legal procedures have to be rearranged on the stage to reach maximal artistic and political results. On the one hand, it looks at the Tricycle Theatre’s careful imitations of real hearings in which actors embodied lawyers and witnesses in terms of linguistic accent, body language, and attitude in a replicated courtroom configuration. On the other hand, it analyses Milo Rau’s activist IIPM public trials with real lawyers and experts as well as actual witnesses and defendants which created their own jurisdictional realities, in discourse and space. However, both cases demonstrate, as Tindemans argues, that by affirming itself as an ‘etiolation’ of real action, the theatre lays bare the fundamental inability of speech to discipline the body which the law obscures as its necessary strategy. In other words, regardless of its imitative or openly activist character, it is by not being felicitous in its performative acts that the theatre becomes political. Lindsey Drury situates the performativity of dance within and as language in a larger socio-political context of mass media while returning to the US at the turn of the century. She explores dance reception in print as a formative historical power through the study of large datasets of newspaper articles of that period. By employing Christian and colonial visions of the dance practices of Indigenous peoples as ‘pagan’, these newspaper discourses

shaped settler-colonist perspectives, and in effect became part of language-as-colonisation. Significantly, as the author underlines, the language of ‘pagan dance’ not only suppressed Indigenous dance forms but also provided cultural capital to early modern dancers. Its ‘double role’ has become evident only today, thanks to many postcolonial and Indigenous scholars. The third article of the subsection remains in the context of reception and its formative power. However, Mateusz Chaberski urges us to go beyond all language-based symbolic systems and seek affective ways of knowing in the face of the ongoing ecological crisis. As he insists, only affective approaches will allow us to better grasp the political and ethical dimensions of more-than-human agency, especially abiotic entities, such as radiation, rocks, fogs, and ice which do not conform to the biological carbon-based definition of life. Although Chaberski persuasively argues that performances of the arts have successively become an important epistemic tool for capturing dynamic environmental processes within the Anthropocene, he is mindful of the necessity we face to convey them through articulate language. To overcome this difficulty, he tries to foreground a situated experience of visiting the analysed installations, and to fuse language-based and affective ways of knowing. Therefore, Chaberski’s contribution shows how much the performativity of language depends on the context, be it on macro or micro level.

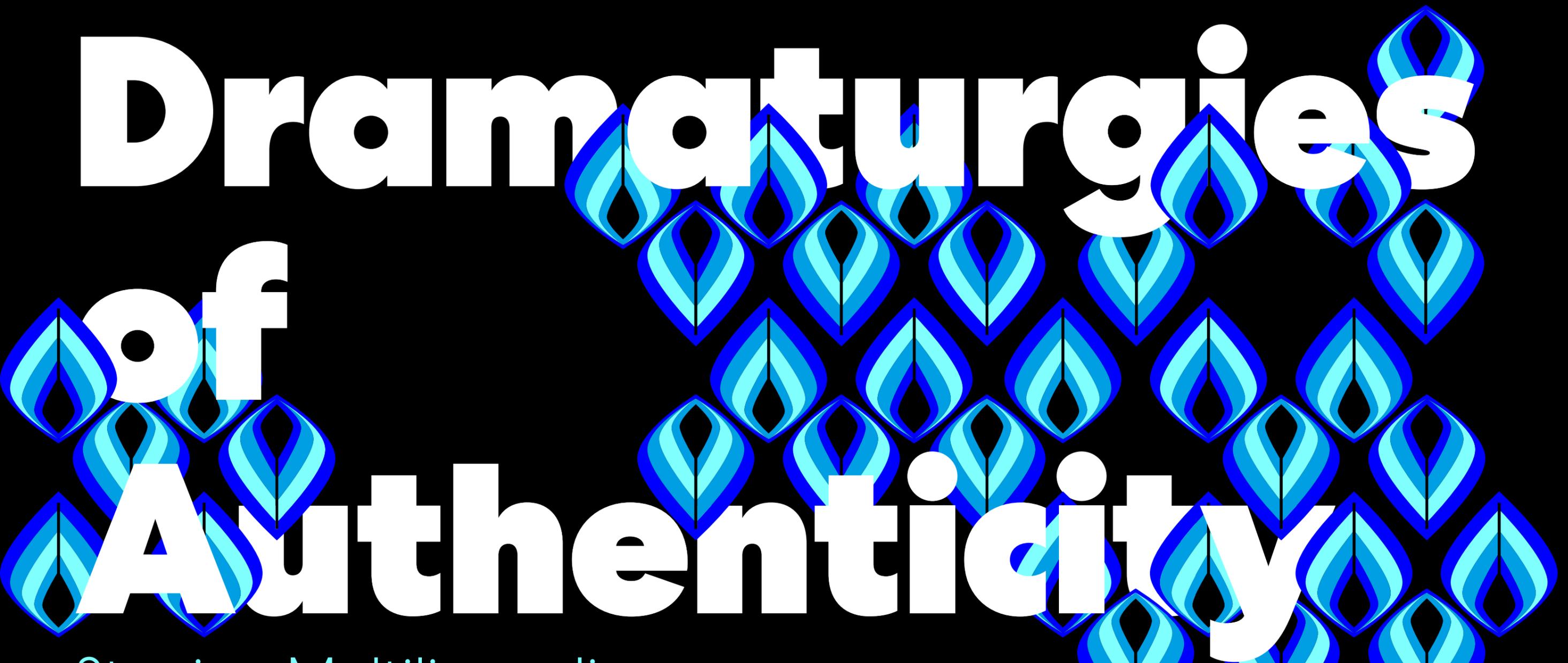
The fourth part of the Essays Section contains just two articles. Nevertheless, it opens a new and timely perspective on language as a material-semiotic tool in both performance and rehearsal processes. The two articles gathered here focus alike on contemporary dance and its embodiment practices, but their findings are important to other — historical and contemporary — forms and genres of performance. This is best exemplified by Rosa Lambert’s term ‘kinetic textuality’ by which she means a performative feature that portrays the interaction between text, movement, rhythm, body, and sound. In her analysis of Hannah De Meyer’s *new skin* she addresses the relationship between text

and body within the interaction between text and performance. At the same time, she explicitly states that any analysis of theatrical language has to take into account both the body that produces the text through voice and gesture and the bodies of the spectators perceiving the text on a cognitive as well as an affective level. Whereas Lambert intentionally goes beyond the limiting dichotomy between text and performance to demonstrate how tightly the material and the semiotic aspects of language are intertwined, David Rittershaus asks what role language plays in dance rehearsals and how choreographers, primarily William Forsythe as his main case study, use specific terms or verbal descriptions to communicate their artistic intentions or choreographic principles. To unpack the issue of language and discursive knowledge in embodied theatrical practices, Rittershaus returns to the psychoanalytic theory of the subject of the unconscious, particularly to Lacan’s notion of *lalangue*. In Rittershaus’s reading, the notion exceeds our common understanding of language as a system for relaying information through verbal or written communication, pointing instead to the affective and playful aspects of language which clearly refuses to subordinate moving bodies to representational notions of thought. Revisiting Lacan, the second article in this subsection convincingly demonstrates that the aim of such a ‘return’ is not to restore well-known and settled knowledge paradigms, verified methodological approaches, and analytical tools. Returning to them and re-reading them should allow us to see them anew in the context of both present and historical artistic practices that inform scholarly arguments. As a result, we can understand these past notions in previously unconsidered ways in order to make them applicable to current economic, social, and political changes. As editors, we believe that this could be said about all the articles gathered here. The overarching aim of this issue is to ‘return’ to the intricate connections between language and performance in order to focus on the yet unattended, omitted, or marginalised aspects of their entanglement in situated, local, and embodied practices which address spectators on both cognitive and affective levels. •

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Dramaturgies of Authenticity

A decorative graphic consisting of numerous stylized blue leaves of varying shades (light blue, medium blue, and dark blue) scattered across the background, partially overlapping the text.

Staging Multilingualism
in Contemporary Theatre Practices

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KEYWORDS

Wajdi Mouawad, dramaturgies of authenticity, multilingualism, migration

MOTS-CLÉS

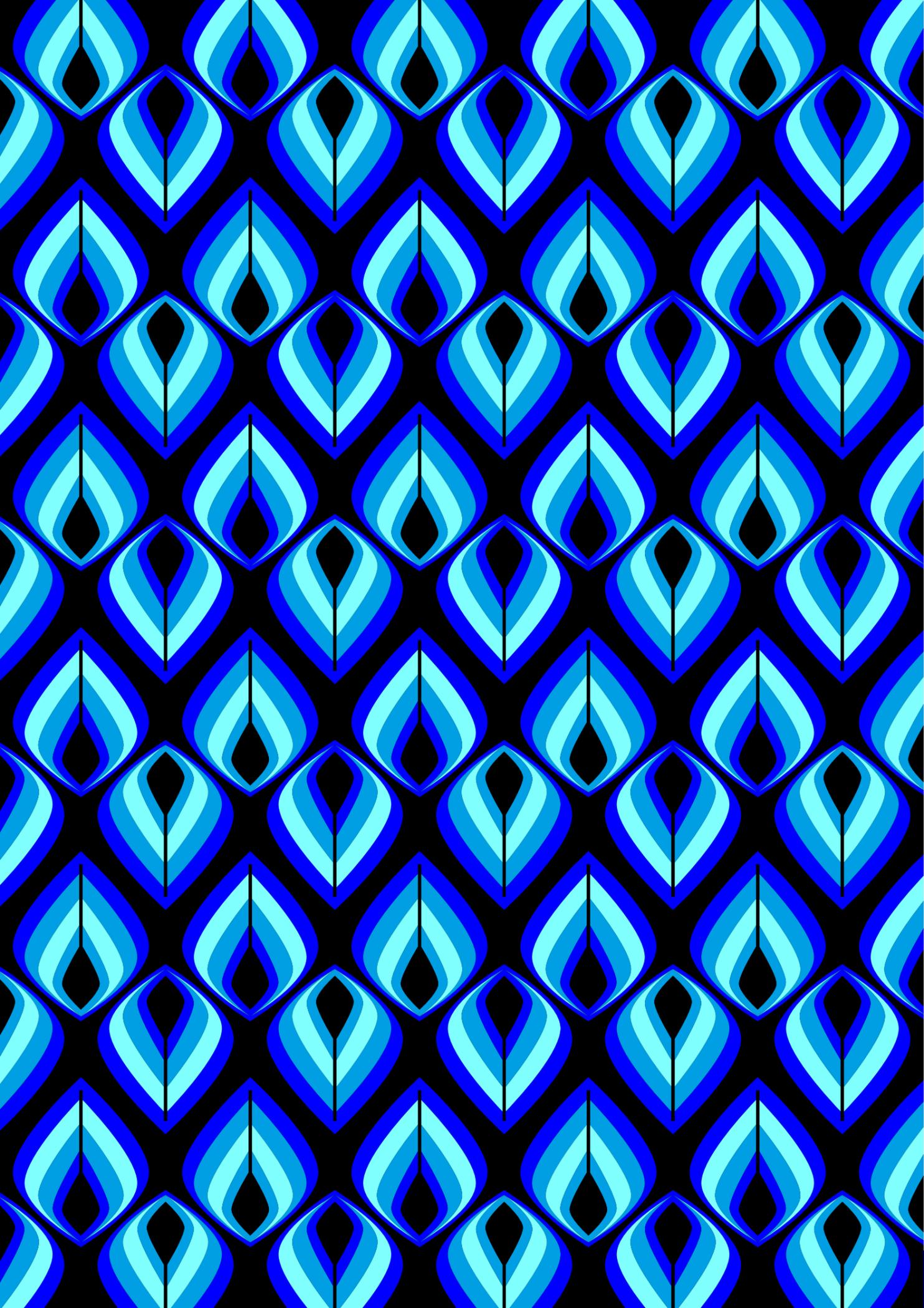
Wajdi Mouawad, dramaturgies de l'authenticité, multilinguisme, migration

Summary

Theatrical multilingualism has recently come to be a focus of many contemporary theatre practices and scholarly studies that recognise communication between those on stage and those in the audience as being tightly linked to realities of forced migration and rising nationalism. Building on the potential ethical functions of theatre, multilingual performances often pursue theatrical verisimilitude and thus rely on what I call *dramaturgies of authenticity*. This is when the characters of migration speak in the language of the actors who enact them. Wajdi Mouawad's play *Tous des oiseaux* (2017) presents a compelling example of this practice. Written originally in French, the play has been translated into four languages: English, Hebrew, German, and Arabic. Enacted by a team of international performers, this play uses multilingualism as an iconic sign of the characters' experiences.

Résumé

Le multilinguisme théâtral est devenu un aspect sur lequel de nombreuses pratiques et études théâtrales se sont focalisées à travers un acte de langage ou un acte de parole qui met en scène et étudie les migrations mondiales. S'appuyant sur les fonctions éthiques du théâtre, les représentations multilingues poursuivent souvent une vraisemblance théâtrale et s'appuient donc sur ce que j'appelle une *dramaturgie de l'authenticité*, lorsque les personnages de la migration parlent dans la langue des acteurs qui les interprètent. La pièce *Tous des oiseaux* (2017) de Wajdi Mouawad est un exemple convaincant de cette pratique. Écrite en français, la pièce a été traduite en quatre langues : l'anglais, l'hébreu, l'allemand et l'arabe. Jouée par une équipe d'interprètes internationaux, elle utilise le multilinguisme comme un signe iconique des expériences des personnages.



Theatrical multilingualism has recently come to be a focus of many contemporary theatre practices and scholarly studies that examine economic, political, cultural, and linguistic realities of global migration. A type of artistic experiment and a form of activism, theatrical multilingualism helps artists investigate the potentials of everyday communication within the relational and liquid nature of transcultural encounters. Multilingual performances often pursue theatrical verisimilitude and as such they rely on what I call *dramaturgies of authenticity*. Such dramaturgies evoke the encounter between multilingual on- and off-stage actants of global movement. The characters they portray appear on stage in the complexity of their multiple linguistic identities, enacted by the actors who speak many languages and whose mother tongue might be identical to the mother tongue of their character. In this case, the notion of ‘dramaturgies of authenticity’ refers to the situation when an actor — a native speaker of German, for example — is cast to play a character whose native language is also German.

In this article, I will examine the foundational devices of such dramaturgies of authenticity and demonstrate how the divided self of a migratory subject, characterised by a separation between ‘I’ and ‘myself’, is linguistically constructed on stage. My focus of analysis is performance that creates its fictional worlds in a realistic mode of representation and in which communication between the characters is made exclusively through language. In such theatre, the non-verbal semiotics of a ‘performance text’ (De Marinis 2007: 232-233), including acting, costumes, or theatrical technology, is of secondary importance. Multilingual dialogue, I argue, emerges as factual and authentic in relation to the truth of the theatrical narrative it produces and to the truth of its own representation, similarly to how documents help mobilise ‘the discourse of factuality’ in documentary theater and verify its ‘truth claim’ (Schulze 2017: 203). In a multilingual theatre, each separate verbal language creates the materiality of the linguistic sign. Like with an acting sign, in which materiality takes over its semioticity — precisely because acting is deeply rooted within the physicality or corporeality of the performer’s body (Fischer-Lichte 2008: 75-138) — in a linguistic sign within a multilingual dialogue its materiality takes over its semioticity. This sign is rooted in the linguistic competence of each performer, who speaks one or several languages of this multilingual dialogue as a native speaker. In this context, multilingual dialogue appears factual and it is able to ‘authentica[t]e its own narrative’ structures and dimensions (Schulze 2017: 203).

Wajdi Mouawad’s play *Tous des oiseaux* (2017) presents a compelling example of dramaturgies of authenticity and therefore serves as my central case study. Written originally in French, the play was then translated into four languages — English, Hebrew, German, and Arabic — and was subsequently enacted by a team of international performers who spoke in their native languages on stage. In many cases, the native language(s) of each actor were also identical to the mother tongue(s) of

the characters that they played. In this way the multilingualism of *Tous des oiseaux* served as an iconic sign to the multiple linguistic and cultural identities of each of its characters. The young protagonist Eitan spoke English to his lover Wahida, German to his mother, and Hebrew to his father David; whereas Wahida spoke English to Eitan but Arabic to the character of Leo Africanus (Hassan El Wazzan). Speaking in their mother tongue(s) functioned as an emotional connector between these characters, whilst the situations of multilingual code-switching also often created comic effect. For the performers, this practice of multilingual communication provided a chance to stay true to their personal — off-stage — linguistic identities or truths. For audiences, the multilingual dialogue of *Tous des oiseaux* invited spectators to relate to the words spoken on stage in what Daniel Schulze calls a ‘default mode of “factuality”’ (2017: 203). Such dialogue reflected the cultural, linguistic, and economic environments of today’s multicultural urbanites. It presented spectators with the off-stage realities of their own everyday communication and prompted them to employ what linguist Suresh Canagarajah calls ‘compensatory strategies of comprehension’ (2013: 173). To follow a non-translated multilingual dialogue, spectators were to pay more attention to the physical work of the actor and the materiality of the stage signs, as well as the rhythms, the atmospheres, and the energy flows engendered by the performance.

Neither the published French text of *Tous des oiseaux* nor its English translation contains proper traces of the inter-linguistic switches that took place in performance. For this reason, my analysis of the play’s theatrical multilingualism is based on the French and Canadian productions that I saw live and the detailed notes that I took while sitting in the audience.

Spoken in four languages, the original production of *Tous des oiseaux* directed by Wajdi Mouawad for *Théâtre national de la Colline* in Paris¹ was aimed at its predominantly French-speaking spectators and used

French surtitles to help them follow the action. The 2019 version of the play, translated into English by Linda Gaboriau as *Birds of a Kind*, was directed by Antoni Cimolino for the Stratford Theatre Festival in Canada.² It was addressed predominately to the English-speaking audiences and used English surtitles.³ In both cases, I argue, multilingual dialogue served a symbolic function of truth and authenticity on stage. This dialogue was to reflect a complex linguistic project of challenging the homogenising power of a mother tongue in a world marked by multiple intercultural encounters and displacement. To contextualise my claims, I will first briefly look into the issues of authenticity and multilingualism in performance.

← 1. Produced by Théâtre national de la Colline, Paris (17 November 2017), *Tous des oiseaux* was written and directed by Wajdi Mouawad, with Jalal Altawil as Wazzan, Jérémie Galiana as Eitan, Leora Rivlin as Leah, Judith Rosmair as Norah, Rafael Tabor as Etgar, Raphael Weinstock as David, Souheila Yacoub as Wahida, and Victor de Oliveira and Darya Sheizaf as Eden. Dramaturgy was by Charlotte Farcet. François Ismert was the literary consultant and Natalie Zemon Davis was the historical consultant. It was translated into German by Uli Menke, English by Linda Gaboriau, Arabic by Jalal Altawil, and Hebrew by Eli Bijaoui, with French surtitles composed by Audrey Mikondo and Uli Menke.

2. *Tous des oiseaux*, translated into English as *Birds of a Kind* by Linda Gaboriau, ran between 30 July to 13 October 2019 at the Stratford Theater Festival, Ontario, Canada. This production was directed by Antoni Cimolino, with Jakob Ehman as Eitan, Deb Filler as Leah, Alon Nashman as David, Harry Nelken as Etgar, Sarah Orenstein as Norah, Baraka Rahmani as Wahida and Hannah Miller as Eden. Artistic credits include Designer Francesca Callow, Lighting Designer Michael Walton, Projection Designer Jamie Nesbitt, Composer Levon Ichkhanian, Sound Designer Adam Harendorf, Dramaturge Bob White and Intimacy Coach Anita Nittoly. Linda Gaboriau received the 2019 Governor General's Award in literary translation for her translation of *Tous des oiseaux*. It was Gaboriau's second Governor General's Award in collaboration with Mouawad, the first one having been awarded for her work on his play *Forests*.

3. In this article, I do not focus on the correlation between the spoken multilingual dialogue and the surtitles. I treat theatrical surtitles as a separate type of meta-text to be studied elsewhere.

Theatre in a Culture of Authenticity

The term 'authenticity' refers to notions of the 'original' and the 'true'. It speaks to the candour and faithfulness of our intentions and actions in relation to our own self and often bears metaphysical, social, and political connotations. According to philosopher Charles Taylor, we live today in a culture of authenticity and so a more nuanced definition of the term is in order. A culture of authenticity, Taylor suggests, is 'the understanding of life which emerges with the Romantic expressivism of the late-eighteenth century, that each one of us has his/her own way of realizing our humanity' (2007: 475). In this respect, it becomes important for each individual to 'find and live out one's own [humanity]', against any other type of human behaviour 'imposed on us from outside, by society, or the previous generation, or religious or political authority' (*ibid.*).

In the history of Western philosophical thought, this view of authenticity goes back to the teachings of Jean-Jacques Rousseau. In the book *Confessions* (1770), Rousseau put forward an idea of authenticity related to the 'inwardness, self-reflection and introspection' of an individual. Rousseau understood the self as 'the space of interiority' that functions as 'a guiding authority' to one's actions and choices (Varga and Guignon 2020: para. 12). The space of interiority or the space of self is something unique to each individual and it is associated with a particular 'set of virtues'. This space, however, can be compromised under the pressure of society and circumstances imposed from outside. It also serves as a social contract when we need to perform our own selves for others. Starting from the age of Romanticism, authenticity has been recognised as the actions and feelings of an individual aiming to '[be] true to oneself for one's own benefit', whereas 'earlier, the moral advice

to be authentic recommended that one should be true to oneself *in order thereby* to be true to others' (*ibid.*: para. 7). In the nineteenth century, this formula of authenticity gained a new meaning wherein 'being true to oneself is seen as a *means* to the end of successful social relations' (*ibid.*). Accordingly, questions of personal behaviour and morals arose and they prepared the idea of the ethic of authenticity or a new moral code of behaviour (Taylor 2007: 475). This new moral code advocated the self-governing abilities of an individual — that is one's aptitude to decide for oneself politically, culturally, and otherwise.

Today, in the society of consumers and individualists, 'besides leading an autonomous life, guided by one's own, non-constrained reasons and motives, authenticity requires that these motives and reasons should be expressive of one's self-identity' (Varga and Guignon 2020: para. 9). Searching for the authentic self makes a special appearance first during the historical avant-garde of the early twentieth century and then in the 1960s within the movements for social liberalisation, civil rights, and quests for equality and truth (Taylor 2007: 476-78). Today this search for authenticity is connected not only to 'the affirmation of sensuality, as simply egoism and the pursuit of pleasure' or 'consumer choice' but also to the 'simultaneous mutual presence' and 'mutual display' of multiple selves, which appear in a collective singular space of a multifaceted cultural habitat both as the producers of action and as its witnesses (*ibid.*: 481).

Within a society made of individuals who claim and share multiple belongings and who speak many languages individually and as a group, multilingualism serves as a signifier of this new authenticity. Today's theatre seeks to both reproduce and challenge this phenomenon, while it also pursues the authenticity of its own representation. As Daniel Schulze observes, today's theatre often aims to express 'a structure of feeling which has superseded Postmodernism with its irony, detachment and pastiche. It instead reconstructs concepts of telos, engagement and

closure' (2017: 2). What I call dramaturgies of authenticity refers to this set of strategies. Specifically, in relation to multilingualism on stage, dramaturgies of authenticity describe the linguistic identity of the dramatic actants. It also implies and even pre-structures the iconic correlation between the languages spoken by these actants and the languages of the actors who enact them. To this extent, theatrical multilingualism and its dramaturgies also reflect the linguistic identity of its makers. That is to say that dramaturgies of authenticity suggest how a multilingual performance may be constructed in such a way as to reveal and highlight the linguistic idiosyncrasy of a multilingual group of performers. In this scenario of multilingualism, the linguistic identity of the performer acquires the same degree of iconicity or 'truth' as this performer's physical or ethnic identity. In this scheme, the voices of the performers serve as the containers, the keepers, and the conveyers of their personal experiences, as well as the guarantors of the so-called historical truth.

On the other side of this spectrum there are postdramatic theatre experiments in which authenticity of representation is not necessarily based on the truth of the past experiences of the performers but on their physical presence within the singularity of the shared temporal and spatial setting of the stage. Hans-Thies Lehmann attributes similar processes to the work of language on stage when he claims that in post-dramatic theatre, dialogue is approximated to an object: '*The principle of exposition* applied to body, gesture and voice also seizes the language material and attacks language's function of representation' (2006: 146). Lehmann traces the history of the 'exposed language' to Gertrude Stein's plays, in which language

loses its immanent teleological temporality and orientation towards meaning and becomes like an *exhibited object*. Stein achieves this through techniques of repeating variations, through the uncoupling of immediately obvious semantic connections, and

through the privileging of formal arrangements according to syntactic or musical principles (similarities in sound, alliterations, or rhythmic analogies) (*ibid.*: 147).

Similarly, in multilingual productions the use of different languages contributes to several layers of signification: on the one hand, a multilingual dialogue fulfills its meaning-forming functions and is therefore locutionary, to use J.L. Austin's terminology (1975); on the other hand, it acts 'like an *exhibited object*' and hence it is performative or illocutionary.

Theatrical Multilingualism

Marvin Carlson traces the history of theatrical multilingualism — or what he calls the 'macaronic stage' (2006: 20-60) — to Renaissance Europe, when passages in Latin and vernacular were spoken on stage without any translation. This type of multilingualism did not present a problem of comprehensibility because before the appearance of nation-states 'audiences were themselves macaronic' (*ibid.*: 41). The historical avant-garde of the twentieth century and its intercultural theatre practices presented new attempts at theatrical multilingualism, often marked by what Emma Cox describes as 'mismatches of intention' and 'the risk of decontextualization, appropriation and commodification' (2014: 12). Today's theatrical multilingualism is mostly practiced in the context of international theatre festivals, co-productions, and touring shows that echo and appeal to the strategies of communication in multicultural urban centres, where individuals tend to switch freely from one language to another. It is slowly becoming a prominent element of productions created by and featuring migrant artists or those that address migration as a theme. The Maxim Gorki Theater in Berlin serves as one of the primary examples of this tendency.⁴

Prompted by questions concerning truth and authenticity, multilingualism in theatre tends to merge and absorb its many languages and so it bears resemblance to 'theatrical syncretism' (Balme 1999: 1-2). To better reflect the 'global pathways' of the post-nation (Bhabha 2014: 259-275), theatrical multilingualism conjures a performative version of utopian siblinghood made of diverse but equal subjects. As such, it seems to inquire 'whether our obsessive interest in language and its identitarian qualities should necessarily be read as a reification of alterity' that leads to 'a rigid association between state, language, identity and the apportioning of rights' (Polezzi 2012: 347). Methodologically, theatrical multilingualism relies upon syncretic tactics of intercultural performance; politically, it provokes and intervenes; artistically, it borrows and builds upon the communication strategies of vernacular multilingualism. As a system of multiple code-switching and code-mixing, it relies on our ability to construct meaning by engaging with para-linguistic signs vital to any speech-making such as changes in rhythm and intonation, use of pauses and tones, speed of delivery, gestures, body postures, and facial expressions.

The accessibility of a multilingual dialogue marks the scale of openness and comprehensibility which theatrical multilingualism offers. To monolingual citizens, a multilingual production might remain mostly closed, as Marvin Carlson proposes (2006: 180-215), but if its spectators are multilingual cosmopolitans themselves, it can be partially open. Defamiliarisation of audience perception is one of the artistic devices of such performance. The act of estrangement puts a monolingual audience member 'into a critical stance or puzzlement' (Phipps 2019: 13). What moments of this multilingual dialogue will be accessible and

← 4. The Maxim Gorki Theater in Berlin was featured in the Artist in Focus Section of this journal's previous issue. See *European Journal of Theatre and Performance*, Issue 2, 2020, pp. 464-589.

to who varies from one encounter to the next. This ambiguity, I believe, represents the most challenging and exciting work of theatrical multilingualism. I will examine some of gains and failures of this ambiguity in my discussion of Wajdi Mouawad's 2017 *Tous des oiseaux* and its 2019 version *Birds of a Kind*.

Dramaturgies of Authenticity: The Case of Making *Tous des oiseaux*

Linda Gaboriau, the English language translator of Mouawad's plays, has said that writers 'are the witnesses of our time. They're people who really take the time to look more deeply into what's going on in human nature or in the political [and] social world around us' (Gaboriau in Giammaria 2019: par. 6). Mouawad is one such writer. A Christian Maronite, Mouawad was born in Lebanon in 1968. He experienced the plight of war and exile at a very early age when his family fled to France in 1978 and then, after they were refused the necessary papers, to Montréal in 1983. Mouawad translates these personal experiences into his theatre and literary works. His tetralogy — *Le sang des promesses – Littoral* (1997), *Incendies* (2003), *Forêts* (2006), and *Ciels* (2009) — stages the world's recent history with its wars, mass migration, and hatred of the other. Mouawad makes the protagonists of each play responsible for setting this history right, often against their will or knowledge. In *Tous des oiseaux*, the convoluted history of one family emerges as a troublesome legacy, which the younger generation is called to commemorate. Unpacking the layers of secrets that make up the story of his family allows Eitan, the central character, to challenge the idea of personal and national identity as something fixed and singular. In this way, as

one critic notes, the play 'takes us to the heart of the political, existential, and religious debates that upset today's citizens' (Poncet 2017, para. 8; my translation).

As often is the case in his theatre, language is the focus of Mouawad's artistic and political investigation. The aesthetic and ethical potential of on-stage multilingualism drives Mouawad's message forward. *Tous des oiseaux* evokes today's vernacular, when different members of a nuclear family can share several languages and can switch from one linguistic idiom to the other. This multilingualism serves as a mechanism of the play's factuality: it is an authenticator of each character's linguistic and cultural identity, with the result that it becomes a special dramaturgical tool of theatrical verisimilitude (Mouawad 2017b: 1:25 min).

Mouawad wrote the original text of *Tous des oiseaux* in French, because this way he could better articulate 'the story he wanted to tell' (Gaboriau in Giammaria 2019: para. 8). For the purposes of linguistic authenticity on stage — that is, to allow his characters speak in the languages true to their dramatic universe and background — he invited four translators fluent in French, English, Hebrew, German, and Arabic to work on the script for the performance. Known for his habits to research and write his texts together with his actors as well as designers and to pursue what he calls a 'polyphonic writing' (Mouawad in Farcet 2017: 5; my translation), this time Mouawad had to finish the core of the dialogue before the translators and the actors joined him in the rehearsal hall. This condition created new circumstances for Mouawad's writing. It forced him to become more self-aware as a writer and to make the text more definitive and less lyrical both on page and on stage (*ibid.*). Whilst Mouawad 'wrote and rewrote the play, scene by scene, constantly tweaking language and dialogue based on the actors' input as they rehearsed' (Gaboriau in Simmons 2019: para. 5), the team of translators worked on bringing the emerging linguistic authenticity forward:

[Each morning he] would come in with a new scene in French, and [Linda Gaboriau] would translate it into English even if it was going to be performed in another language because English was the lingua franca (common language) of this motley crew (of actors) who had come from Tel Aviv, Vienna, Berlin. So we often had certain conversations in English because several of the actors did speak English as a second language, but not French. [...] And then Wajdi would decide which scenes would be in German, or Hebrew, or Arabic, and then those translators would translate them (*ibid.*: para. 6-7).

This new multilingual dialogue was chosen to speak to the truth of the fictional situation of the multilingual family on stage and to the authenticity of the performers' linguistic background, even though Mouawad had to accept the fact that his original French dialogue would not be spoken on stage, a feature to which I will return later.

The Legend of the Amphibian Bird

Set between New York and Jerusalem, *Tous des oiseaux* unfolds across three generations of one Jewish family whose history is tightly linked to the multiple Israel-Palestine conflicts. The Canadian theater critic Barbara Gabriel asks 'how does one 'translate' one person's story into another's, one people's history into that of their enemy?' (2019: para. 6). Mouawad places domestic conflict within a framework of historical trauma, central to 'his reading of the Israeli-Palestinean *agon*' (*ibid.*). To elevate the story of *Tous des oiseaux* to mythological dimensions, Mouawad uses the life narrative and the philosophy of Hassan Ibn Muhamed el Wazzân, the protagonist of Natalie Zemon Davis' book *Trickster Travels: The Search for Leo Africanus* (2007).

Known in the West as Leo Africanus, el Wazzân was a Berber diplomat from sixteenth-century Granada. Enslaved by Spanish corsairs, he ended up at the court of Pope Leo X. Leo Africanus spoke many languages and to save his life he agreed to convert to Christianity. In Italy, he studied Latin and Italian, taught Arabic, and wrote a book about Africa. For Mouawad, this enigmatic and symbolic character of the past consolidates many questions that have been haunting him for years, including 'How do you become your own enemy? or, how does one become an "amphibian bird"?' (Duplan et al. 2017: 6).

The legend of an amphibian bird — as narrated by Leo Africanus on stage — is the principal metaphor of Mouawad's piece. It speaks of the inner and outer metamorphosis one must undergo to understand oneself and the other. The bird, as Leo's tale goes, was so drawn to the life of the fish that despite his family's warning it plunged into the water to join them. When the bird fell, it grew gills and began to breathe, and so it turned into a fish:

And breathing, flying-swimming, he moves among the fish with scales of jade, gold and pink, as fascinated with him as he is with them, and the bird greets them, saying "Here I am! It's me! I am the amphibian bird arriving in your midst. I am one of you. I am one of you!" (Mouawad 2018: 109).

To Mouawad, this tale of transformation speaks to the truth of a migrant's journey and is called upon to teach his audiences something profound 'of our time, of our world and our relationship to the Other, to the enemy, so to speak' (Mouawad 2017a: 5). Like Leo Africanus, Mouawad tends to think of himself as an eternal traveller, a penguin 'for whom there is no centre, only the voice that becomes home' (Mouawad in Farcet 2017, 9; my translation). Identity, he continues, 'is a movement, there is no fixed centre, only relativity. For a traveller,

when they are asked “where are you from?”, it is possible to answer “I am from here or there”, but it is impossible to say “my identity is my origin” without denying the road they have travelled upon’ (*ibid.*).

With travelling, the need for survival and adaptation comes. The story of Leo Africanus refers to one possible strategy of such adaptation or *taqīyah* (Duplan et al. 2017: 6), which in Islam describes ‘the practice of concealing one’s belief and foregoing ordinary religious duties when under threat of death or injury’ (Stefon 2020: para. 1). Even if there is no definitive proof that the historical Al-Wazzân used this tactic of survival in his exilic journey (Duplan et al. 2017: 6), the play makes a suggestion that he could have resorted to it. *Tous des oiseaux* does not tell us much about what really happened to Al-Wazzân at the Pope’s court, but it makes use of the symbolism of his performative presence on stage. Most of the time Leo Africanus remains silent, but when he does decide to communicate he speaks in Arabic and uses the language of metaphors. Through his silent presence, Leo Africanus connects the characters’ past and present. His unspoken story of choices and survival underlines every internal conflict that each of the play’s characters faces. In *Tous des oiseaux*, Leo Africanus’ story of exilic metamorphosis and simulacrum is the subject of Wahida’s doctoral dissertation. This research and the presence of Leo Africanus on stage helps Wahida connect back to her own roots and better understand the fragments of her shattered identity. A speaker of many tongues, Leo is also summoned at the most crucial moment in the play: he is called to speak to David, the father of protagonist Eitan, in David’s lost mother tongue and so help him peacefully transition from the world of the living to that of the dead.

It is not by chance, therefore, that the play is entitled *Tous des oiseaux* — as already in its title it refers to the multiple truths and journeys that each of its characters possesses. To Antoni Cimolino, who staged the play in Canada, the title suggests that ‘Wazzan is intrigued by the [amphibian]

bird’s ability to defy the conventional demands of identity. Birds are not bound by walls or borders. If you could ask a bird, “Where are you from?” it would likely answer, “From all over!” Birds’ migratory routes inform their sense of identity, but no single place defines them’ (Cimolino 2019: 10). Consequently, this idea of fluent or malleable identities that make up the subjectivity of migrants and that define their sense of multiple belongings becomes central to the play, whilst the multilingual dialogue testifies to the ambiguities and ruptures that these migrants face.

At the same time, in the Parisian staging of this play, the dialogue spoken in four languages but not French created a special effect of disappearance. Projected onto moving vertical panels, the French dialogue written by Mouawad turned into a technical element of the production, used to make the action accessible to La Colline’s audiences. For Mouawad himself, losing the auditory presence of French on his stage brought back the traumatic experiences of his childhood, when he was forgetting his mother tongue.⁵ Although losing one’s native language as a child might not always be as painful as we might imagine, understanding what this loss means can be distressing, especially if this understanding comes to this person in their adulthood. It can make one’s need to re-learn this language ‘a terrible paradox’:

No one can relearn one’s mother tongue. The verb ‘learn’ poorly connects to the concept of the mother tongue. A mother tongue cannot be studied. It is acquired. Relearn is a powerful disenchantment. It’s an assumption, a hypothesis. As adults, we feel the need to go back to this experience of losing one’s mother tongue, so to be able to observe it consciously, to understand and to appropriate it. Maybe in the disappearance of my writing in this show, there was

5. French is Mouawad’s acquired or second language, yet it has always been the leading device of his artistic expression both on page and on stage.

a desire to return to this experience. During the rehearsals, I wondered if it was a choice just for the show, or if it was the author's pride, my ego, that forced me to investigate these sensations. I did fear what might happen when the audience would no longer have access to my language! (Mouawad in Farcet 2017: 7; my translation)

This fear forced Mouawad to respect the language of each character. It marked the search for linguistic truth or linguistic authenticity in the play, in which one's identity and one's mother tongue are deeply interconnected.

Speaking in Mother Tongues

The opening image of *Tous des oiseaux* takes the audience into the heart of the play's conflict. The scene is a flashback that depicts the first encounter between the star-crossed lovers Eitan, a German scientist of Jewish background, and Wahida, an Arab-American historian. Their very first meeting takes place in a university library somewhere in New York. The book *Ibn Khallikán's Biographical Dictionary*, serves as a dramaturgical device of chance: it is a magic object that brings the lovers together. Before Eitan appears on stage for the first time, we see Leo Africanus presenting Wahida with this book. This gesture is also symbolic: it suggests a tight connection not only between this historical figure and the play's characters, but also between narratives of the past and the stories of the present.

When Eitan joins Wahida on stage, he recognises the book as a token. A 'skeptical type' who does not believe 'in magic or the mysterious meaning of life' (Mouawad 2018: 5), Eitan falls in love with Wahida and with the idea that chance brought them together. The book, which

Eitan would find in this library time and again, lands in Wahida's hands and thus serves as a connecting tissue between the play's characters and their multilayered histories. As often in Mouawad's theatre, it is a written word — a letter, an engraving on a tombstone, or a book — that moves the action forward and serves as a vessel of the play's truth.

The action reaches the next stage of dramatic tension when Eitan decides to introduce Wahida to his family. His father David, a Jew of traditional beliefs, condemns their love because of the religious and cultural differences between the young people. To David, Eitan's duty in life lays with the guilt of the survivor that many Jewish people share. This guilt imposes an obligation: Eitan must marry a Jewish woman to ensure a continuation of his tribe and his family. To David, Eitan's falling in love with someone of a non-Jewish origin and specifically an Arab is an act of betrayal (Mouawad 2018: 32), if not 'patricide' (*ibid.*: 38). To the scientist Eitan, who believes in the total power of forty-six chromosomes, 'suffering cannot be transmitted from one generation to another!' (*ibid.*: 35-36) 'Let me say this in Hebrew!', Eitan insists, '*the experiences of a human being during his lifetime do not affect his chromosomes, no matter how brutal those experiences are!*' (*ibid.*: 36).

To prove his truth and to uncover a family secret, which Eitan believes defines his identity and his relationships with his father, Eitan decides to seek the answers in Jerusalem. Together with Wahida, Eitan travels to Israel to meet his grandmother Leah, yet a terrorist attack on the Allenby Bridge that connects the Palestinians of the West Bank and Jordan interrupts this trip.⁶ Eitan ends up in an Israeli hospital in a coma while Wahida is left to bring his estranged family together. In the second part of the play, the truth — different to each character — resurfaces. This causes repercussions impossible for any of them to reconcile.

⁶ For more on the historical background of the play, see Diaz 2018: 139-155.



Tous des oiseaux written and directed by Wajdi Mouawad. La Colline – théâtre national November 17 – December 17, 2017

Jalal Altawil as Wazzan, Souheila Yacoub as Wahida

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Tous des oiseaux written and directed by Wajdi Mouawad. La Colline – théâtre national November 17 – December 17, 2017

Jérémie Galiana as Eitan, Souheila Yacoub as Wahida

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Tous des oiseaux written and directed by Wajdi Mouawad. La Colline – théâtre national November 17 – December 17, 2017

Jérémie Galiana as Eitan, Souheila Yacoub as Wahida

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In Mouawad's version of *Romeo and Juliet*, Eitan stands for everything male and rational, someone 'who believes everything is an object and who doesn't waste time indulging in idle daydreaming' (Mouawad 2018: 5). Wahida, on the other hand, represents everything irrational and sensual, so her presence confuses and angers people. The ways these two characters connect to language — rationally or sensually — illustrates their differences and serves for Mouawad as the major tactic of dramaturgical authenticity. To better express themselves, the characters must communicate beyond their mother tongues; they must speak in different languages.

Eitan is both the benefactor and the victim of this multilingualism, as his ability to speak several languages reflects the consequences of war and exile. When Eitan begins to question his origins, 'a historical chasm opens, sorrows rise, and the necessity of the truth becomes as hot as a hot iron. It's a double-edged knife: this multiplicity of languages is a wealth for Eitan, but very soon, the reasons for this multiplicity will make his misfortune' (Mouawad in Farcet 2017: 8; my translation). When Eitan needs to make sure his father follows his argument, he switches to Hebrew, his father's native language. However, when the doctor tells Eitan's family that they should speak to Eitan in his mother tongue, Eitan's mother Norah volunteers German as it is her native language. At the same time, the language of Eitan's emotional attachments is English, because he uses English to communicate with Wahida.

With Wahida's bilingualism (she speaks Arabic and English), Mouawad draws a different picture of linguistic authenticity. If Eitan's multilingualism appears as something unrehearsed and unprompted, a natural outcome of his multicultural upbringing, in Wahida's case her bilingualism needs to be re-discovered, accepted, and owned as her own. Eitan has spoken numerous languages since birth and so his multilingualism challenges the notion of mother tongue as something deeply

visceral, emotionally binding, and subconscious. Witnessing the attack on the Allenby Bridge and finding herself on the Palestinian side connects Wahida back to her roots and native language:

I went to the other side of the wall', Wahida says, 'I wondered in the dust of Palestine and I felt I have come home. I slept in the homes of people I didn't know and when they asked me my father's name, I burst into tears. Never since his death had I heard my name pronounced so well (Mouawad 2018: 86).

Here not only Wahida re-discovers her bilingualism, she realises that even in the case of shifting identities, the psycho-physicality of her mother tongue serves as the basis to her own embodied identity. When Wahida hears 'the song of her name' spoken in the language of her father and when she realises that 'all of Ramallah smells like [her] mother' (*ibid.*: 88), Wahida decides to stay in Palestine. This sensorial return to the roots, the sounds, the smells, and the dust of a land that she never knew helps Wahida face who she is and fight the imposed truth of immigration, regardless of what she may have learned about herself in the United States. All her childhood, Wahida explains, she was trained to hide her identity. Raised in an Anglophone milieu, Wahida is familiar with her native language only through her parents. However, she never claimed the English language or U.S. culture as her own: 'I am an Arab and no one taught me how to be one. On the contrary, I was taught to find it disgusting and I vomited it out of me' (*ibid.*: 87). As an academic, she dedicated her life to prove 'how dangerous it is to let the principle of identity dictate your life, how stupid it is to cling to your lost identity' (*ibid.*: 89). Hearing and speaking her mother tongue in Palestine, Wahida rejects all these philosophies: 'The reality is simple', she says, 'This is what I am [...] I belong to this, and if I want to escape it, I have to start by taking a look at myself' (*ibid.*: 89).

In Wahida's case, therefore, Mouawad follows the Freudian reading of mother tongue as something that, as Yasemin Yildiz explains, helps us 'fantasize a bodily as well as familial grounding in language', tightly linked to such important manifestations of familial intimacy as 'affect, gender, and kinship' (2012: 14). Wahida's monologue, in which she explains why she wants to stay in Palestine, reinforces the idea of a mother tongue as linked to the image of a maternal body. It also evokes Friedrich Kittler's account of how the emergence of the eighteenth-century nation state was tightly connected to the implicit sexuality of the mother's body.⁷ According to Kittler — as cited by Yildiz — the mouth of the mother who reads a book to her child links together the sound this mouth makes, the written letter associated with it, and the sense of belonging. This 'manufactured proximity between "mother" and "language" stages the fantasy behind the modern notion of the mother tongue—namely, that the mother tongue emanates from the mother's body' (Yildiz 2012: 12). This statement also implies that communicating in one's native language is one's special privilege if not pleasure. The word 'mother' in the expression 'mother tongue' 'stands in for the allegedly organic nature of this structure by supplying it with notions of maternal origin, affective and corporeal intimacy, and natural kinship' (*ibid.*: 10). The ideologists of the nation state used this argument to claim the mother tongue as a foundation for the nation's homogeneity, originality, and authenticity. Monolingualism invited individuals to imagine one's mother tongue as their only true language and 'through this possession to be organically linked to an exclusive, clearly demarcated ethnicity, culture, and nation' (*ibid.*: 2). Wahida's journey back to her mother tongue speaks to this theory of the maternal and the sensual. As she joins the Palestinians, Wahida comes to recognise her true self. By accepting — instead of rejecting, as she previously had done — her own linguistic and ethnic

identity as an Arab and as a woman, she declares her place in the world as a new cosmopolitan. In this way she also becomes a foil figure to Leo Africanus, a man of many languages and affiliations.

From Paris to Stratford: On the Concretization of a Multilingual Disorder

Contextualising the staging of the English version of *Tous des oiseaux*, translated as *Birds of a Kind*, for the predominantly Anglophone audiences of Ontario's Stratford Theatre Festival, the director of the production Antoni Cimolino said:

Wajdi [Mouawad] writes often in this play of an individual's mother tongue [...] Perhaps for all creatures this is the single strongest source of identity: the call of our mother. Respecting the vital importance of the mother tongue, this Stratford Festival production – like the original in Paris – is performed in multiple languages: German, Hebrew, Arabic and English. The play was developed with the contribution of artists from all over the world, especially Palestinians and Israelis. Its many languages, each unique, bring nuance and richness of texture to the piece. Yet – paradoxically, perhaps – this diversity also brings clarity. (Cimolino in *Stage Door News* 2019: para. 5)

Cimolino's directorial interpretation of Mouawad's play exemplifies an attempt at transcultural transposition.

To move this multilingual text into a new cultural setting, he uses what literary historian Felix Vodička calls 'concretization' — an act of cultural

⁷ Friedrich Kittler foregrounds this connection between the nation state and the figure of the mother in his 1990 book *Discourse networks 1800/1900*.



Birds of a Kind written by Wajdi Mouawad, translated by Linda Gaboriau, directed by Antoni Cimolino. Stratford Festival 2019

(L to R) Deb Filler as Leah, Baraka Rahmani as Wahida, Ron Kennell as Rabbi, Sarah Orenstein as Norah, Alon Nashman as David, Harry Nelken as Etgar, Jakob Ehman as Eitan

© David Hou. Image courtesy of Stratford Festival Archives

translation that takes place on the side of the receiver as it designates ‘the reflection of a work in the consciousness of those to whom it is an aesthetic object’ (Vodička 1975: 110). According to Vodička, a work of art — a piece of literature or a theatre performance — can be concretized in many ways: ‘not only can its schematic places be concretized, but also can the structure of the entire work if it is projected against the background of the structure of the immediate literary tradition. A work constantly changes under changing temporal, local, social and even individual conditions’ (*ibid.*: 110). The same mechanisms of concretization define the work of theatregoers in aesthetic reception, which takes place within two histories: ‘that of the work within its literary and social context, and that of a receiver in his own time, and within the system of ideological and aesthetic expectations’ (Pavis 1982: 72). Cimolino’s staging exemplifies these processes of concretization. To direct a ‘story of crossing cultural borders’, Cimolino chose *Birds of a Kind* for his 2019 season. This choice reflected the theme of the season — ‘Breaking Boundaries’ — and allowed Cimolino to ask such difficult questions as ‘how do we stay true to ourselves as we make new lives in a new society? [...] What is a life lived between two worlds? What is a migrant? A refugee? A mutant?’ (Cimolino 2019: 9).

As a cultural institution, Stratford Theatre Festival is marked by its contradictory role and history in developing English Canadian theatre. Vincent Massey, the first Canadian-born Governor General of the country, ‘believed that without art’, and very specifically without theatre, ‘there was no nation’ (Salter 2004: 149). He advocated creating a theatre festival in rural Ontario, which would serve as ‘a binding agent of nation building. Yet there was a fatal flaw at the center of this vision: the festival was in part based on the staging of Shakespeare, a foreign dramatist. He was the elusive origin, and no matter how original Stratford sought to be, it would be only an imitation’ (*ibid.*:150). Still today the paradox of the festival rests with the fact that it ‘cites and recites

the words of Shakespeare, yet its own identity is borrowed, inauthentic, and its place, both figuratively and literally, is displaced’ (*ibid.*: 150).

Recently, specifically with the appointment of Antoni Cimolino as its Artistic Director in 2013, Stratford Theatre Festival has begun questioning its place in the Canadian theatre landscape (Yeo 2019). To Cimolino, Stratford remains a home for the Canadian Shakespeare, but it is also ‘a meal of many different flavours’ (in Paton-Evans 2015: para. 30). Producing *Birds of a Kind* at Stratford was in line with the plan for diversification and authentication of difference at the festival. To a certain degree, it was an act of acknowledgement of the festival’s changing multicultural and multilingual audience, which rarely finds its representation on this stage. To achieve this objective, Cimolino invited Linda Gaboriau to transpose Mouawad’s original performance into the multilingual context of English Canada.

A longstanding collaborator of Mouawad and someone who spent six months in the rehearsal hall of Paris working on *Tous des oiseaux*, Gaboriau had a special perspective on Mouawad’s quest for linguistic truth on stage. In Cimolino’s words, Gaboriau ‘had the really challenging job of translating a poem, in French — that had influence from all sorts of other languages — into English, and keep its raw, awkward, metaphorical quality... and not try to iron it out and make it all sound normal’ (in Simmons 2019: para. 11). Preserving the characters’ linguistic identity has become ‘a key component in presenting the play to a Stratford audience in its full authenticity and with its intended impact’ (*ibid.*: para. 13). The selection and the distribution of languages took place during the rehearsal period and these decisions were ‘based upon the speaker, situation and dramatic intent’ (Cimolino 2019: 10):

We went through the script a couple of times [...] I contributed by having a few question marks. [...] Most of my questions [...] were



Birds of a Kind written by Wajdi Mouawad, translated by Linda Gaboriau, directed by Antoni Cimolino. Stratford Festival 2019
Jakob Ehman as Eitan and Baraka Rahmani as Wahida
© David Hou. Image courtesy of Stratford Festival Archives

about what was intended here and what's the back story on this. So many of my questions for Linda weren't about her actual translation, but just about the genesis of what was happening (Cimolino in Simmons 2019: para. 12).

This approach provoked many linguistic shifts and changes in the English script. The most significant change was a transposition of the improbable encounter between Eitan's father David and Leo Africanus from Hebrew and Arabic into Hebrew and English.

To better situate the analysis of this symbolic encounter between David and Leo Africanus, it is necessary to turn to the plot of *Tous des oiseaux* once again. When Eitan begins to question his origins, he discovers that David, his Jewish father, was born Palestinian. However, David does not know this truth and will discover it only at the very end of the play. This discovery will cause his deadly stroke. As the play unfolds, we learn together with David that he was the product of nurture not nature. Etgar, a soldier in the Israeli army during the 1967 Arab-Israeli War, found a baby boy in one of the destroyed Palestinian villages. He named and adopted him, and never looked for the boy's birth parents. However, when the family reconciles in Jerusalem, Leah, David's adoptive mother, insists that Etgar reveals the truth. Unable to accept his origins, David suffers a fatal stroke. To make peace with his past and to prepare to meet his eternity, David now must face his true self, and he must do it in the language of his biological mother. To mobilise this argument dramaturgically, Mouawad brings Leo Africanus into the action, who now recites the parable of the amphibian bird to David and teaches him the tale of a true self.

In the original Paris staging, Leo Africanus was played by Jalal Altawil, a Syrian actor and refugee. He recited the parable in Arabic while David responded to him in Hebrew, with the Arabic letters and French surtitles

projected onto the screens. In this scene, according to Altawil (2019),⁸ Mouawad broke the dramaturgical conventions of probability and theatrical verisimilitude that he had established earlier. Instead, he created the impossible: not only did Mouawad make his characters converse in the language of metaphors and dreams, taking their dialogue beyond the locutionary function of a referential speech act, he also brought together the past and the present. Paradoxically, this gesture of logical untruth permitted the playwright to reach the most truthful moment in the play, not factual to the reality of life but authentic to the logic of his narrative. Although Leo speaks in Arabic and David responds in Hebrew, the power of theatrical illusion allows them mutual understanding (Altawil 2019). David's line, which follows Leo's monologue, shows this: 'In your voice, I hear the language spoken by the mother I never knew. Your voice like a net cast on the sea to capture ancient fragments of me. We have to console those who are dying. Thank you. But as beautiful as your story is, it's a story to soothe the living. For the dying man, nothing is repaired' (Mouawad 2018: 109). Thus, by staging an improbable meeting between David and Leo Africanus, Mouawad wishes to overcome the political, geographical, linguistic, and symbolic borders that mark peoples' identities and histories today.

In Stratford's production, Leo Africanus was played by Aladeen Tawfeek, who spoke mostly in English. This mode of delivery created an effect of intimacy with the audience, as they were not asked to put in the additional labour of reading the surtitles. However, this gesture created a new sense of un-truth. The parable spoken in English instead of Arabic sounded more exoticised, if not objectified. It created a different type of audience and story alienation. In the original staging, the act of reading surtitles and listening to the parable in Arabic forced the audience

⁸ Altawil discussed his work during a public meeting with the audience at the Festival transamerique in Montreal on 13 May, 2019.

to pay closer attention to their own labour and to the meaning of the spoken text. When Cimolino removed spoken Arabic from his production, he undermined Mouawad's original project of linguistic authenticity, despite Cimolino's claims of following it to the 'T' (Cimolino 2019: 10).⁹ This choice also carried ideological implications. Assuming that the majority of the Stratford audience was predominantly English-speaking, Cimolino went with a different gesture of authenticity: he chose to privilege his audience's emotional attachment to the story.

Moreover, this choice undercut the implicit political project of the original script. By removing spoken French from his stage and privileging four other languages, Mouawad challenged the idea of a nation state based on the homogeneity of its citizens' language. Mouawad's performance thus spoke to the reality of today, in which neither the citizens of France nor those of Canada are monolingual. By bringing English back to the Stratford's stage and by using it in the key scenes about the characters' identity and regret, Cimolino diminished Mouawad's political quest. Instead, the Stratford's version spoke in a token version of English Canadian authenticity. It upheld the official version of Canadian multiculturalism in which one's linguistic, ethnic, and diasporic identity becomes a commodity of difference. Using the help of many language coaches, the production did not always hire performers whose native tongue was identical to that of the characters they played and it took away the voice of Leo Africanus when it made him speak in English and not Arabic. Such choices speak to the linguistic and artistic peculiarities of this work, but also — and perhaps even more significantly — to the political and ethical impact of multilingualism as a gesture of globalisation.

⁹ Cimolino claims that back in 2007 he was the one to introduce Mouawad to the book by Natalie Zemon Davis. Hence he lists a long history of this work's development, suggesting the true kinship between this work and his own artistic and political agenda (Cimolino 2019: 10).

Theatrical multilingualism subscribes to the idea that, in a world characterised by global movement, presenting the multilingual citizens of today's world as interlocutors of their own stories and as self-translators envisions them in the dynamic shift 'from [the] objects of translation to [its] active subjects' (Pollezi 2012: 348). Multilingualism constitutes an artistic and political response within contemporary theatre to the new material and political conditions of global movement. As Hans-Thies Lehmann points out, not only do 'multi-lingual theatre texts dismantle the unity of national languages', they also 'asser[t] a polyglossia on several levels, playfully showing gaps, abruptions and unsolved conflicts, even clumsiness and loss of control' (2006: 147). This new polyglossia is marked both by pragmatic and artistic reasoning, yet it also suspends the work of reception by immersing spectators into the state of not-knowing. Theatrical multilingualism reminds its audiences that one must recognise today's linguistic norm as plurilingual, with the work of translation emerging from within the multicultural spaces of strangers and neighbours. Theatrical multilingualism invites its audiences to practice skills of comprehension developed in situations of everyday trans-cultural encounter. It employs on-stage and inter-character translations to help spectators follow the action. Finally, theatrical multilingualism suggests more nuanced modes of perception, as our interpretation of multilingual performances often rests with our corporeal imagination.

As Mouawad's work demonstrates, theatrical multilingualism defines the author/audience interconnection anew and thus creates theatrical communities of hope: a utopian siblinghood of equal subjects. A multilingual performance — as the two examples studied in this article reveal — can be authentic and factual and it can also serve as a testing device for the political intentions and failures of its makers. •

فهي لا تُشبهك في شيء وإذا ذهبت إليها فسوف تموت حتماً كما
ستموت هي أيضاً إذا جئت إلينا ،

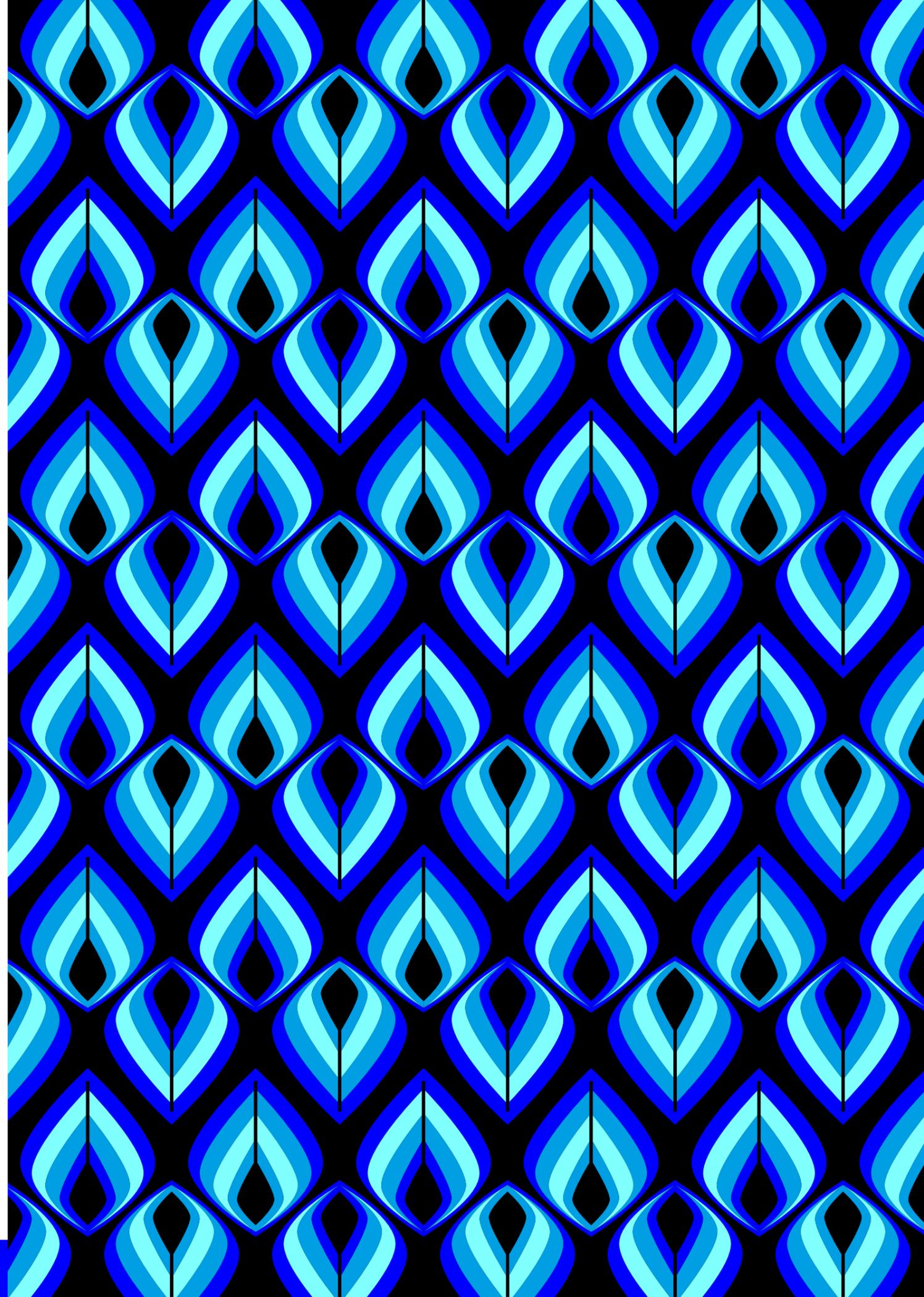


Birds of a Kind written by Wajdi Mouawad, translated by Linda Gaboriau, directed by Antoni Cimolino. Stratford Festival 2019
(L to R) Aladeen Tawfeek as Wazzan, Baraka Rahmani as Wahida, Alon Nashman as David
© David Hou. Image courtesy of Stratford Festival Archives

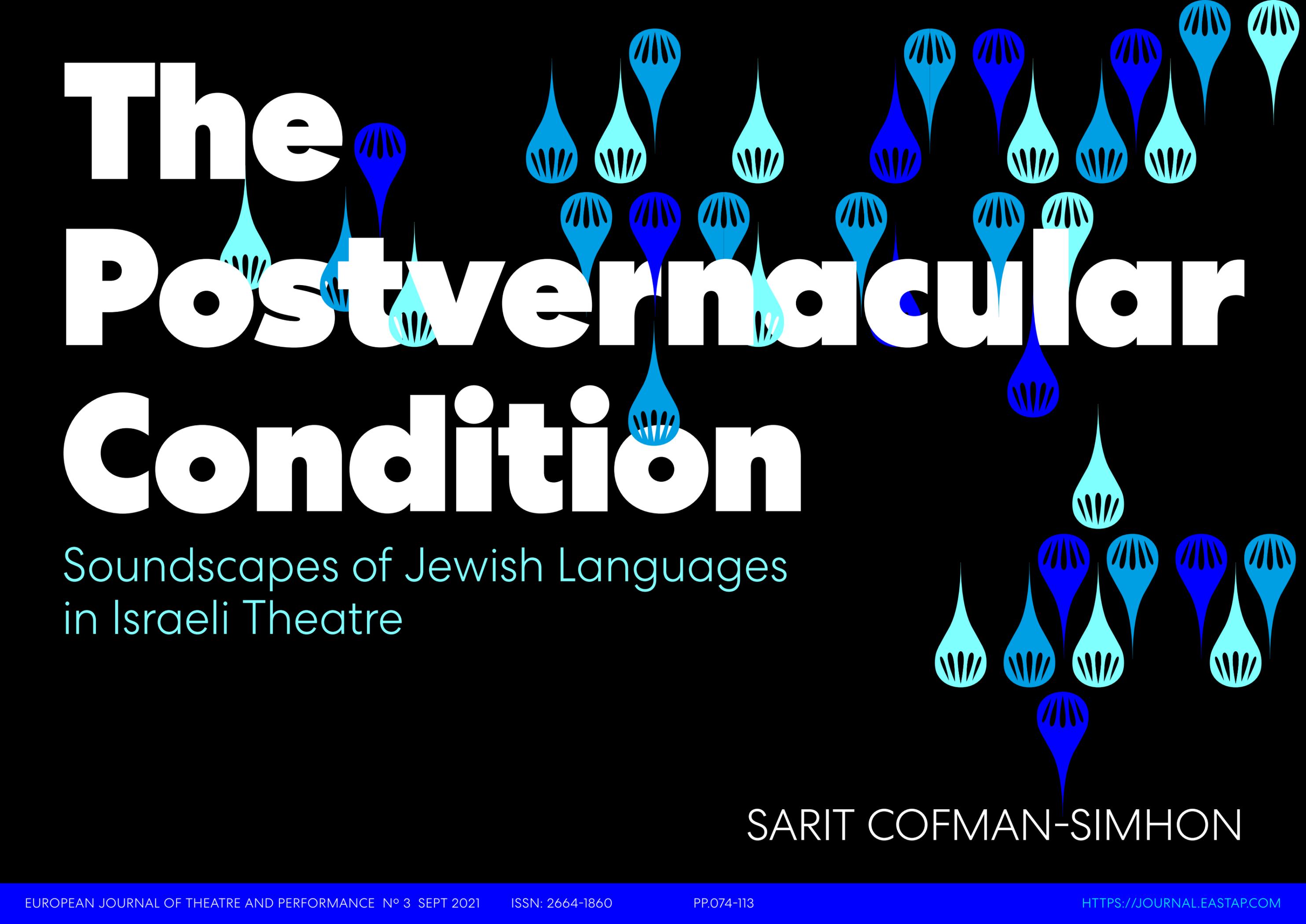
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The Postvernacular Condition



Soundscapes of Jewish Languages
in Israeli Theatre

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KEYWORDS

Israeli theatre, postvernacularity, Jewish languages, endangered languages

MOTS-CLÉS

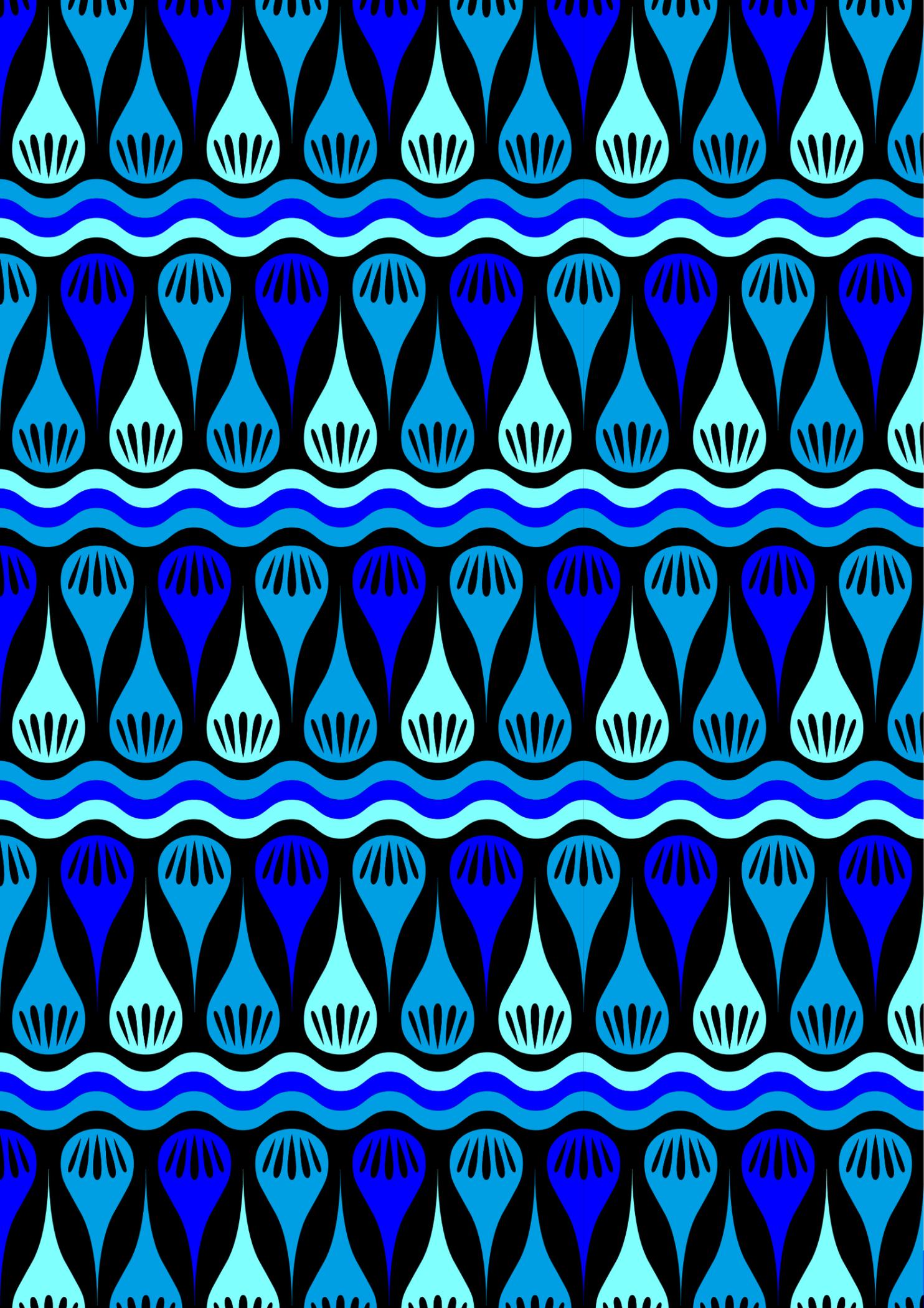
Théâtre israélien, post-vernaculaire, langues juives, langue en voie de disparition

Summary

In the twenty-first century more and more Israelis are joining the preservation and revival of Jewish tongues and dialects onstage, looking for their diasporic roots. Across the country, one can attend shows in practically every Jewish language (Ladino, Yiddish, Maghrebi, Juhuri, Judeo-Aramaic, Bukharan, Judeo-Iraqi, and others). This trend cannot be separated from a quest for identity which includes a rejection of the essentialist attitude that the Hebrew language is a *sine qua non* for Israeli theatre (apart from Arabic). As a postvernacular cultural practice, these languages, no longer in use as a vernacular, gain in symbolic value what they have lost in communicative functions: generating vanished soundscapes, performing vocal dimensions of familiarity and estrangement. Indeed, this is a peculiarity of postvernacularity: rather than the language functioning as the vehicle of performance, its utterance is the performance itself.

Résumé

Ces vingt dernières années de plus en plus de jeunes Israéliens, qu'ils soient créateurs ou spectateurs, participent aux efforts de conservation et de renaissance de diverses langues juives par le biais de pièces de théâtre. On peut assister dans tout le pays à des spectacles en ladino, en yiddish, en judéo-marocain, en juhuri (langue des Juifs du Caucase), en judéo-araméen, en judéo-persan, en arabe judéo-irakien, etc. Ce phénomène est lié à une recherche d'identité et au rejet de l'approche essentialiste qui considère l'hébreu comme la seule langue possible du théâtre de l'Etat d'Israël (mis à part l'arabe). Il s'agit d'une praxis post-vernaculaire; des langues qui ne sont plus employées pour la communication quotidienne prennent une valeur symbolique suite à la perte de leur fonction communicative. Les pièces dans ces langues dispensent des espaces sonores qui avaient pratiquement disparus, ainsi que des caractéristiques vocaux de représentation allant de l'identité à l'aliénation. Du fait du caractère particulier du post-vernaculaire, les langues juives ne remplissent pas seulement dans ces pièces la fonction de moyen verbal, mais le fait de les entendre sur scène constitue en lui-même la représentation théâtrale.



*While we are drowning in the noise of our own
voices, uttered within dominant cultures
and languages, we are surrounded by an ocean filled
with the silence of others and barely
hear an echo of the vanishing chorus.*

*(‘Last Whispers’.
The Endangered Languages
Documentation Programme)*

Introduction

The Hebrew language intimately identifies Israeli culture, yet a new theatrical phenomenon can be found today outside mainstream theatre in Israel: across the country one can attend theatrical productions in practically every other Jewish language¹ such as Ladino, Yiddish, Maghrebi, Juhuri, Judeo-Aramaic, Bukharan, Judeo-Iraqi, and others.² These new initiatives in Israeli theatre reflect a major shift taking place, which sociologists and historians have discussed extensively (Shapira 2004, Kimmerling 2001). This shift rejects the essentialist linguistic ideology of Hebrew as the *sine qua non* for Israeli theatre (apart from Arabic).³ Above and beyond the historical and sociological transitions, this phenomenon opens up a new category of performances, which I would like to examine and conceptualise: theatre productions in Jewish languages that are on the verge of extinction. Basing my current essay on case-studies that are in my view key phenomena, I will analyse performances and interviews with audiences and founders of various theatres and explore how these languages operate onstage, what is their reception, who is the audience, and what is their aesthetic rationale.

1. 'Jewish languages' refers to languages spoken by the Jewish people besides Hebrew.

2. Ladino is spoken by Jews from Turkey and the Balkans, Yiddish by Eastern European Jews, Maghrebi by Moroccan Jews, Juhuri is the language of Jews of the Caucasus, Judeo-Aramaic that of the Jews of Kurdistan. Bukharan is spoken by Jews of Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, and Judeo-Iraqi by Jews from Iraq.

3. Arabic used to be (and is not any longer) an official language in Israel. It is now a language with 'a special status' – after a new law of 'nationality' was passed a few years ago. Still, Arabic speaking theatres are financially supported by the Ministry of Culture.

At the heart of my analysis will be the concept of postvernacularity, a term coined by Jeffrey Shandler in *Adventures in Yiddishland: Postvernacular Language and Culture* (2006). In his study Shandler defined postvernacularity as a cultural practice where languages that are no longer in use as the vernacular gain in symbolic value what they have lost in their communicative functions, by generating vanished soundscapes, and performing vocal dimensions of familiarity and estrangement. Indeed, what is peculiar about postvernacularity is that rather than the language functioning as a vehicle of performance, its utterance is the performance itself. I will further explore the theatrical attributes of endangered languages and their attractiveness for audiences who understand them, as well as those who barely understand them. My main question is how postvernacular languages in theatre acquire an aesthetic dimension of their own and how they function as a gesture of performance rather than as a semantic means of communication. Consequently, I will analyse how one can mobilise such languages to evoke a lost, multilingual background. I will propose three socio-political metaphors (the zombie, the genie, and the dybbuk) that will enable me to illuminate the specific situation of diasporic languages in Israel as 'undead' and to illustrate their haunting dimension as well as their unconscious after-life for third and fourth generations.

Soundscapes on the Verge of Extinction⁴

Jewish culture in the diaspora was essentially multilingual: Jewish vernacular speech was a communal dialect, while literary and religious texts were written in a language patterned altogether differently, mostly in Hebrew, sometimes Aramaic. Jewish speech communities in the diaspora were inherently diglossic (or even triglossic). This wasn't diglossia in the classic sense, where the same language is used in a low register for the everyday and in a high and more prestigious register for writing. The languages of Jewish heritage belong to various families (Germanic, Turkish, Iranian, Semitic and more). In fact, in their diasporic lands of origin, Jewish languages were essentially not much different from the dialects of other communities within the same environment. Only when the community relocated did its language become markedly different from the surrounding language (as with Ladino speakers in Turkey or Yiddish speakers in Russia). Several Jewish dialects developed regionally, consisting of Hebrew grafted onto a framework of local languages. In addition to the most prominent examples — Yiddish (Judeo-German), Ladino (medieval Castilian) and Judeo-Arabic (Maghrebi Jewish Moroccan, Jewish Iraqi, and more) — there are lesser-known languages, including: Judeo-Provençal (the medieval Occitan dialect), Judeo-Persian (spoken by Jews in Iran, Uzbekistan and central Asia), and Judeo-Tat (the Turkish-Iranian language of Jews from the Caucasus), to name but a few of the most prominent. Many of these languages were customarily written in Hebrew letters but are really separate, if related, languages.

4. This essay does not discuss additional languages in theatre in Israel, such as Arabic, Russian, or English, since these are not postvernacular languages.

When the State of Israel was formed in 1948, the government took Hebrew to be the *de facto* official language, discouraging the use of any other Jewish tongue. This coincided with a politics of 'cultural homogenisation' (Appadurai 1996): language and culture had to contribute to the formation of a unified and univocal people. The government adopted this ideology with the aim of Hebraisation of the population, in order to create homogeneity in place of heterogeneity from its origins in the Jewish diaspora.

Today, like many other languages around the world, most Jewish languages are considered endangered (a linguistic concept to describe the process of a diminishing command of the language among members of the community, to the point of disappearance). However, the process undergone by Jewish languages has been different from other languages. If Jewish communities in the diaspora would have remained in place, perhaps their languages would have died out like other minority tongues, rather than being brought to the State of Israel through massive flows of immigration from around the world, where they are still in use in domestic and communal spaces. These languages have been uprooted from their places of origin, along with their speakers, and replanted in the State of Israel with its ideology of Hebrew, where they have become grandparents' languages, now facing extinction:

Today, with few exceptions, the remaining longstanding Jewish languages are severely endangered, whether destroyed by the Holocaust, persecuted in the Soviet Union, or lost in the thinning of the diaspora and the push towards assimilation. [...] Individuals and communities seeking to record and maintain their languages, in whatever form, have often had to do so alone (Endangered Language Alliances 2021).

In the absence of an Israeli policy for language preservation, every initiative and body does its best in its own way. Paradoxically enough, research into languages is blossoming. Books, articles, research and conferences worldwide as well as in Israel show the importance of this subject in academic terms (Miller & Norich 2016, Myhill 2004, Kahn 2018, Kahn & Rubin 2014, Spolsky 2014). Against this background, theatres play a prominent role: performances are unique in their active engagement with languages. Spectators are willing to spend money on tickets and go to the trouble of getting to the theatre hall with the expectation of an enjoyable performance. While ‘preservation’ might imply a passive form of documentation, theatre adopts an active stance. In fact, theatre is one of the only public arenas in the country where Jewish languages are used naturally, as a primary form of communication between characters on stage and between stage and audience (Shem-Tov 2021). These theatres reengage with the various languages in an everyday manner, not in academic or artificial circumstances and they are rare examples of theatre in endangered languages even on a global scale. One of the most intriguing examples is theatre in the Sami language, which can be found at the Ruska Ensemble in Finland and the Giron Sámi Teáhter in Sweden. Another case in point would be the shows acted in Romagnolo dialect, in Rimini, Italy, where every year a theatre company plays a theatrical comedy in Romagnolo (ELP), an endangered language of the Emilia-Romagna region (Grementieri). In Israel the quantity and diversity of shows in endangered languages is well beyond these examples and requires a serious study.

Jewish Languages Soundscapes On Stage: Sonic Genies and Macaronic Performances

Most Israeli theatres working with various Jewish languages operate as private initiatives with amateur actors, apart from Yiddishpiel (which puts on performances in Yiddish) and Hullegeb (playing in a combination of Hebrew and Amharic⁵), which are two professional theatres that receive recognition and funding from the Ministry of Culture. Multiple private and independent troupes have achieved significant success. For example, Asher Cohen’s *Maghrebi Al Maghreb Theatre*, Hay Davidov’s Bukharan *Handa Handa*, and Sigal Shaul’s *Iraqi Theatre* have all become successful businesses. These entrepreneurs have figured out the nature of the market in which they operate and made their theatres into profitable concerns. They know how to identify the right places and times, the right subjects, and the right ticket prices. Cohen, Davidov and Shaul partner with local councils and municipalities who invite them to perform at suitable events. Davidov also receives support from the World Congress of Bukharan Jews. In contrast, the Aramaic theatre of Gila Hakimi and the Juhuri theatre from the Eastern Caucasus established by Roman Isaev, are volunteer amateur companies that make no profits and cover their costs with difficulty.

5. Spoken by Jews from Ethiopia.

Within the framework of this essay, I would like to focus on two case studies that are adaptations of European canonic plays into Jewish languages (one in Maghrebi and one in Yiddish) and their postvernacular practice. My first case study concerns a performance of Goldoni's *The Servant of Two Masters* (2004, see figure I) directed by Ronit Ivgy with her amateur Maghrebi language company *Tami* (Moroccan Israeli Theatre), as I have already described elsewhere:

Mounted on a proscenium stage, the scenography, costumes, and adaptation of *The Servant of Two Masters* in 2004 evoked the Casablanca of French Morocco in the 1950s and 1960s. The set represented the patio of a well-off family's residence. The walls were painted in warm yellow to reddish shades; the doors and window frames were turquoise. Décor included painted murals of arches with crown moldings; long, red velvet drapery; a red tapestry; Moroccan-style benches in vibrant red and gold tones; soft pillows; and blue tiles. A large blue hamsa (hand-shaped good luck charm) was prominent. The costumes conformed to the fashions in Morocco during the same period. Men and women of the upper class wore European attire and red tarbushes, while the male servants wore Moroccan caftans and sharwals (loose-fitting trousers), and servant women wore colourful dresses with white aprons and headscarves. The performance was accompanied by Moroccan music, which the spectators happily supported with rhythmic clapping (Cofman-Simhon, 2013: 52).

Naphtaly Shem-Tov notes that this particular production catered to the nostalgia of the spectators who grew up in Morocco, thus 'challenging and expanding Israeli identity' (2019: 62). Shem-Tov differentiates between those audiences who know the language and emigrated from Morocco on the one hand and spectators from the third and fourth generations on the other:

[W]e can see how nostalgia is for Israeli-born spectators of Moroccan descent, this is an imagined nostalgia, recognizable from family stories, visually, linguistically, and bodily recreated on stage. This performance does not deal only with the past, but also relates indirectly to the Israeli present (*ibid.*: 62).

Indeed, for those who know the language, for whom Jewish Maghrebi is not a postvernacular, the happy reunion with their language in a public space constitutes an affirmative action. However, for the Israeli-born spectators of Moroccan descent, this very same language triggers imagined nostalgia which is intimately intertwined with the history of migration in Israel. The process through which Jewish languages have become endangered is to a certain degree similar to what happens to the languages of migrants all over the world, removed from their countries of origin. The bond to heritage languages in the third and fourth generations functions as a kind of 'sound box', explains Haviva Pedaya, similar to a box of hidden treasures, from which sounds of collective memory reverberate (in Nizri 2004, 13; my translation). This is true of those who experience intergenerational transmission who might hear heritage languages but do not speak them. The audience who is not at all of Moroccan descent and does not know the language of the performance also participates to some extent in this sound box, since in a small country, such as Israel, diverse sonic spaces are easily reachable. Many people in the State of Israel encounter, on a daily basis, Jewish languages outside their home. That the country is small means that one recognises, and even utters words in the languages of a number of communities. Their sound is theatrical material even for those who have no direct connection to it. This reverberation functions as a link in the chain of generations, says Yigal Nizri, who sees the connection to a diaspora language as a longing for continuity between the diaspora and the Israeli state. There is in this 'a need to go back to something that was lost in the effort of Hebraisation [...], a kind of gap asking to be filled with these links' (2004, 13; my translation).



Figure 1
The Servant of Two Masters (2004), Moroccan Israeli Theatre (*Tami*), directed by Ronit Ivgy
© Yakov Saada

Jana Braziel explains that throughout the world there is a consciousness of uprooting among the children and grandchildren of migrants, the generations that did not themselves experience migration. She explains that in immigrant cultures the third generation feels a lack of roots and looks for a 'distant beginning' (2003) which they may turn into a mythical ground for their current experience. The longing for unknown roots can take the form of a search for a founding story, of an eternal return to a distant origin. Braziel explains how the migrant condition is consistently present in the third generation taking mythical proportions, due to an absence of its actual experience. In the case of the Jews, a people who have known many wanderings and many exiles, and for whom migration is almost a continual experience, the founding narrative is all the more indispensable. Arjun Appadurai emphasises how the search for belonging and cultural identity defines many of the descendants of migrants. He calls this phenomenon 'nationalist genie' (1996: 160), to describe how these groups try to hold on to a kind of supernatural, imaginary creature. The migrant subject, says Appadurai, is in an unstable condition, often also into the third generation: the descendants of migrants see themselves as belonging to two places, if not physically, then at least in their consciousness. The image of a genie illustrates repressed longing, like the genie in the bottle or the genie in Aladdin's magic lantern who will liberate the desires of whoever sets them free. In this image the categories of reality and fantasy are mixed up and assimilated with one another: present and past are linked in a return to a mythic or fantastic beginning, by means of language.

In contemporary circumstances, migrants can continue to be nourished by the language and culture of the mother country, even for several generations. By contrast, the State of Israel is purported to draw its culture and build its national identity from the Jewish diasporas, while erasing them. This politics of building while simultaneously erasing does not allow the younger generations the option of drawing, in the future, on those diasporic cultures. For the descendants of migrants,

the search for belonging and cultural identity amounts to freeing a kind of cultural genie which had been caged and repressed since the immigrant generation. It is a paradoxical state: just as the social and cultural structures of Jewish communities are broken up in the move to Israel or to other countries, new paradigms are created alongside a collective longing for what has been lost.

My second case study is Yiddishpiel's theatre production of Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* (2015) directed by Yehoshua Sobol. Sobol chose to alter the ending, transforming it into a play about Jewish refugees in 1943 who are waiting for help to escape the Nazis but eventually decide to flee by themselves (see figure II). He got the idea for this staging through a text published in 2009 by Pierre Temkine, *Warten auf Godot: Das Absurde und die Geschichte*. In this book Vladimir and Estragon become French Jews hoping to be smuggled over the Spanish border. Sobol was not the first to use Temkine's book to reinterpret Beckett's well-known play. Indeed, in the last decade a number of productions of *Waiting for Godot* have been based on this same book,⁶ yet not using Yiddish (spoken by the majority of European Jews in the interwar period) as the language of the protagonists. In Sobol's production Vladimir and Estragon carry suitcases and wait for that someone named Godot to help them cross the French-Spanish border clandestinely, yet Godot never arrives. The two characters are doomed to wait for salvation until their death (alluding to Walter Benjamin's suicide on the French-Spanish border in 1940).

Yiddishpiel's *Waiting for Godot* was a multilingual production: the two main protagonists spoke Yiddish and Podzo French, while his servant

6. Among others, the 2010 production by Le Théâtre de l'Eskabo de Saint-Étienne, presented at Avignon Festival and directed by Patrick Reynard, and the 2012 production in Hamburg at Deutsches Schauspielhaus, directed by Henrike Zöllner, as well as the 2016 Laurent Fréchuret's staging at Théâtre de la Croix-Rousse in Lyon. In 2014 Ivan Panteleev's production at Deutsches Theatre Berlin was awarded the Theatertreffen prize.

Lucky used a mixture of languages gradually turning into gibberish, and the boy from the other side of the border spoke Spanish. These languages, which are integrated in the main language of the performance, constitute a ‘macaronic text’. According to the *Oxford Reference*, the concept of macaronism was born in the seventeenth century, when Latin words were mixed into verses written in the vernacular: ‘Macaronic: Refers to speech or writing that mixes languages’ (Oxford References). Marvin Carlson expands:

Nearly every period of theatre history offers examples of plays that utilize more than one language, and our own era is particularly rich in the number and variety of multilanguage performances. [...] Every macaronic performance may be seen as a cross-cultural activity, a staging of difference (2000: 16).

Indeed, the staging of *Waiting for Godot* in Yiddish relegates the two eternal tramps to be linguistic outsiders: they speak Yiddish, as did many Jews in interwar France, while Podzo, the master, speaks French. Marking difference through language also contributes to the idea of verisimilitude: ‘Surely nothing so immediately marks an outsider as representing another culture than the fact that he speaks an alien language, and the alien voice of the outsider has always been a major contributor to heteroglossia in the theatre’ (Carlson, 2006, 21). Thus, Sobol’s play reverberates soundscapes of interwar Jewish European anguish as unwanted outsiders, by postvernacular means: he makes use of a language which has almost been erased from the European continent in tragic circumstances. Given the profile of Yiddishpiel’s theatre audience (mostly senior spectators who came from Europe, including Holocaust survivors), the soundscape of Yiddish was imbued with terrifying significance. For these reasons, as he attests in an interview, Sobol could not leave Vladimir and Estragon on the border, but had to have them flee (Sobol, 2016). Vladimir and Estragon decide to leave, take their suitcases and step off the stage, pass through the audience and exit.



Figure II

Dori Engel as Vladimir and Yuval Rappaport as Estragon in *Waiting for Godot*, by Samuel Beckett. Directed by Yehoshua Sobol, July 2015. Yiddishpiel Theatre, Tel-Aviv © Gérard Alon

This concrete example of a macaronic practice suggests that theatre productions can use postvernacular language as a tool to resituate canonic plays and reflexively comment upon them.

Reception

One can divide the audiences for various performances in Jewish languages into a number of groups: older people who understand and even speak the language; members of the second generation, who grew up in Israel and have some command of the language; the third and fourth generation who don't know the language but hear it at home; and those who are not members of the community and don't know the language. Testimonies of spectators give us a more precise understanding of the appeal of these shows for the different groups of spectators. Hay Davidov, for example, who established a theatre in the Bukharan language, was born in Israel and relates that he learned Bukharan mainly from his grandmother. He reconstructs what he told her, and she told him:

Safta [grandma], look, these are people who in Uzbekistan [ex Soviet Union], I know, all went to the theatre. They all played a musical instrument: it was part of the curriculum. They were all continuously involved in culture, the theatre, the stage. How is it that these beautiful people, from the day they arrived in Israel, stopped going to the theatre, to the cinema, didn't even know where it was, weren't involved at all? She told me: 'They went then, but where will they go now when they don't know the language?' So I promised my grandmother, I told her: 'Look. If these beautiful people aren't coming to the theatre, one day I will bring theatre to the Bukharans'. (Davidov 2017; my translation)

Davidov is a graduate of the Nissan Nativ acting studio in Tel Aviv. Although he dreamed of becoming an actor, he had no intention of acting in Bukharan:

I wanted to be Tel Aviv. I grew up in Tel Kabir, and Tel Kabir is exactly five minutes walk from Herzl Street in Tel Aviv, where the studio of my beloved teacher Nissan Nativ was. But although the distance is next to nothing physically, intellectually and spiritually it is very great. I crossed this distance to be a little bit Israeli, to be part of Israeliness. With us, we live together all the time, the Bukharan family, the Bukharan community, all the Bukharans marrying within the community, eating Bukharan food. I so wanted to get out. And the further away I got, in the end it brought me closer (*ibid.*).

What Davidov means by this is that the more successful he became as an actor, director and scriptwriter in Hebrew, and the more doors opened for him in Israeli theatre, the more he realised that his unique creativity was connected to the Bukharan identity he had left behind. He saw the case for establishing a theatre in the Bukharan language:

On the day I finished my studies I established the 'Nonsense' group and we performed [in Hebrew] as a team, doing some very funny things, and one day they invited us to appear at this event of the Bukharan Jewish Congress, in front of Bukharan students who had received grants from the congress. An hour-long performance, entirely in Hebrew, and very funny. I added a skit about a Moroccan who came to ask a Bukharan for a grant. In the Bukharan passages, they laughed more than ever. I saw that the audience laughed throughout the performance, but the laughter in that sketch was a different laughter, a soul laughter; and the players stopped for each minute of laughter and each second of applause, so that a five-minute skit turned into one of twenty five minutes, just because of the laughter, just because of the applause. I understood that something was going on here. I understood that the community wanted something of me, they expected things of us, it was the community that was making demands. From that day on, it wasn't me that decided

to establish a theatre, the community decided that I would do it for them. The community had decided on this, on this sketch in Bukharan, and it wanted more, more than just this show (*ibid.*).

From there it was a short journey to opening a Bukharan theatre; a theatre in which Davidov writes, acts, and directs a new production every year.

In 2001 Ronit Ivgy founded *Tami*, the first Moroccan Israeli Theatre. Her Maghrebi productions of Molière's *The Miser* and Goldoni's *The Servant of Two Masters* triggered enthusiastic responses: 'I left Morocco when I was twenty-four,' says one spectator, 'the show is wonderful, brings back words, memories, proverbs and sayings. I am very moved, it is a return to my roots' (*Moroccan Theatre* file; my translation).⁷ On internet websites, as well, people reacted enthusiastically and someone wrote: 'The sayings, tricks and pranks onstage undoubtedly brought back memories for many spectators' (*ibid.*). Another fan added: 'The show carried me back to childhood, to the melodies and songs of my parents' house' (in Cofman-Simhon 2013: 54). Another says:

When I was a little boy, I forbade my parents to speak Moroccan, as did many other children, first because I wanted to 'help' them assimilate, and second because I was concerned about my status among my friends. Even at my *bar-mitzvah*, I didn't let them speak anything but French and Hebrew (in Rotem 2004; my translation).

And perhaps the best summary of this productions' impact: 'The show in Moroccan took me back forty years to the language at its best. Lucky us to have managed to restore the Moroccan language, which people

were afraid to speak, and now can be heard all over the lobby of the theatre in our town' (*Moroccan Theatre* file; my translation).

Some of my students, young actors of Moroccan origin of the third and fourth generation, shared their experience with me after their parents had attended theatre in the Maghrebi language. As one of them described it:

My father Raphael told me: 'I laughed and cried with excitement. I recalled my childhood and also understood to what extent the Maghrebi language is beautiful and funny. I was moved to see the connection between theatre and Maghrebi; I am used to elevated language in theatre, with which I don't feel good. Besides, I haven't seen your mother laughing like that for a long time' (in Cofman-Simhon 2013, 56; my translation).

Another young student cited her mother: 'It's a pity that you don't know Maghrebi,' she said. 'You have no idea what you're missing' (*ibid.*). Here we can see the difference between the first generation who embraces nostalgic soundscape of Maghrebi, and the young generations who feel connected to the language through the 'sound box'.

Another initiative is the Amharic⁸ Ethiopian theatre *Tizita* (Memories, or Nostalgia), established by Fruit Farada in 2016. Farada came to Israel when she was eight. The *Tizita* Theatre began as a community project and the initiative was received with pride by Ethiopian emigrants: 'the theatre gives proud and nourishing expression to community members and gives us a basis for preserving the beautiful language and culture we grew up with' (Farada 2019; my translation). She adds that her

⁷ *Moroccan Theatre* file. Israel Goor Theatre Archives and Museum (IGTAM), Jerusalem. IGTAM maintains articles from the Israeli press. Yet many of the articles were selected from newspapers lacking the author's name and/or the date of publication. In such cases the file itself serves as reference.

⁸ Amharic is not a Jewish language, but the main language of Ethiopia. It has been included in this essay because the Ethiopian community is rather new in Israel and is struggling with preserving its identity.

theatre answers the need of youngsters in the community to identify with Amharic, and is aimed, then, not only at adults, but also at young people who came to the country as children speaking Amharic, but even more so for those born in Israel and who barely know the language. Farada declares that ‘to children it is saying: be proud of your heritage’ (*ibid.*). The group seeks to correct the absence of theatre in Amharic:

Our vision is to connect the generations and theatre groups particularly those working in Amharic, which can bring together the whole community – Sabras,⁹ adults and adolescents. When we first launched the theatre and saw the whole spectrum of ages in the audience, we realized the sheer pleasure of experiencing Ethiopian culture in Amharic together (*The First*; my translation).

To conclude, what we hear, again and again, is that various audiences of productions in Jewish languages want and need to hear the soundscapes of their communities’ tongues onstage. However, at the same time, they are perfectly aware of the fact that the utterance of these languages in the theatre is not an ordinary event: it is something to celebrate and to be proud of. The sudden transition experienced by Jewish languages as they passed from being spoken vernaculars throughout the diaspora to being postvernacular in the State of Israel, turned them into a sort of distinct sociolinguistic category. The achievement of the Hebrew ‘revival’ made it a more common language, and there are those who argue that it is no longer Hebrew rather than ‘Israeli’.¹⁰ The holy tongue shared by Jews from diverse communities was called on to become a kind of *lingua franca*, so that people who spoke different mother tongues could communicate. Thus, the holy tongue

9. Sabras are people born in Israel.

10. Such as Ghil’ad Zuckermann, whose book *Israeli—A Beautiful Language* (2008) maintains that contemporary Hebrew vernacular is radically different from ancient Hebrew.

metamorphosed into a vernacular, while Jewish languages that had been vernacular became conspicuous, of no practical use, and a source of longing, thereby acquiring a special status.

Postvernacular Jewish Tongues and Zombie Linguistics

According to Jeffrey Shandler, language no longer used as a vernacular can gain in symbolic value what it has lost in communicative functions. Members of a postvernacular speech community may not be able to speak the language fluently or fully understand it, but they can still engage in a number of activities which Shandler calls ‘postvernacular cultural practices’ (2006: 94). They can do so, for example, by attempting to learn the language, performing in the language, engaging in discourse about the language, using or doing translations, surrounding themselves with objects related to the language and using certain borrowed words and phrases from the language.

Shandler writes about the fate of Yiddish culture in the U.S.A. and points out how parallel to the demise of Yiddish as a spoken language, there are signs of its development and renewal. So the practice of Yiddish is developing in opposite directions: on the one hand Yiddish as a vernacular is shrinking, but on the other it is prospering in new forms. This Yiddish, diminished though certainly not dead, says Shandler, has become something else, something altogether different from what it once was: it has become a museum artefact, or even a theatrical and artistic object, serving the needs of researchers, translators, directors and performers. Yiddish language and literature are taught and

studied today in universities under the umbrella of Jewish studies, but also in classes for German language and culture. In its postvernacular era, Yiddish has returned to its origin as a dialect of German, and can for the first time reclaim what was once dismissed in Germany as an inferior jargon.¹¹ In the twenty-first century, Yiddish is rarely thought of as a language of the everyday, and is sometimes met with a smile. Shandler gives the example of ticket vending machines for the New York subway. In 2004 the authorities programmed the machines to give instructions for use in a number of languages, including Yiddish (at certain stations in areas of Brooklyn, populated by Yiddish speakers). This decision did not go unnoticed: local media outlets reported on the development in piquant headlines, such as ‘Subway learns joys of Yiddish’ (in Shandler 2006: 4). Other languages introduced to ticket vending machines in various neighbourhoods across the city (Greek, Korean, Polish) did not attract special attention. The reason for this, says Shandler, is Yiddish’s postvernacular standing: the other languages employed in the New York subway vending machines have vernacular status in their countries of origin (Poland, Korea, Greece), and in New York they exist as extensions of languages which have a homeland and an independent concrete existence. Yiddish, though, is not seen as a part of the everyday, where one buys subway tickets, but as a vague and intangible remnant from another time. It has a special aura, from a distant time and space, which is nearly extravagant. It has become a kind of curiosity. In Shandler’s view, this response to the attempt at public signage in an outdated language (as far as the wider public is concerned) clarifies the unique status of Jewish languages in our time. In public consciousness these languages have achieved an unreal status, even if there are still (much diminished) communities who speak them. The distinctive status of Yiddish in the United States gives

11. For centuries it was widely assumed that Yiddish was just broken German, more of a linguistic mishmash than a true language (Johnson, 1996).

a nostalgic hue to the renewed interest in academic circles and beyond. The reputation of the language precedes her: people who have never spoken Yiddish claim to have a deep and true, emotional or ideological connection to it. In semiotic terms, Shandler indicates, the primary aspect of the language, its communicative value, is diminishing. At the same time, its secondary dimension, its symbolic value as a language of the past, beyond its semantic value, is increasing. When the secondary dimension becomes more predominant than the primary, the language acquires a *sui generis* function. At this stage, the everyday speech of those who still communicate in Yiddish is seen as almost exotic, a leftover from the past.

One of the leading theatre directors at the end of the twentieth century, the Polish director Tadeusz Kantor, coined the term ‘poor object’ (in Kobińska 2008: 113) to explain the exalted position afforded to discarded objects after they have served their purpose, objects acquiring indistinct status. Kantor would collect such items from rubbish dumps and use them as stage props in a most concrete way, explaining that at the end of their functional lives the objects become ‘poor’ and active in another, poetic dimension. This too has happened to Jewish languages. In their ‘poor,’ postvernacular age, they have become theatrical characters. The postvernacular is, then, a key concept for understanding the nature of Jewish languages onstage in contemporary Israel: languages that were until recently used in prosaic contexts, now walk a tightrope between extinction and a postvernacular alternative existence.

The significant contribution of these languages to theatre can be explained via the concept of zombie linguistics. This concept was coined in 2012 by Bernard Perley to describe research into ‘undead’ languages. A zombie, says Perley, is neither the opposite of what is alive nor of that which is dead (in Nash 2013), and this in-between state ties in perfectly with the ambivalent status of Jewish languages. In many

cultural traditions a zombie is an unnaturally created character who has returned to the world in his own deceased body. Dudu Rotman defines such creations as ‘anomalous, foreign to familiar reality’, and adds: ‘the view according to which the end of an individual’s life is not the end of their existence accompanies humanity from the dawn of history’ (2016, 392; my translation). The metaphor of the zombie language is meant to describe an abnormal presence, where a language has been conjured after it has passed away. It does not, then, become a living language, but at the same time it is not actually dead. ‘Zombie’ stands for an undefined position, says Perley, who seeks to harness the communicative power of zombie language: the parameters of the discussion change from ‘meaningful language as communication’ to ‘language as meaningful communication’ (Nash 2013). That is to say, even where the semantic value of a language is lost because no one speaks it, it can still have other features such as sound, intonation and even a certain charm to be discovered in the attempt to guess its meanings. This amounts to an expressive, non-verbal contribution to human communication and emphasises the performative dimension of language. As Rotman puts it, ‘the end of life doesn’t mean the end of existence’ (2016: 392; my translation). The extinction of a vernacular doesn’t mean its disappearance from the world. It is liable to return as a zombie.

Jewish languages are still not zombie languages, because they have speakers. They are not yet extinct. Nevertheless, the distinctions made by Perley correspond with those made by Jeffrey Shandler: the languages of Jewish heritage loom in a twilight zone. The image of the zombie presents the languages in a fantastic light: between enchantment and fear. This duality may be seen to inform approaches to Jewish languages in the State of Israel: on the one hand the consolation of nostalgia and wonder about these languages’ vitality, and on the other the fear that diaspora culture may poke its hand out of the grave and draw everyone to it. However, whilst diaspora ghosts might flutter around

Israeli heads, the triumphant Hebrew language, along with Hebrew culture that sits on firm social and economic infrastructures, doesn’t need to worry about linguistic ghosts.

The Aesthetics of Macaronic Sound

Most Jewish language performances feature, to one degree or another, embedded Hebrew sentences, whose aim is to enable the audience who don’t understand the language to follow the plot. There are a number of ways of bringing different languages in the same performance into proximity: as translated subtitles or surtitles; as a translation built into the production, a structured part of the speech on stage; and as a feature of the characters who speak different languages or dialects, or even as a choice of a character to speak a number of languages or to utter parts of sentences in one language with some words in another language.

Artists using Jewish languages make use of macaronic texts, well beyond dropping in a few isolated words of Hebrew, with the clear intention to broaden the audience, and to make performances more accessible to spectators who don’t understand the original language but still want to hear it. A kind of polyphony is created on stage, a collocation of voices, a kind of reflection of the multilingual reality within which these theatres are operating. The decision to interpose Hebrew sentences often seems arbitrary, when the single aim is to communicate with the audience. The logic is generally pragmatic, without justification in terms of the plot. The macaronic text spices up the main language, but the isolated Hebrew sentences have special honour and weight since they are meant to clarify the main text.

Some performances have surtitles translating what is said on stage. Such examples are found in the aforementioned productions of *The Servant of Two Masters* and *Waiting for Godot*. Marvin Carlson calls this a 'side text'. The surtitles take away stage time for the reader. This is to say that although the spectators gain verbal understanding, their hold on what unfolds visually on stage is weakened. For the most part, shows in diaspora languages do not have surtitles, but instead use a kind of simultaneous translation, a built-in part of the macaronic text. Carlson considers macaronism to be an important element in present-day hybrid and eclectic postmodern theatre: 'Various elements are assembled without either the totalizing aesthetic vision that was used to justify previous formal and abstract experimentation in the theatre and other arts, or the appeal to verisimilitude that grounded traditional realistic theatre' (2006:16). In other words, contemporary theatre, which has abandoned realism, does not need to justify the macaronic beyond purely aesthetic considerations. Christopher Balme, though, emphasises the postcolonial aspect of the macaronic text: a part of the phenomenon is not the result of choice, but of the cultural hybridity forced on artists who want to write and speak in an ancestral language, rather than in a culturally hegemonic language. Other researchers who have discussed the macaronic stage in different world contexts emphasise the oral/aural aspect of languages that are not written. Most Jewish languages are like this, based on oral transmission over generations. Currently facing extinction, some have already lost part of their lexicon or have undergone 'Israelisation' (the replacement of certain terms with Hebrew words). Consequently, on the stage they are forced to make use of Hebrew, not only for translation purposes, but for the sake of precise expression.

The director Alexander Hausvater, who worked at the Yiddishpiel theatre, argues that there is no need for translation of any sort. Here spectators are seen to understand what characters are thinking, beyond their words and actions, as in opera:

There's no need for a translation, no need for the spectators to look for info on smartphones. Art gets under the skin to change a person. The fact is that if you don't understand a language, it doesn't mean you don't understand the character; the actor has to create beyond language (Hausvater 2018; my translation).

For Hausvater, theatregoers and artists both need to change their viewpoint: postvernacular languages today are like characters with their own personalities. This is Hausvater's private opinion, but it is analogous to Shandler's scholarly definition of the postvernacular condition. Moreover, even when the audience is not Jewish, claims Moni Ovadia, a well-known Italian performer of Yiddish cabarets, 'it doesn't matter that the audience doesn't understand the words. What's important is that they hear the sound and cadences of Yiddish' (in Gruber 2002:65).

Oded Erez and Nadeem Karkabi take a similar position, when they recount an event that occurred after a performance by the Israeli band AWA, whose songs are in the Jewish Yemeni language:

One member of the audience suggested projecting translations of the song lyrics, an element that she believed would enhance the experience of the audience. Tair Haim [...] replied: '[...] it's not done in pop music concerts'..... there's something we love about saying little and simply letting the audience *feel*; this is music with a lot of emotion, and it also makes your body move, it has a lot of groove'. In Haim's reluctance to explain what the lyrics actually mean we can identify the postvernacular tendency of separating the semantic value of language from its other semiotic registers, and relishing it as a signifier of affect or as an aesthetic experience of sound play. Teasing out 'the musicality of language' (Erez and Karkabi 2019: 311).

These interviews teach us that artists are very much aware of the postvernacular soundscapes of their performances and wish to retain this quality as a main feature of their works. Their observations stress the aesthetic quality of macaronic sound and the musicality of language and therefore the non-necessity of translation for the sake of semantic understanding.

Sonic Dybbuks

An additional miraculous being that portrays the dynamics between Jewish languages and Israeli audiences is the dybbuk (evil spirit). Here someone whose existence in this world was thought to have ended comes back, not in their own body as a zombie, but by means of the body of a living person, which they take control of. This is a particularly charged image, because unlike the genie and the zombie, the dybbuk is not an independent entity, but it enters ('possesses' or 'cleaves to'¹²) the actual bodies of humans and acts from within. In this way the past returns and is present, refuses to let go, seeks to be involved and demands acknowledgement. There is an active, stubborn and domineering side to this return. It doesn't loosen its grip; its yearning has to be assuaged.

Indeed, Jewish languages won't let go. As we have heard from the spectators quoted in the essay, these languages operate as the dybbuk of the diaspora's past, which refuses to negate itself in the Israeli present. Diego Rotman, writing of Yiddish theatre in Israel, observes that the socio-political metaphor of diasporic language as a dybbuk who demands after-life amounts to the idea that 'language is a strategy of struggle for freedom' (Rotman, 2017: 197, my translation). In Rotman's view, the liminal position of Yiddish, between life and death, has become a tool for cultural independence within Israeliness:

Liminality allows [...] to represent the tension between the dead spirit and the living body, between the new immigrant and the leader of the nation, between the Yiddish language and its speakers, the citizens of Israel.[...] Yiddish, as a language, takes over the country and expresses its subconscious, its suppressed impulses. The Yiddish speakers claiming their place in the world, attempt a cultural coup (*ibid.*).

Rotman thus equates the existence of the Yiddish language in Israel with a subversive dybbuk within the Hebrew collective subconscious, meaning nothing less than a cultural coup. I would add that other Jewish languages, in their postvernacular state, have also become a kind of dybbuk that demands its place within the Israeli entity. As we have heard from the artists and the spectators quoted above, theatre in diasporic languages cannot be separated from a quest for identity which includes a rejection of the essentialist attitude that the Hebrew language is a *sine qua non* for Israeli theatre (apart from Arabic).

The metaphor of the past that encamps in the present like a dybbuk challenges the relationship between Jewish languages and contemporary Hebrew. This is the dybbuk that Israeli culture fears. Jewish languages are returning as a dybbuk that actually grabs and dictates the Israeli experience, at the same time enriching it. This is the sound box: the need for many Israelis to hear the languages of the diaspora on stage, a need that perhaps stems from that imprisoned genie, a memory that reaches back hundreds of years: a sonic dybbuk.

12. The word 'dybbuk' stems from the Hebrew verb *davek* [to cleave to].

Conclusion: The Appeal of Postvernacular Soundscapes On Stage

The key concept for this essay is postvernacularity, that is, languages that are no longer used as a vernacular and that may be seen in a theatrical context to function as the performance itself. Such languages, which are not fully understood or not understood at all by audiences, may be used to evoke the lost, multilingual background of a predominantly Hebrew speaking public sphere.

I have mobilised three socio-political metaphors (the zombie, the genie, and the dybbuk) to lend explanatory power to the discussion. These metaphors illuminate the specific situation of diasporic languages in Israel as ‘undead’, and illustrate their haunting dimension as well as their unconscious after-life in the third and fourth generations.

I have also sought to demonstrate how the soundscape of postvernacular languages is theatrical material beyond semantic value. For example, with regards to my two primary case studies, I have shown how in the 2004 production of *The Servant of Two Masters* directed by Ronit Ivgy with the Moroccan Israeli theatre company *Tami*, the Maghrebi language served to create nostalgia, whilst in the 2015 production of *Waiting for Godot* directed by Yehoshua Sobol at Yiddishpiel theatre, the Yiddish language defined the two protagonists as endangered outsiders.

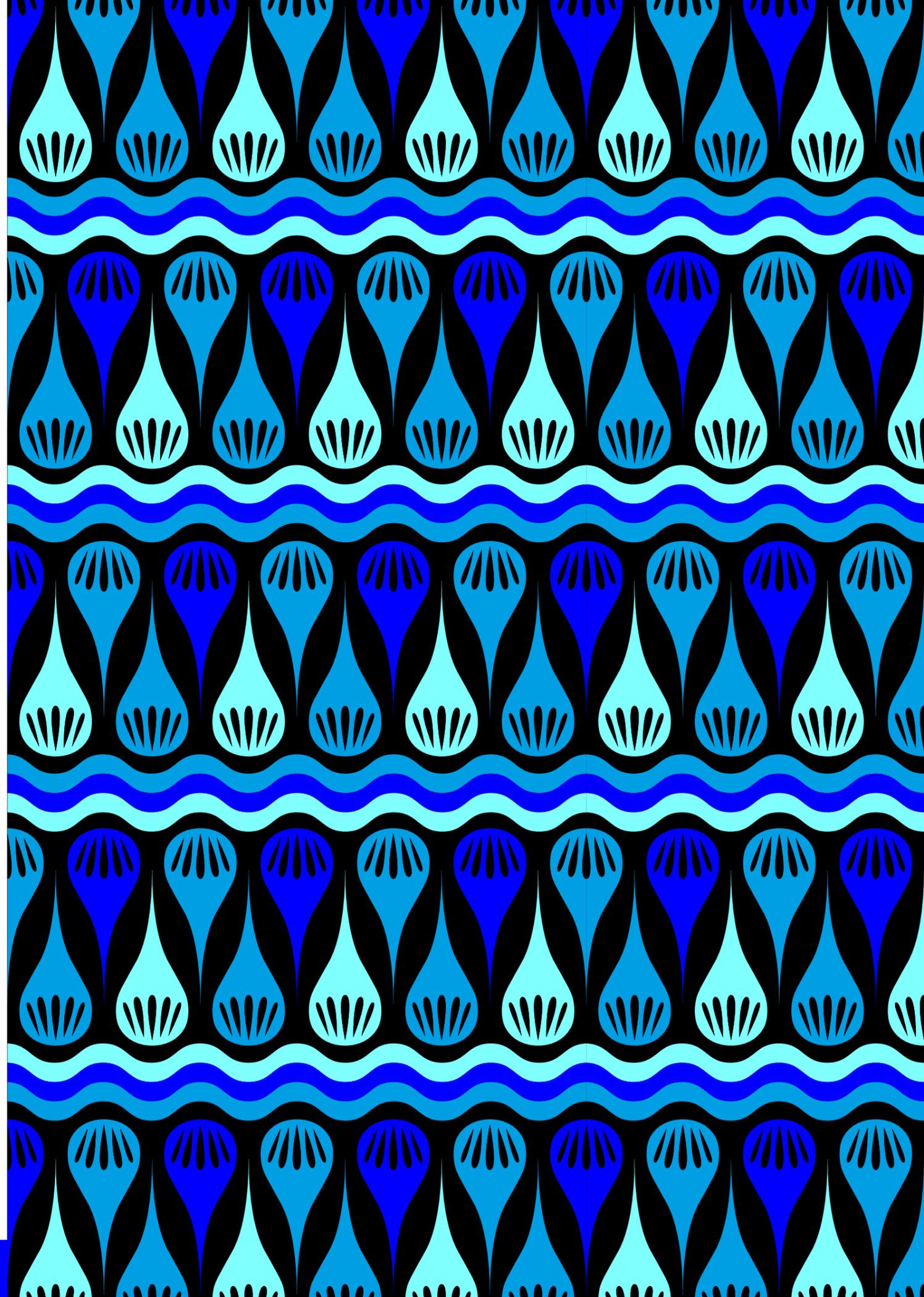
The third and fourth generations of Israeli spectators involved in performances in different Jewish languages exemplify the ‘sound box’ syndrome, where words, intonations, and the aural repository of memories of previous generations echo. Simultaneously, the socio-political metaphor of diaspora languages as a dybbuk points to ‘language [as] a strategy in a struggle for freedom’ (Rotman 2017: 197; my translation). The soundscapes of different Jewish tongues onstage thus bring silenced voices to the fore and aurally connect the past to the present.



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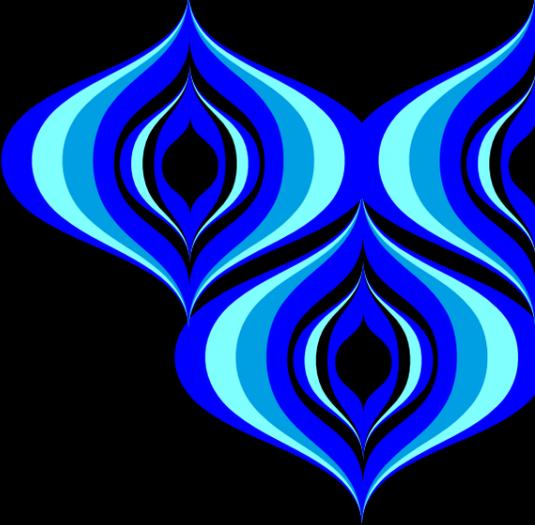
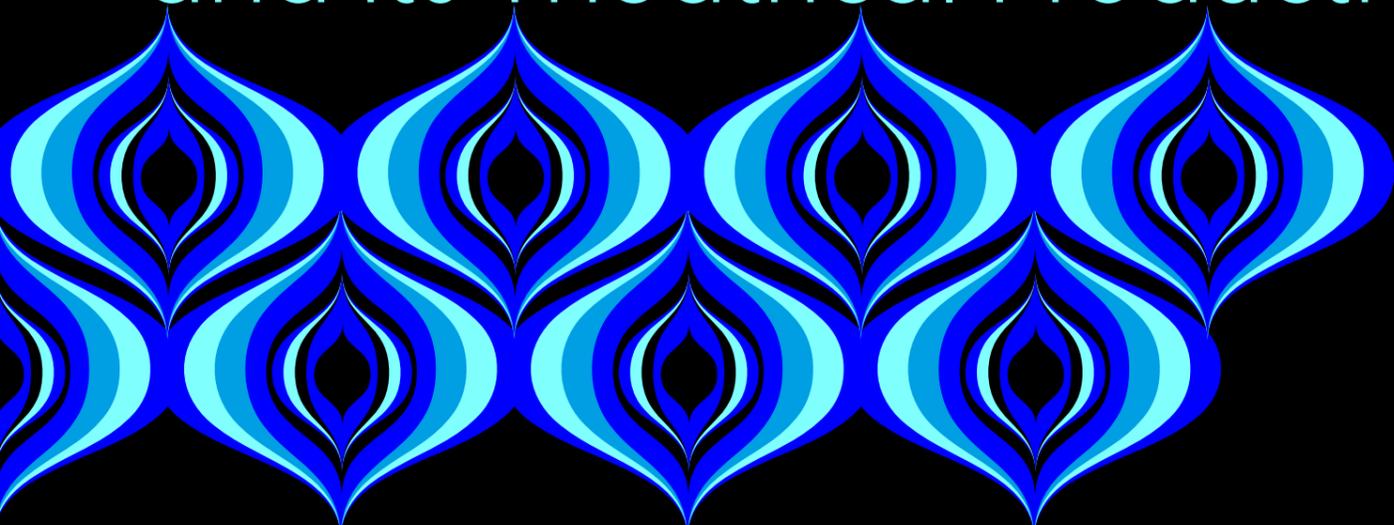
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Defying Space and Time Through Language



The Case of Kozani's Carnival, its Songs,
and its Theatrical Productions in Kozani Greek



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Summary

This article studies two festive occasions taking place in Kozani, a city in northern Greece: firstly its carnival rituals and secondly some theatrical plays, both carried out entirely in the local dialect. In order to examine the relationship between language and performance, this article proposes an analysis in three parts. The first section shall rapidly outline the city's linguistic history with regard to national politics, the second shall describe the use of the dialect in the carnival rituals of the *fanos*, and the third shall study a historically-themed play performed in Kozani Greek.

Résumé

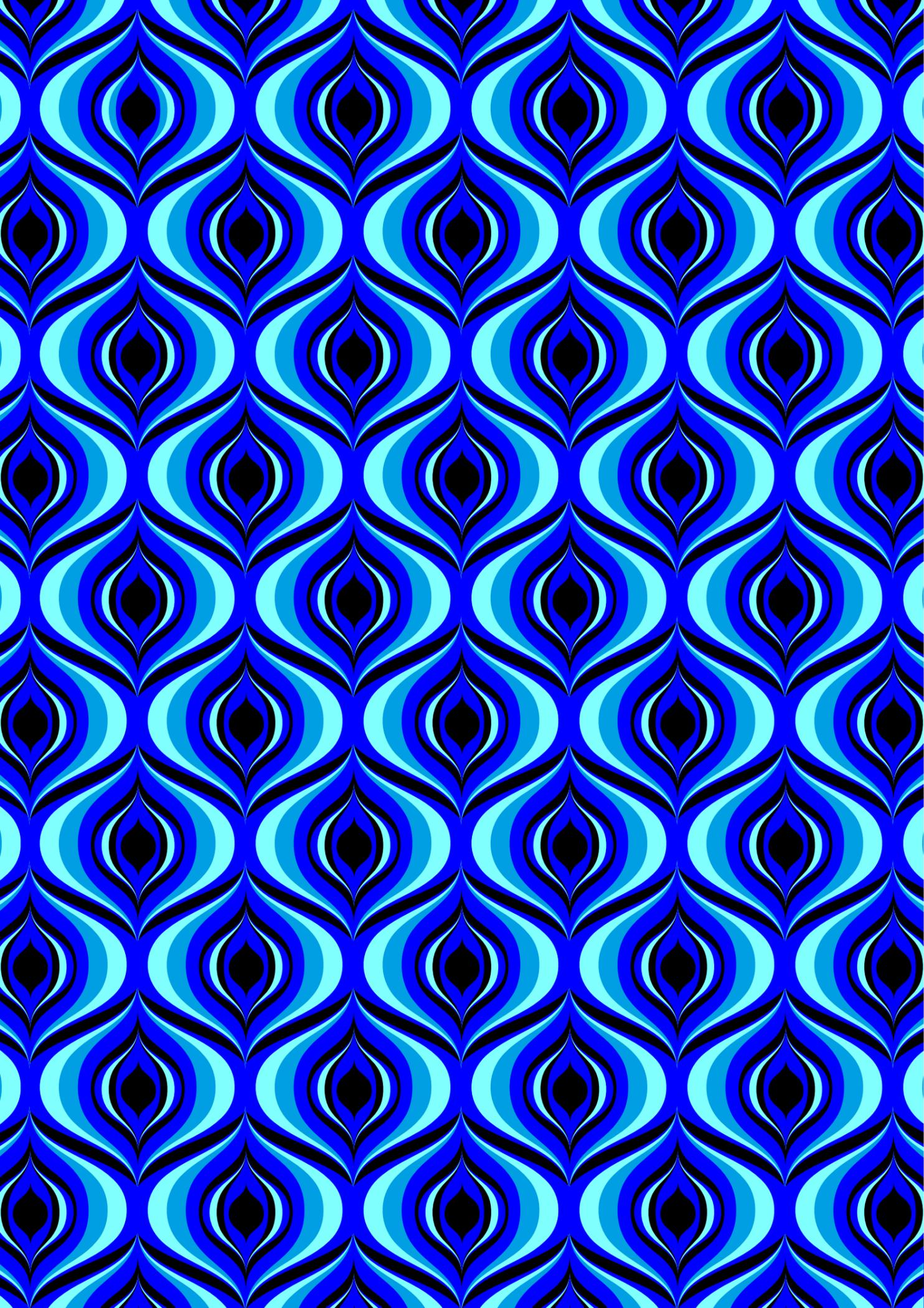
Ce travail se donne comme objet d'étude deux temporalités festives qui ont lieu à Kozani, une ville au nord de la Grèce. Plus spécifiquement, il s'agit de son carnaval populaire et d'une série de pièces théâtrales qui se déroulent entièrement en dialecte local. Afin d'examiner le rapport entre langue et représentation, nous proposons une analyse en trois parties, dont la première présentera l'histoire linguistique de la ville, la deuxième décrira l'usage du dialecte pendant le rituel carnavalesque du *fanos*, et la troisième analysera une pièce théâtrale de thème historique jouée en dialecte.

KEYWORDS

Greece, theatre, carnival, dialect, performance

MOTS-CLÉS

Grèce, théâtre, carnaval, dialecte, représentation



'Some Like it Unlighted': A Short One-Act Play Satirising the Smoking Ban, Performed in Kozani Greek¹

1. Acknowledgments: I would like to express my gratitude to Karel Vanhaesebrouck, as well as to the anonymous reviewers and editors for their insightful comments and suggestions which have significantly improved this article in more than one ways. I would like to extend my sincere thanks to Adeline Lionetto, who supervised my Master 1 thesis on Kozani's carnival songs at Sorbonne University for her guidance and fruitful feedback, and to Alceste Sofou for her valuable advice during my Master 1 thesis' defence. Finally, this paper would not have been written without Matina Tsikritzi-Momtsiou and Theodoros Lakkas whom I would like to thank for the personal interviews they granted me, as well as for their unwavering support all these years.

The calendar reads February 24th 2020. In most parts of northern Greece it's a chilly evening, yet the central square of Kozani, the biggest city in the region of Western Macedonia, is filled with people. Amongst them are TV crews, YouTubers, aspiring documentarians, and spectators eager to capture the short one-act play about to begin, their smartphones and cameras ready. In the middle of the square lies a simple construction that will function as the performance's set. A sign reading *I Taverna t' Koutioul'*,² or Koutioul's Tavern in English (Figure 5), indicates that the action will be situated inside and outside of a tavern. The tavern's name is written in the way it would be pronounced in the local dialect, Kozani Greek, as suggested by the elision in both the definite article *tou*, which becomes *t'*, and the name *Koutiouli* (in Genitive), which becomes *Koutioul'* (Dinas 2005i: 44-46).

A narrator welcomes the audience to the one-act play entitled *Some Like it Unlighted* (original title: *Merikí tu protimún svistò*; my translation) as the characters appear smoking outside the tavern, shivering due to low temperatures.

2. All Greek words and phrases have been written using the Roman script in order for the dialect's pronunciation to be highlighted.

This could have been a play about modern Greece, depicting how the harsh realities brought on by the financial crisis have been experienced by the population of a provincial northern city like Kozani. However, certain elements prepare the audience for the comic spectacle that's about to begin such as the characters' fancy costumes that include old blankets worn as capes, wigs in fluorescent colours, clown hats, and head boppers. At the same time, the characters' constant back-and-forth movement in and out of the tavern, accompanied by exaggerated grimaces and silly walks, adds to the merry atmosphere. However, the single most important reason why one would expect to watch a comic spectacle is to be found on the date: it's carnival season in Kozani, a few days before all celebrations are called off due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and both visitors and locals are well aware of the celebrations' explicitly satirical character.

Some Like it Unlighted does not disappoint. The narrator describes in the local dialect the characters' angry reaction to the smoking ban, which officially came into effect in 2010 but has only been strictly implemented all over Greece since 2019 (Helena Smith 2019: para 3 of 10). The characters' constant need for nicotine is stressed through the expression '*tranón gailé*', which translates to 'huge despair' (Dinas 2005ii: 512 and 111). Meanwhile their opinion of the lawmakers who introduced the ban is described with the curse '*na ksipatuthún*', 'to buzz off' (Dinas 2005ii: 368). When the narrator pronounces the curse all of the characters do an insulting gesture, known throughout Greece as the *moutza* (Stavropoulos 1988: 565) which consists in extending an open palm to someone's face, and exclaim '*Oú*', an interjection indicating disdain (Figure 7). The audience breaks into laughter.

Ultimately, the characters come up with a scheme that will allow them to continue smoking inside Koutioul's Tavern: they pretend to be holding rehearsals for a musical production in which all the heroes are smokers. This leads to a series of face-offs with a police officer during which the characters insult and mock the policeman in Kozani Greek. It is worth noting that the officer's T-shirt bears the logo of PASOK, one of the two parties that dominated the Greek political scene from the 1980s until the early 2010s (Clogg 2015: 240-274), adding another layer of satire to the comic short play.³ As Dinas points out, a native speaker of Kozani Greek is usually heavily involved emotionally with a phrase's content, whether they act as the sender or the receiver of a message (Dinas 2005i: 173). This observation could explain the continuous use of yells, interjections, and obscene gestures by the characters of *Some Like it Unlighted*.

3. Jokes about PASOK have been popular on the internet since the fall from grace of the party in the early 2010s. Such jokes include memes that compare the 'good old times', when PASOK was in power, with the rather difficult financial situation of today.



Figure 1
The fanos Lakkous t' Maggan'



Figure 2
Traditional uniforms

Some Like it Unlighted ends in cheers and the production team bows to the public, inviting everyone back to their district, *Ai-Dimitris*. A festive fire is going to be lit there and carnival songs in Kozani Greek are set to be performed around it. This is the ritual of the *fanos* (Dinas 2005ii: 544), one of the key elements of the city's carnival (Tsikritzi-Momtsiou 2000: 30). The word *fanos* indicates both the festive fires lit in the same specific spots every year during carnival season in different parts of the city and also the cultural associations responsible for organising this *fanos* ritual in their district. As the troupe leaves the central square dancing, traditional orchestral music is performed by the local philharmonic orchestra, Pandora, setting the tone of what is to come. We shall follow them shortly.

Singing About Taxes and Throwing Yoghurt at Politicians: Presenting The Objectives, Field Work, and Methodology of this Study

The starting point of this paper is the unanimous use of Kozani Greek, a dialect not widely spoken by Kozani's population, known as Kozanites, nowadays (Dinas 2005i: 34), every year during carnival season. Like most carnivals in Greece, Kozani's carnival is a moveable feast that takes place at the end of winter, most often in late February or early March. The festivities start on *Tsiknopémpti* (Smoky Thursday) and last for eleven days, ending on *Kathara Deftera* (Clean Monday), which is the first day of Lent (Tsikritzi-Momtsiou 2000: 15). At their core is the

ritual of the *fanos*, namely the performance of the city's carnival songs around a festive fire. Throughout the eleven days that separate *Tsiknopémpti* from the beginning of Lent, another *fanos* is lit each evening in a different spot. On the last day of the carnival, known as *Traní Apukrá* in the Kozani dialect and translating as 'Big Carnival', all the *fanoi* are lit simultaneously. Contrary to other regions in Greece that refer to carnival season as *karnaváli* or *Apókries*, the latter being plural, Kozanites have adopted the dialectal term *Apukrá* (Dinas 2005ii: 59) that is always employed as a singular noun. All these terms have the same meaning as the Latin-derived *carnival*, indicating abstention from the consumption of meat.

Unlike other carnivals in Greece, like those taking place in Patras and Xanthi, which have incorporated contemporary elements into their festivities, Kozani's retains the ritual of the *fanos* at the core of its festivities, along with the use of the Kozani dialect. While the Patras and Xanthi carnivals are featured on the Greek National Tourism Organisation's official site, 'Visit Greece', the Kozani carnival is nowhere to be found.⁴ However, the event still attracts a significant number of visitors, which is vital for the local economy.⁵ In 2017, Kozani's local authorities launched the website *Kozanítiki Apokriá* (Kozani's Carnival), dedicated to the city's festivities (OAPN 2020). The site has the festival programme updated every year and features informative texts by the writer and playwright Matina Tsikritzi-Momtsiou. The application *Apokria GO!* was also released alongside this website, assisting visitors to navigate the maps of the city and find the location of each *fanos* (OAPN 2020).

4. More specifically, while 'Visit Greece' has dedicated stand-alone articles to both Patras' and Xanthi's carnivals (Visit Greece 2000 b and c), Kozani's carnival is not even mentioned in the more general article 'Carnival in Greece' (Visit Greece 2000a).

5. Although large-scale statistical research concerning carnival and tourism all over Greece is still to be undertaken, local and national newspapers have reported a major arrival of tourists in Kozani in the past few years during carnival season, reflected in the fully booked local hotels (Ziaba 2018 and Proinos Logos 2017).



Figure 3
The fanos Lakkous t' Maggan's headquarters

At first glance, Kozani's carnival may seem a rather closed space due to the extensive use of the Kozani dialect in its festivities. The dialect forms part of the ritual performance of songs around the festive fires and the theatrical productions staged both inside theatres and in open spaces, like *Some Like it Unlighted*. It also characterises the grand parade that takes place on the eve of the Lent. While local politicians, journalists, and an important part of the population use Modern Greek in their everyday lives, they switch to the exclusive use of the dialect during the carnival period. As a result, an external observer could argue that this rather 'traditional' carnival is an out of touch caricature of past customs. In order to argue in contrast that the Kozani carnival keeps up with current affairs, often by providing a satirical view, I follow Jane K. Cowan's observations in her study of the Sohos Carnival in Thessaloniki, another occasion that is considered to preserve a generations-old character. Cowan stresses the importance of studying folklore not merely in historical terms nor through the opposition between an event and its interpretation by scientific literature but rather through its dialectic relation to contemporary affairs as they are expressed on a local level (Cowan 1988: 246-247).

This insight holds true in relation to Kozani's carnival which, regardless of its century-old character, maintains a satirical outlook on current affairs. This can be spotted in the grand parade's floats, each year inspired by another ongoing hot topic, and in the theatrical plays' themes. Satire is also evident in the performance of some newly composed carnival songs such as the song *E9* which parodies the strict tax policy introduced by the Greek government after the financial crisis (Lakkas 2010: 150-151). Such satirical expressions often adopt a local perspective. Besides the smoking ban evoked in *Some Like it Unlighted*, plays performed during carnival season in 2019 and in 2020 parodied the downfall of the Public Power Corporation, DEI,⁶ the local authorities' inaction towards the city's rapidly growing stray-dog population, and the campaigns for the 2019 local elections.⁷

In 2012, during the grand parade, participants with the float of the *fanos Lakkous t' Maggan*' threw yoghurt at politicians attending (Pontiki 2012: para 1 of 5). Such gestures are common during carnival, often deemed a 'world upside down' by academic research (Burke 1978: 188) where both satire and scatological elements are welcome. The yoghurt-throwing act specifically should be interpreted within the context of the financial crisis of 2008 that inspired many literary texts, artistic interventions, and theoretical analyses (Lakka, Papadopoulos 2020: 566). The connection of the festivities in Kozani to current affairs demonstrates, amongst other things, that Kozani Greek is still undergoing the process of *mutability* (de Saussure 2016: 163), being shaped by its satire of present-day issues. For instance, the aforementioned newly composed carnival song *E9* gets its title from the term used to describe tax declaration in Greece, which becomes *dialectised* and is pronounced like 'épsilun iniá' instead of the Modern Greek pronunciation 'épsilon eniá' (Lakkas 2010: 150-151).

Kozani Greek is also used in some theatrical plays performed outside carnival season, whose themes are usually inspired by the city's history.

← 6. DEI coal power plants situated outside of Kozani are currently shutting down due to the process of decarbonisation introduced by the E.U..

← 7. For each of the events described, one can mention the following plays as respective examples: a) *Kozani, 2146: Sosti t' Sk'rka* (Kozani, 2146: Save Sk'rka), staged in 2019 during carnival season, saw the characters of a dystopian future, presented in a comical way, dedicate a religious ceremony to the no longer functioning DEI (Proinos Logos 2019c), b) *Archisan ta organa* (Time to Face the Music) performed by the *fanos* Aï-Dimitris in Kozani's central square during carnival season in 2019, parodied the candidates' campaigns for the local elections and satirised the local authorities' ignoring of stray dogs (Proinos Logos 2019a), and c) *I Tsitsiúla Dímarchos* (Mayor Tsitsiula), staged in 2019 during carnival season, was centred around the classic character Tsitsiula's decision to run for mayor. Tsitsiula, an old lady who only speaks in the dialect and has to deal with the rapid evolution of the modern world, is the *alter ego* of playwright Manolis Markopoulos, who, every year, stages another play to share Tsitsiula's new adventures, always connected to current affairs (Proinos Logos 2019b).



Figure 4
A lead singer



Figure 5
The *fanos Ai-Dimitris'* one-act play performed at the central square

One such play, Matina Tsikritzi-Momtsiou's *Daiáda* (Patience) (Dinas 2005ii: 343), staged in April 2019, was centred around the Nazis occupying the city in 1941, and the locals' reactions, including their hurrying to save the library's treasures. In an interview that I conducted with Tsikritzi-Momtsiou in September 2020,⁸ she argued that, while the play could have been performed during carnival season 'because there are some comical elements' (Tsikritzi-Momtsiou 2020), she 'felt like it would also be a bit out of context' (Tsikritzi-Momtsiou 2020). When the curtains fell and she saw people crying in the audience, she wondered whether 'it could have been performed amidst the carnival's phallic atmosphere' (Tsikritzi-Momtsiou 2020), deciding that 'after all, it's not the carnival's role to make people contemplate things' (Tsikritzi-Momtsiou 2020). An older example of a play performed in the Kozani dialect outside carnival season is Giorgos Pafilis' *Tu Nu* (The

Letter N), which was staged in May 2011 (City of Kozani 2011: para 1 of 4) and depicted the launch of the city's water supply network in the late 1930s, while the country was governed by the dictator Ioannis Metaxas (Clogg 2015: 164).

8. In both interviews conducted for this study, all protective measures against the spread of COVID-19 were taken.

Whilst Kozani Greek has been the subject of a small number of research works, most notably in dialectology and lexicography (Dinas 2005i: 30-32), its use in regard to performance has not yet been thoroughly examined. Studies focusing on the use of other Greek dialects⁹ in performance have failed to inspire such an analysis of Kozani Greek. This article aspires to undertake this task, with the hope of setting the tone for future publications on the matter. In order to study the

9. See, for instance, Patricia Fann's work on the Pontic theatre (Fann 1991 & 2002). In addition, Cretan Greek has been studied thoroughly in regard to the works of Nikos Kazantzakis, one of the most important Greek authors of the twentieth century, who famously used idioms from his native Cretan Greek in his own literary works and translations (Bien 1972: 28), often in regard to the construction of 'manhood' (Herzfeld 1985).

relationship between language and performance with regard to the Kozani dialect, I will examine how Kozani Greek is used in the carnival rituals and in Tsikritzi-Momtsiou's *Patience*.

Throughout this study, I used raw material that I filmed myself during carnival season in 2019 and 2020 in Kozani, as well as some photographs of the *fanos* ritual taken in 2013.¹⁰ The film footage includes the performance of carnival songs around the festive fire (Figures 6 and 8) and a part of *Some Like it Unlighted* (Figure 7). For the citation of carnival songs, I consulted Theodoros Lakkas' 2010 anthology *Ivgati agoria m' stou chouro* (Go Dance, my Boys), which is the most complete collection of the songs to date. The song *Iléfthira* (Freely), written in 2020, is cited on its own. When it comes to the theatrical play *Patience*, Matina Tsikritzi-Momtsiou kindly allowed me access to its final version (Tsikritzi-Momtsiou 2019). Finally, I conducted two interviews in September 2020, one with Theodoros Lakkas concerning carnival rituals (Lakkas 2020) and another with Matina Tsikritzi-Momtsiou about *Patience* (Tsikritzi-Momtsiou 2020). These interviews provided me with valuable information on how people who actively participate in the organisation and realisation of the festivities interpret their performative character in regard to the use of language.

10. All material was filmed before the cancellation of 2020 carnival festivities due to the COVID-19 pandemic.



Figure 6
Performance of a song in the *fanos Pigadi tou Kirmario*



Figure 7
The *fanos Ai-Dimitris*' one-act play performed at the central square

Kozani Greek at Home, Modern Greek or *Katharevousa* at School: What Kozani's Linguistic History Can Tell Us About its Carnival

Before examining the use of Kozani Greek in carnival rituals and in theatrical productions, I will provide a short outline of the city's history, intended to render the social and political context that shaped the dialect more accessible to the reader. After being under Ottoman Rule for four centuries, from 1453 up to 1830 (Clogg 2015: 405-406), Greece achieved its current geographical composition in 1947, with its northern part being incorporated into the Greek state after the First Balkan War in 1912-1913 (Clogg 2015: 119). The Greek Army entered Kozani on 11 October 1912, marking the city's official integration into the Greek State (Papakonstantinou 1992: 400). Issues regarding national identity emerged throughout Modern Greece's history, including the conflict between two varieties of Greek, *katharevousa*, literally meaning 'purifying language', and Demotic Greek (Mackridge 2004), which led to a long period of 'diglossia' or bilingualism (Herzfeld 2016: 20).

In addition to the primary 'language question', smaller debates emerged concerning regional dialects, frequently marking the behaviors of entire populations. For example, Riki van Boeschoten (2006: 348) examined the case of Slav-speaking villages in the region of Florina, whose

inhabitants were forced to adopt Modern Greek as their primary spoken language. Up until 1974, the year that marked the start of the period of the *Metapolitefsi* (Clogg 2015: 232) when Demotic Greek became the official language of education and administration (Mackridge 1985: 10), *katharevousa* and Demotic Greek alternated in the educational system (Mackridge 1985: 9-10). In regions like Kozani, this situation only contributed to a particular type of bilingualism or even trilingualism if a person experienced a change of official language during their school years, with children speaking Kozani Greek at home yet having to learn Demotic Greek or *katharevousa* at school, with no consideration of the dialect by the Greek state whatsoever.

Herzfeld notes how language has often functioned as a means to a 'social, political, and economic exclusion' in Greece (2016: 20) and introduces the term 'disemia', which 'contextualizes [language] as part of a semiotic continuum that includes silence, gesture, music, and the built environment, and economic, civic, and social values' (*ibid*: 20). The mindset associated with Kozani Greek may be considered to be quite particular, linked to irony, humour, and sarcasm (Dinas 2005i: 174). This emerges throughout both carnival festivities and theatrical productions in Kozani Greek, thus stressing the city's own disemia, not unrelated to the Greek state's forging of a national identity throughout the twentieth century.

A case of disemia is also to be found in the city's literary scene, which emerged during Ottoman Rule when Kozani experienced a period of economic, scientific, cultural, and literary growth in the eighteenth century (Papakonstantinou 1992: 43-50). At the time, local writers like Megdanis, Sakellarios, Perdikaris, Sakellariou, and Lassanis wrote in an erudite form of Modern Greek, completely distinct from the local dialect (Papakonstantinou 1992: 50-60). The city's liberation in 1912 contributed to the creation of a local intelligentsia whose works were written in either Demotic Greek or *katharevousa*. Panagiotis Lioufis,

Stavros Theodosiadis, and Konstantinos Tsitselikis were amongst these writers, with the occasional appearance of the Kozani dialect functioning as an indicator of a character's background. In the second half of the twentieth century, literary works in Kozani Greek started to appear with Nassis Alevras, Zenon Pitenis, and Leonidas Papasiopis, carving the way for a sometimes comical social realism depicted in the dialect. Nowadays, there are a number of local writers who cultivate the genre, amongst them Stratos Eliadelis, Theodora Kouziaki, Lazaros Kouziakis, Theodoros Lakkas, and Anna Repana.

A Ritual Space: the Performance of Carnival Songs in Kozani Greek Around the Festive Fire

The origins of Kozani's carnival have steered passionate debates amongst locals with some arguing that the rituals derive from the ancient Dionysian mysteries and others tracing them back into Byzantine festivals (Tsikritzi-Momtsiou 2000: 62-63). Even though it would be impossible to make the case for either of these hypotheses with certainty, the rituals do share a series of similarities with mysteries dedicated to the cult of Dionysus, including their execution in specific spots at night (Burkert 1985: 601), and their expressions of sexuality (Burkert 1985: 605). The consumption of wine is also central to Kozani's carnival. Multiple elements within the rituals suggest their century-old origins, the most important of which concerns their relation to nature. Taking place before the start of spring, the festivities strongly evoke the ideas of death and resurrection, which are also major themes in the Greek folk song

tradition (Saunier 2001: 24). Rituals to secure nature's annual renaissance existed throughout the ancient world and often included brutal practices as in the case of the Babylonian king who was stripped of his title, humiliated, and crowned again during New Year's celebrations (Burkert 1985: 472). Kozani's carnival rituals propose an inversion of hierarchy as well, with satire replacing violence.

Under Ottoman Rule, carnival festivities in Kozani were organised after New Year's Day, until two masked brothers got into a fight, and killed each other (Tsikritzi-Momtsiou 2000: 25). Tsitselikis wrote a fictionalised version of this tragic event (Tsitselikis 2020: 288-298). Ultimately, the Turkish authorities allowed Kozanites to celebrate before Lent (Tsikritzi-Momtsiou 2000: 27), while the carnival's modern-day form was shaped after the 1970s (Tsikritzi-Momtsiou 2000: 32-34). The carnival's inclusion in the local government's annual budget contributed to the introduction of new events, including the rally of the 'Sourd Games', a fun competition for children (Tsikritzi-Momtsiou 2000: 44), theatrical productions in the Kozani dialect (Tsikritzi-Momtsiou 2000: 46), and the enrichment of the grand parade (Tsikritzi-Momtsiou 2000: 51).

On the evening of their district's celebrations, members of each *fanos* dance their way to the central square, accompanied by the local philharmonic orchestra, Pandora, that performs orchestral songs of the region, most notably *Endeka*, 'Eleven' (Tsikritzi-Momtsiou 2000: 93-94; my translation).¹¹ Once there, they either sing one or two songs, or perform a short play, such as *Some Like it Unlighted*, before heading back to their district, inviting everyone to join them. The ritual can now begin: the festive fire is lit by a ritual torch, pre-placed at the centre of the circle to be formed (Figure 1), and the lead singer of the *fanos*, usually a man (Figure 4), sings the first verse of the song *Go Dance, my Boys* (Lakkas 2010: 32), inviting everyone to join the dance.¹²

¹¹. Pandora has been an essential part of the city's carnival festivities since the 1950s (Tani 2018: 145-146).

Gradually, a human circle is formed, with most members of the *fanos* standing out due to the fact that they are dressed up in traditional uniforms. These outfits are composed of an all-black ensemble composed of woolen shirts and trousers with a red woolen belt and a wooden crook, *glitsa*, for men and of long dresses with vests and necklaces worn under long coats for women (Figure 2). Since members of the *fanoi* visit one another's festivities, sometimes it happens that a lead singer is invited to sing one or two songs when visiting another district. In this case they wear everyday clothes since it is the *fanos* celebrating whose members need to stand out from the crowd (Figure 6).

← 12. This particular song originates from the corpus of Greek folk songs (Lakkas 2020). Researching the many existing variants of folk songs in different regions of Greece, Saunier stresses the important contribution of the singer, who has the power to bring a song closer to the needs of their audience, even though their authority is often questioned (Saunier 2001: 24).

All the *fanoi* follow a specific order in the songs' performance. First are sung the *kleftika*, a category dedicated to episodes from the 1821 Greek Revolution and, in particular, to the historical activity of the *klefts* (Herzfeld 1982: 61-62). Theodoros Lakkas (2020) notes that most of the *kleftika* are 'variations of Greek folk songs'. Immediately after come the love songs, followed by the satirical songs, which make up the largest category and are most often inspired by real incidents that took place in Kozani. The last category contains the *maskarlitka*, namely the 'obscene' songs (Dinas 2005ii: 280), which are usually performed after midnight.

The performance of these songs is very specific, as is their order, and successful communication between the singer and the audience is crucial for their message, be it satirical or explicitly obscene, to be heard. Since all songs are sung in Kozani Greek, a dialect many visitors are unfamiliar with, it is the movements of members of the *fanos* that allow for the lyrics to be properly understood. Sometimes they may interact with the visitors, perhaps showing them a song's particular choreography

or teasing them, while at other times small non-verbal theatrical acts will bring the lyrics of a song to life. I shall provide three examples of such acts in order to demonstrate how successful communication is carried out and how the carnival's satirical spirit is expressed. The first concerns a satirical love song, *I Shall Arrange a Marriage for You, My Daughter* (Lakkas 2010: 95-96; my translation), the second a satirical song, *I Passed From Where They Grow Broad Beans* (Lakkas 2010: 92-94; my translation), and the third the performance of some sexually explicit songs. As a general rule, the lead singer sings a verse that is repeated by both the members of the *fanos* and the audience, in two alternating motions, one including moving ahead and the other staying still and clapping. This repetitive motion accompanies all the songs, with certain exceptions. All songs are sung *a capella*.

I Shall Arrange a Marriage for You, My Daughter is a dialogue between a mother and daughter around marriage. Arranged marriages were common for young women when they came of age in Kozani, like elsewhere in Greece, up until the first years of the *Metapolitefsi*. The dowry prohibition in 1983 and the Greek feminist movement contributed to the gradual decay of the phenomenon (Clogg 2015: 251). The song is ideally sung by two people, who play the characters of the mother and the daughter respectively, or alternatively solely by the lead singer with a performance recreating the lyrics near the centre of the human circle. The mother presents to her daughter a list of potential suitors through their occupations and it is the other members' duty to show to the audience, through movement, what these occupations are. '*Bakaláki*' is the grocery store owner, so some members pretend to buy invisible stuff, while another writes down the sum and scratches their head, making the audience laugh and deem them not good enough for the bride to be. The character of the daughter theatrically pushes them away, while singing in the dialect '*No, my mother, I don't want him; I shall fall down and die*' (original: '*Óchi, mána m', den tun thélu, péftu kátu ki pithénu*'),

Lakkas 2010: 95; my translation). While the verbs in the first person would be pronounced with an [o] at their end, in the dialect it becomes an [u], hence turning ‘*péfto*’, meaning ‘I fall’, into ‘*péftu*’, and ‘*pethéno*’, meaning ‘I die’, into ‘*pithénu*’, [e] also becoming [i], due to vowel raising constructions observed in Kozani Greek (Dinas 2005i: 42-43). The character of the bride to be goes on to reject the following two suitors: ‘*barberáki*’, the barber, who is pushed away by the participants’ wooden crooks or *glitses* while pretending to cut a visitor’s hair and ‘*raftáki*’, the tailor, who is just taking measures for a dress when the daughter screams that he spends the entire night ‘eating flies’, ‘*míyis háfti*’, both words here also pronounced with vowel raising (Lakkas 2010: 96). At the end of the song, the daughter chooses the shepherd, ‘*giubanáki*’, because he is the most sexually active of them all. Members of the *fanos* who have worn bridal dresses over their traditional uniforms then lift them up so that the crowd can clearly see the plastic phalluses around their waists.

While the audience continues to engage in the ‘staying still and clapping’ and ‘moving ahead’ choreography during the performance of *I Shall Arrange a Marriage for You, My Daughter*, the next song requires another form of engagement. The lead singer brandishes their *glitsa* and starts singing:

Perasa ap' ta Bugdanià
ída póspirnan kukià
Éétsja jà ta éspirnan
Bugdaniótsis ta kukià

I passed from where they grow broad beans,
 saw them seeding broad beans,
 like this they seeded them,
 the women of Bougdania.
 (Lakkas 2010: 92; my translation)

The dialectal phrase ‘*éétsja jà*’ (Dinas 2005i: 74-75), meaning ‘like this’, is sung many times, each introducing a different action that the lead singer demonstrates to the people dancing in the circle in order for them to repeat along with the lyrics. The members’ wooden crooks, *glitses*, are essential in the representation of the actions described in the song to show how the women of Bougdania ‘*skálgan*’, ‘dug’, ‘*pótzan*’, ‘watered’, and ‘*mázunan*’, ‘picked up’, their broad bean crop (Lakkas 2010: 92-93). Even though all verbs are pronounced in Kozani Greek, as manifest in the vowel raising in ‘*mázunan*’ and the elision in ‘*skálgan*’ and ‘*pótzan*’, they are the same as in Modern Greek. Through the gestures and the lyrics that the spectators have to repeat, we learn that the women of Bougdania hulled, winnowed, sifted, baked, and ate their broad beans. For the final gesture the lead singer sits in a squat and makes an extremely pained expression. The crowd imitates them, waiting for the last action to be described, some amongst them already giggling. ‘Like that, they defecated them’, sings the lead singer with a sigh (Lakkas 2010: 94; my translation), and the crowd bursts into laughter. As Theodoros Lakkas notes, ‘it is the way the songs are performed that makes them intelligible’ (Lakkas 2020).

The third performance (Figure 8) that I will examine is made up of a medley of three different songs, combined together, and adapted to the needs of the audience. If one observes Figure 8, they will see how the *fanos*’ singers decide that they will address an obscene verse to women in the crowd, first to me, then to another woman. The verse sung to me is also adapted to the situation: the original one is ‘*ki isís pu mas tiráti, ta arhídia mas na fáti*’ (and all you, looking at us, eat our balls) (Lakkas 2010: 142; my translation), the verbs being sung in the second plural person. In my footage, the verb ‘*tiráte*’, a dialectal verb meaning ‘look’ (Dinas 2005ii: 502), which would be ‘*tirás*’ in the second singular person, becomes ‘*travás*’, a Modern Greek verb meaning ‘to film’ among other things, hence keeping the metrical rhythm but being adjusted to the situation, in a way that will provoke the crowd’s laughter.



Figure 8
Sexually explicit song in the *fanos Pigadi tou Kirmario*

Likewise, afterwards, one of the singers stands in front of another woman, and sings to her ‘*námun pláka stin avlí su na mi katurái tu mní su*’, which translates to ‘I wish I were a flagstone in your garden, so that your cunt would piss on me’ (Lakkas 2010: 142; my translation), while the other members of the *fanos* dance aggressively around the fire. The carnival’s explicitly satirical character is to be found in the themes of the *maskarlítka* songs, which often represent priests who have taken a chastity oath as men leading an exhaustive sex life. In the footage of Figure 8, the lead singer describes the sexual advice given to him by the ‘priest who eats ribs’, who encouraged them ‘to fuck them all’. As if the use of the dialect and the festive occasion facilitate the expression of sexuality and the construction of what Bakhtin calls ‘the grotesque body’ (1970: 36) — namely the abundant, essentially material body linked to the earth and to lower body functions — *maskarlítka* are only sung in Kozani Greek and, like all the other songs, only during carnival season.

Within this ritual, ephemeral space, every social and political structure, including the respected figure of the priest, is prone to satire, expressing the carnival’s mechanisms that overthrow all hierarchy. However, this ‘world upside down’, whose circular formation many members of the *fanos* are assigned to keep intact during the performance of their songs through yells, interjections like ‘*Oú*’, and brandishing their wooden crooks (Figure 1), only exists for a few minutes at a time since the songs are not performed non-stop. During intervals, the orchestra, Pandora, that follows every *fanos* back to their district on the night of their celebration, plays orchestral pieces accompanied by specific choreographies. One of them, known as *Pigeons*, sees the crowd imitate pigeons, lying on their knees, and jumping up each time the tune gets more lively. Most of the *fanoi* also have headquarters, which are usually near the spot where the *fanos* is lit, where visitors are welcome to try local delicacies and drink wine (Figure 3). At the same time, kiosks with free wine and cheese pies, *kichia*, are provided by the local authorities (Tsikritzi-Momtsiou 2000: 74).

As the third example shows, songs are not recited by heart, but can be slightly altered in order to adjust to their audience. This element explains the ritual’s persistence throughout the years since it stresses the festivities’ ability to adapt to the specific needs of each occasion. At the same time, this flexibility shows that Kozani Greek is still undergoing the process of evolution like every spoken language. In the case of the carnival songs, this evolution takes the form of more Modern Greek words being inserted into the dialect, such as the word ‘*travás*’ in the third example above. The more recently a song is composed, the more frequent this phenomenon is. In the song *Iléfhira* (Freely), written in 2020, we find the word ‘*filu*’, meaning ‘gender’, rendered dialectical via vowel raising. In Modern Greek, this same word is ‘*filo*’. The ritual of the *fanos* ends after the performance of the *maskarlítka* when the sacred fire is put out by the urine of the male members of each *fanos* (Tsikritzi-Momtsiou 2000: 67). Thus participants bid goodbye to the carnival’s *grotesque body* until the next year and welcome the period of Lent.

Patience: Between History and Language

Matina Tsikritzi-Momtsiou’s *Patience* is a theatrical play in five acts which attempts to reconstruct a period of Kozani’s history, namely the spring of 1941 when the Axis Occupation of Greece began (1941-1944, Clogg 2015: 410-411). Performed almost entirely in Kozani Greek, the play was staged in April 2019 to critical acclaim. As I will demonstrate now, *Patience*, despite its historical theme, remained quite contemporary in its criticism of war, corruption, and the patriarchy, therefore using the dialect in order to reflect upon structures that have affected the lives of the entire population. Writing the play, Tsikritzi-Momtsiou was fully aware that she needed to use the dialect in a way that would



Figure 9
Sexually explicit song in the *fanos Pigadi tou Kirmario*

lead to successful communication, noting that ‘the dialect, like all languages, is a living organism, always changing, always in motion’. Thus she decided not to attempt to recreate the way people would speak in 1941 but rather use the dialect’s contemporary form in order to make the play fully comprehensible to the audience. According to Tsikritzi-Momtsiou, ‘the most important thing is successful communication’ (Tsikritzi-Momtsiou 2020).

The play’s action opens in contemporary Kozani when a group of tourists arrive to the city and meet an elderly man, Thodoros, who plays cards with his friends at a local café. Thodoros speaks to them exclusively in the dialect but they are able to understand him. Their communication, however, is not always successful. For example, when the character of Amaryllis tells him her name, the old man thinks she is called ‘*Maroulis*’, ‘lettuce-like’ (Tsikritzi-Momtsiou 2019: 4). Thus, the comic element, ever-present in the dialectal theatre in Kozani, seems to characterise the beginning of the play. When the character of Thodoros starts narrating the story of his family, returning back to his childhood, the scene is transformed: the chairs and tables are taken away, the set of an old house appears, and characters dressed in 1940s fashion enter the stage, while radio broadcasts about the Greek Army’s successes on the Albanian front are heard (Clogg 2015: 168).

As the Nazis are ready to invade Greece, Annika, Thodoros’ mother, is ready to marry her daughter, Peristera, off to a wealthy family, even though she is in love with Nikolas. They all speak entirely in the dialect but certain terms are pronounced in Modern Greek. For example, Annika refers to the line of defence planned by the dictator Metaxas as ‘*i gramí Metaxá*’, instead of dialectising it into ‘*i gramí Mitaxá*’. The scene depicts the reality of arranged marriages, satirised in the carnival song *I Shall Arrange a Marriage For You, My Daughter* that I have already discussed. Peristera, unwilling to marry the man her mother has picked

for her, says that she wanted to become a teacher, ‘*na yénu daskála háliva*’, a phrase in which the term ‘*daskála*’, which means ‘teacher’, is not dialectised, hence showing the educational system’s influence on the dialect. She also argues that ‘things change’, ‘*alázn ta práymata*’, foreshadowing, in a way, the feminist movement’s action in Greece, which pressed for changes introduced in the Marriage Law of 1983 (Clogg 2015: 251).

The father of the family, Takis, is shown to share a friendship with the character of Stavros, the only real historical figure to appear in the play, corresponding to the writer and journalist Stavros Theodosiadis (Tsikritzi-Momtsiou 2020). Through this relationship the audience is informed of the librarian’s plan to protect the local library’s treasures from the Nazis by hiding some of them in a church’s crypt long considered to be haunted by the ‘*stxó t’ Ai-Lázar*’, the ‘ghost of Saint-Lazarus’ church’ (Papakonstantinou 1999: 64). While Stavros is shown to master both Demotic Greek and the *katharevousa*, he speaks in Kozani Greek with Kozanites, saying ‘*paénu st’ vivliothík*’, ‘I go to the library’, instead of ‘*piyéno sti vivliothíki*’, using both elision and vowel raising in his speech. The librarian, Nikos Delialis, does not appear as a character in the play, a choice Tsikritzi-Momtsiou explains by arguing that she ‘wanted to reflect upon the legend-like connotations of a real event’, before noting that, ‘after all, every civilisation needs its legends’ (Tsikritzi-Momtsiou 2020). While Stavros explains to Takis the plan to hide the rare manuscripts from the Nazis, a family of Serb refugees arrives, to whom they offer food and fresh water, evoking the present-day refugee crisis in Europe and the importance of solidarity.

The performance’s tone changes dramatically after many Kozanites leave their homes behind in order to go to the countryside for a few days out of fear that the Nazis will bomb the city. In reality a Luftwaffe air attack took place on 10 April 1941 (Papakonstantinou 1999:

56), destroying many buildings including the City Hall's second floor (Papakonstantinou 1999: 64). On stage, under the sounds of the bombing and with images of destroyed buildings projected in the background, the characters appear walking with whatever they could take with them, their clothes gradually appearing dirtier, their faces growing more worn out. Cries and desperate phrases in Kozani Greek are heard such as *'pán ta spítxa mas'* (we lost our houses) or *'aílí pxí apómnan písu'* (alas, those who stayed behind) (Tsikritzi-Momtsiou 2019: 23). A woman is killed by a bomb onstage. Her children kneel beside her, urging her to wake up, telling her that they have to flee the city, to no use. The central characters return to find their house ruined by the air attack. This is the first time that the word *'daiáda'*, the play's title, is heard. This word will be heard again when Annika's elder sons return from the Albanian front, one of them severely wounded. *'Daiáda'* expresses the tragedy of war, thus stressing the play's strong antiwar message.

Another contemporary issue showcased throughout the performance is that of the way that patriarchy shatters women's wants and ambitions. This is explored through the arch of Peristera's character who was forced to drop out of her education. Her mother, Annika, criticises her for acting *'man isi pídi'* (as if you were a boy). It is worth noting that the word *'pídi'*, which means 'child' in Modern Greek, is used in Kozani Greek to describe boys alone (Dinas 2005ii: 403), demonstrating the way patriarchal structures have persisted within the language. As the action progresses, Peristera grows more and more confident in herself, a change manifested through her movements and her tone: she speaks more loudly, her voice being clear and stable, and she expresses her feelings. After the bombing when her fiancé's family breaks off the arranged engagement due to her lack of *'náxti'* (dowry) (Dinas 2005ii: 335), Peristera shows her relief, declaring that she would not marry this man even if her family dragged her all the way to the church (Tsikritzi-Momtsiou 2019: 45). Thus the theme of arranged marriages, almost

always taking place at the expense of women's freedom of choice, re-emerges, recalling today's reality which, even though quite different from the one Peristera experiences, still sees women being harassed within the patriarchy. When Nikolas finally comes to ask for her hand, Peristera tells her parents that all she ever wished for was to live with a person able to understand her feelings and who would let her be (Tsikritzi-Momtsiou 2019: 50). While her speech does not manage to convince her family, her wounded brother intervenes in the dispute, talking about how the hardships of war have thrown them all inside a dark hole — *'más érksan s' éna lákkou'* (Tsikritzi-Momtsiou 2019: 50) — and how his sister and Nikolas' example is that of people ready to climb their way up towards the sun (Tsikritzi-Momtsiou 2019: 50). A Platonic-inspired metaphor thus evokes struggles that continue today concerning the need for equality, peace, and knowledge. Following this the family agrees to the union. At this point, the audience usually stands up, crying and applauding.

The final scene takes the action back to modern-day Kozani, the tables and chairs reappearing on stage. Thodoros cheerfully describes how Peristera ended up being an elected representative at the local council and how Nikolas 'handed out ballots', *'mírazin psifuðéltia'* (Tsikritzi-Momtsiou 2019: 52), hinting that none of them managed to get any closer to the symbolic sun, but rather settled for money and glory. The play ends when Thodoros' grandson, Thodoris, comes looking for him and urges him to get back home for lunch by saying in English 'Let's go' (Tsikritzi-Momtsiou 2019: 55). His grandfather asks him to repeat the phrase in Kozani Greek and the boy joyfully says *'vzn'*, an interjection with the same meaning as 'Let's go'. The old man comments: 'That's right! *Vzn!* Some things change, okay, but we can't transform them entirely' (Tsikritzi-Momtsiou 2019: 55; my translation). The curtains drop as they walk offstage, to the crowd's applause.

Conclusion

This article has studied two cultural performances carried out entirely in Kozani's local dialect with a dual aim: firstly, to introduce the city's carnival rituals and theatrical productions as a phenomenon worthy of observation and analysis in contemporary scholarship dedicated to performance and language, and, secondly, to explain the Kozanites' need to use the dialect during the two quite specific occasions of the carnival season and plays staged in Kozani Greek. In order to successfully meet the two objectives of this study, I have examined both occasions through the detailed observation and analysis of examples with regard to the use of the dialect.

Throughout carnival season, Kozani Greek is used in all of the festivities. The close examination of the short one-act play *Some Like it Unlighted* and the way that carnival song lyrics are adjusted to the needs of the moment, as well as consideration of the fact that new songs are being written, reveals a strong two-way relation between the carnival festivities and the current social and political landscape. Furthermore, it underlines the fact that Kozani Greek, even though not widely spoken by the local population, is still undergoing the evolutionary process of every language by being constantly transformed through its speakers' choices.

Analysis of Matina Tsikritzi-Momtsiou's *Patience* exhibits analogous findings, with the dialect functioning as a means to a present-day criticism of the patriarchy and to carry a message in favour of peace and solidarity. The characters' family stories and struggles during a period so dark as the one of the Axis Occupation are viewed through the narration of Thodoros, an old man remembering his childhood, therefore bringing forth the contemporary use of the dialect by older generations.

However, the play's success, as well as its final scene, seem to confirm the same fact that was observed in the carnival rituals, namely that Kozani Greek is still evolving.

As both these examples demonstrate, performance seems to justify the use of the dialect. For a region whose bilingualism was never taken into account by the government in its implementation of educational reforms and constant efforts to construct a national identity, the linguistic prejudice often expressed against Kozani Greek (Lakka 2018) seems to be put on hold during these performative occasions when the dialect is allowed to dominate cultural and social life. In such moments, Kozani Greek seems to be employed in order to defy time and space, leaving behind homogenous national narratives that have repressed dialects and rather stressing its own worldview that is both humorous and contemplative.



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Maapoo Teatro

Dramaturgies of Decolonisation

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Since March 2007, Kati Röttger has been professor and chair of the Institute of Theatre Studies at the University of Amsterdam. She completed her doctoral studies concerning Collective Creation in the New Colombian Theatre at the Freie Universität Berlin in Germany. Until 1998, she was appointed as postdoc in a research cluster entitled *Gender-Difference and Literature* at the Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München (Germany) where she conducted research on postcolonial theatre of women in Latin America. (See: H. Adler, K. Röttger (eds.). *Performance, Pathos, Política de los Sexos. Teatro Postcolonial de Autoras Latinoamericanas* (1999)). In 1998, she was appointed at the Johannes Gutenberg Universität Mainz (Germany) as Assistant Professor where she delivered a 'Habilitation' about *Theatre as a Medium of Vision*. Her current research topics include International Dramaturgy and Technologies of Spectacle.

KEYWORDS

Collective creation, decolonial epistemology and aesthetics, transdisciplinary artistic laboratory, docufiction, Colombia

SCHLÜSSELWÖRTER

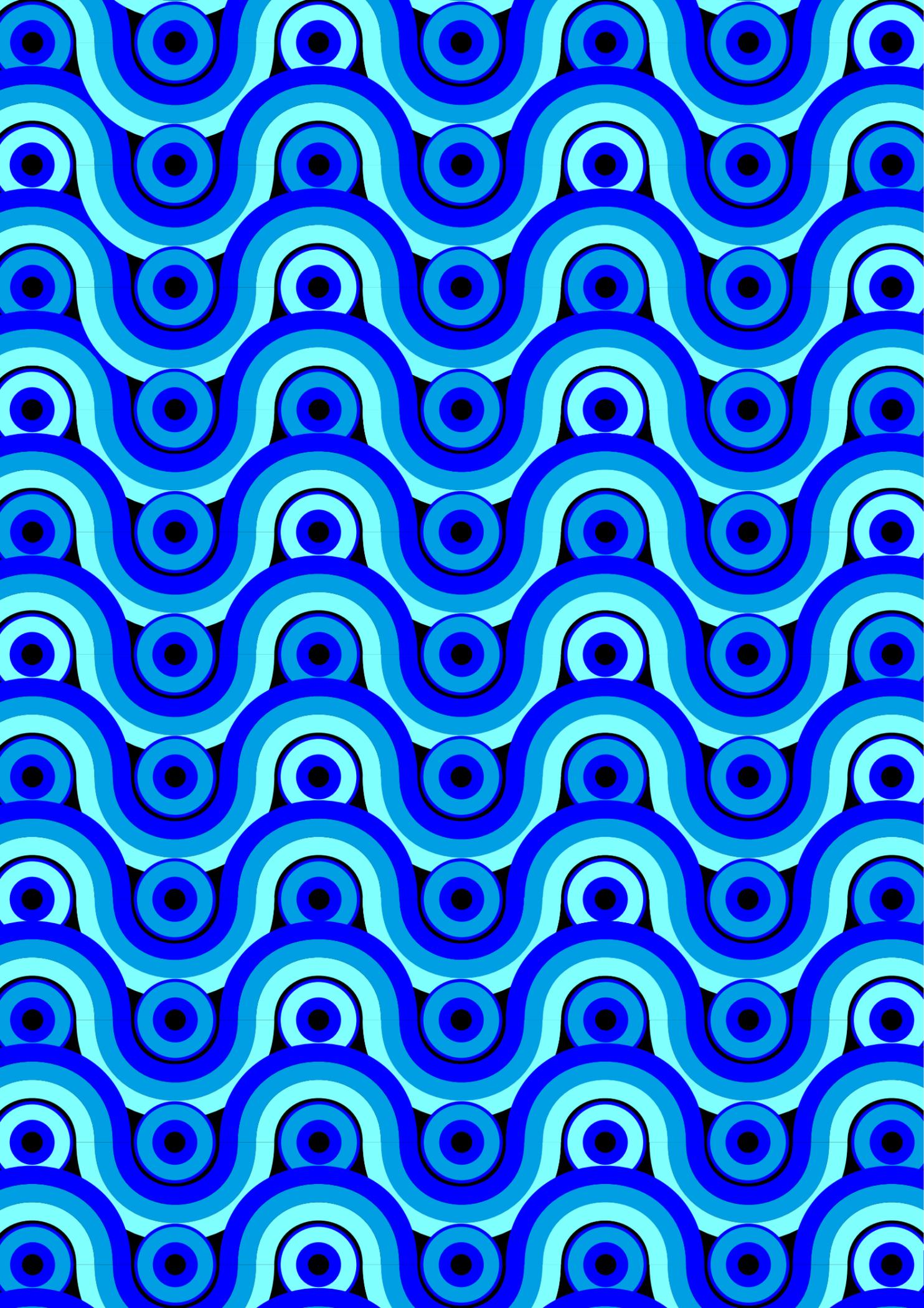
Kollektive Theaterarbeit, dekoloniale Epistemologie und Ästhetik, transdisziplinäres künstlerisches Labor, Dokufiktion, Kolumbien

Summary

This article explores the hybrid, transdisciplinary, and docufictional aesthetics of Mapa Teatro's theatrical work by discussing the theatre project *Anatomía de la Violencia en Colombia* (2010-2014), with a special focus on the performance *Los Incontados: un tríptico* (2014). It will demonstrate that the specific aesthetics of Mapa Teatro's work cannot be seen isolated from the legacy of Colombian theatre and performance history. The claim is put forward that Mapa Teatro transforms the lines of dramaturgies of decolonisation that can be traced back to previous epochs of Colombian theatre since the 1960s which was deeply concerned with the violent Colombian reality. Against the background of (Latin American) theories of decolonisation, it will become apparent that the theatrical language that the group has developed is closely related to (post)colonial intellectual history and to artistic traditions that are marked by violent frictions between global and local points of view.

Zusammenfassung

Der vorliegende Beitrag untersucht die hybride, transdisziplinäre und dokufiktionale Ästhetik von Mapa Teatro am Beispiel des Theaterprojekts *Anatomía de la Violencia en Colombia* (2010-2014) mit besonderem Fokus auf die Inszenierung *Los Incontados: un tríptico* (2014). Es wird dargelegt, dass Mapa Teatro Dramaturgien der Dekolonisierung transformiert, die sich bis in die 1960er Jahre zurückverfolgen lassen. Vor dem Hintergrund einer Auseinandersetzung mit (lateinamerikanischen) Theorien der Dekolonisierung wird aufgezeigt, dass die besondere theatralische Sprache der Gruppe im Zeichen einer (post)kolonialen intellektuellen Geschichte und künstlerischen Tradition steht, die von den gewaltvollen Spannungen zwischen lokalen und globalen Perspektiven geprägt ist.



Introduction

In recent times, the work of the Colombian theatre group Mapa Teatro has gained considerable attention from European scholars of Theatre and Performance Studies. This growing interest resonates with the experimental, multifaceted, and politically concerned character of Mapa Teatro's aesthetics that critically engages with dominant practices of performative arts. The group commonly works in what they call their transdisciplinary artistic laboratory. In that sense, the name of the group is emblematic of their intentions. Connotating 'the cartography of theatre', this name suggests the mapping of the limits of theatre that defines their work. In what they call operations of *pensamiento-montaje* (thought-montage) they create migratory spaces where myth, history, and actuality are replaced again and again, mixing up the artistic languages of theatre, opera, cabaret, radio, installation, urban intervention, documentary theatre, and lecture performances. While their work focuses closely on the reality of violence in Colombia and seeks to detect

hidden narratives relating to this, at the same time Mapa Teatro are interested in cultural translations and transpositions of Western sources such as Greek mythologies or the texts of playwrights like Heiner Müller, Samuel Beckett or Sarah Kane into their hybrid theatrical language.

Against this background, Mapa Teatro have been praised for creating an ‘imaginary which dwells in a space of excesses, [...] a wave of multiplicities’ (Palladini 2018: 661, my translation). Such commendation may be seen to stem from the group’s dramaturgy of pasticcio, a combination of diverse elements extracted from their original contexts, which resists mimesis (Villegas 2019). Also of significance is their ‘attempt to denaturalize Western conceptions of historical time as empty and universal, demonstrating the performativity of the boundaries between the past, the present, and the future’, as Malgorzata Sugiera claimed in 2019 in a lecture on *Speculative Fabulations in Decolonial History Writings* (Amsterdam, September, 12).

All these scholars rightly stress the relevance of Mapa Teatro’s unconventional approach to theatrical languages and history. The group tends to reimagine the past by working across temporalities and creating space-time constellations that resist a coherent narrative. While their cross-disciplinary work has generally been assessed from a transhistorical perspective, I want to demonstrate that the specific aesthetics of Mapa Teatro’s work cannot be seen isolated from the legacy of Colombian theatre history since the 1960s. In doing so, I will claim that Mapa Teatro conducts what I would call ‘dramaturgies of decolonisation’ that can be traced back to previous epochs of collective Colombian theatre, which was deeply concerned with the violent Colombian reality. The notion of dramaturgy here refers to the literal meaning of the word: working on actions (Georgelou et al 2017) at the ‘precarious threshold’ where the public sphere and artistic creation necessarily meet to constitute performances as communal events’ (Röttger 2014: 184, 197).

The mobilization of the perspective of decolonisation is informed by a specific need to contextualise the dramaturgies of Mapa Teatro in an epistemic location where the structures of the relationship between colonial power and knowledge may be considered. In the words of Ramón Grosfoguel this means to take into account that ‘all knowledges are epistemically located in the dominant or the subaltern side of the power relations and that this is related to the geo- and body-politics of knowledge’ (2011, no page numbers).

By analysing the performance *Los Incontados: un tríptico* (2014) which is part of the project *Anatomía de la Violencia en Colombia* (2010-2014), I will explore the deep involvement of Mapa Teatro’s work in the violent (post) colonial history of Colombia and its dramaturgical legacy. It will become apparent that the theatrical language that the group has developed is related to a (post)colonial intellectual history and artistic tradition that is marked by the friction between global and local points of view. As such the work of Mapa Teatro has to be understood as a critical intervention in the world of global performance arts from a decolonial perspective. In this sense Mapa Teatro is exemplary of the various ways in which performance always operates on the microlevel of concrete practices as well as in dialogue with the macrolevel of larger socio-political and cultural contexts. This article contributes to the move across discourses and practices in a globalised world, bringing in critical perspectives which open up a broader canon of references for Performance Studies, as such taking ‘seriously the epistemic perspectives/ cosmologies/ insights of critical thinkers [and theatre practitioners] from the Global South’¹ (Grosfoguel 2011).

1. The Global South is a notion defined by the unequal global economic and political North-South divide (Therien 1999).

Mapping the work of Mapa Teatro?

Mapa Teatro was founded in 1984 in Paris by the siblings Heidi, Rolf, and Elizabeth Abderhalden Cortés. Of dual Swiss and Colombian origin, they were raised in Colombia and trained in Europe where they each developed their personal approach through corporeal techniques (Rolf for instance was a student of Jacques Lecoq, through whom he met William Kentridge) as well as through dramaturgy and the visual arts. In 1986 Heidi and Rolf transferred their theatre residence to Bogotá. There they established their transdisciplinary artistic laboratory and from that moment on they started to create temporary communities and to interact with different local actors in site-specific projects. They always use a particular question as a point of departure, generating a central topic that allows them to merge micro-politics and poetics as well as local and global points of view by means of multiform visual and auditive dramaturgies. A telling example of their specific dramaturgical strategies and performative language is the project *C'undua*, realised between 2001 and 2005 in Bogotá. This project illustrates the extent to which the work of the group is clearly linked to and departs from concrete local and political concerns arising from precarious realities in Colombia. Here Mapa Teatro develop a local docufictional theatrical language that is at the same time informed by aesthetic means reaching out to a global repertoire of stories, art forms, and media.

C'undua started from the concrete local problem of gentrification in Bogotá. In 1998 the city government took the radical decision to destroy the old neighbourhood of Santa Inés to transform it into a recreation park. This was seen by many as posing devastating consequences for social life in the centre of the city. According to Rolf Abderhalden Cortés

(2010: 295), Santa Inés, generally called *El Cartucho* (the cartridge), was a stigmatised place, loaded with a long and rich urban history and full of mythologies for anyone in the city. When he was a child living in the prosperous and faraway Northern district of the town, *El Cartucho* sounded to Rolf Abderhalden like a space of anxiousness, *un centro de terror*, causing all kinds of fantasies:

With the decision taken in 1998 to destroy this place completely, to make a *tabula rasa* in order to construct instead a park, a hole covered by green, they brought to an end a part of our history, of our social and urban history which is, definitely, a history of a way of doing, of unknown social practices, of irreplaceable histories of life, of unequalled histories of survival. Finally, a history of a local singularity becoming, by disappearing, a non-place, homogenous and global (Abderhalden-Cortés: 295-296, my translation).

To confront this space of conflict between local (social) and global (economic) interests, Mapa Teatro took several important dramaturgical decisions: they worked on the (devastated) memory of that place, on local and global mythology and narrative, and they worked closely together with those who had been living there. The title of the project recalls this approach. In the Arhuaca mythology of the Sierra Nevada in Colombia, *C'undua* is the name of the mythical space where everybody is transferred after death. Letting the destroyed place speak as a graveyard, Mapa Teatro transformed it together with former inhabitants into a new *escenario de lo real* (scenario of the real). When they started in 2001, they had already been confronted with the total devastation of this space, a space where an utterly mixed group of people developed their own way of life surrounding an *economía de rebúsque* or economy of the black market and clandestine employment. These people were, for example, recyclers, barkeepers, dealers, prostitutes, and also families. Mapa Teatro decided to start from the former residents' funda-

mental memories of the place and to combine these with the myth of Prometheus. Why myth? According to Rolf Abderhalden, myth engenders narratives that return like dreams in a continuous movement of configuration and reconfiguration of significations. Interwoven with the narratives of the former inhabitants, myths served as a substantial part of the architecture of the memory of the *barrio*. The two together, the time of mythology and the space of memory, were meant to form a kind of resistance against oblivion, leaving a trace in the ruins.

In the period between 2001 and 2005, Mapa Teatro developed various projects closely following the process of the ongoing demolition of the neighbourhood, while the construction of the park (*Parque del Tercer Milenio*) started simultaneously. The project finished when the park was inaugurated in 2005. This may be seen as a cynical footnote that exemplifies the conflict between the local interest of the community and government ambitions for a global reach of the area. The park won the award for the best project in a public space during the Biennial of Architecture in Colombia in 2016, something that Mapa Teatro say was an award for a graveyard (Abderhalden Cortés 2010: 302).

In four disparate works that constituted a project entitled *Proyecto Prometeo*, Mapa Teatro gathered testimonies and memories to create a multiplicity of traces consisting of performative acts, archives, and expositions of different kinds. Combining social and artistic research, they approached a small representative group of the heterogeneous *Cartucho* community and formed what they called a *comunidad experimental* (experimental community). In the course of the first year of this project in 2001, Mapa Teatro conducted a *laboratorio del imaginario social* (laboratory of social imagination) together with this community, using Heiner Müller's text *Befreiung des Prometheus* (Liberation of Prometheus) as a departure point. The choice for this text was triggered by the contradictory turn which Müller had implemented into the myth

wherein Heracles finally appears to liberate Prometheus, who in his turn is no longer sure if he wants to be liberated. Here Prometheus does not know if he will be able to live without the eagle that was eating his liver day by day. He fears liberty more than the bird. This contradictory image resonated with the experience of the former inhabitants of *El Cartucho* living in between liberation and banishment. As such, Müller's text served as a ready-made to start the laboratorial work. The text was allowed to be used by the participants as a decontextualised object for the sake of resignification. Everybody involved reinvented their own story, re-actualising the myth by filling it in with their own experiences, lectures, gestures, and visions. All this collectively gathered material was presented during one night in December 2002 within the half-demolished neighbourhood as the play *Prometeo: Ier acto*. Called an *instala-acción*, the stories, sounds, and gestures produced in the laboratory came to life in the presence of an audience composed of former inhabitants of the neighbourhood and people from other parts of the city (Abderhalden-Cortés 2010: 298).

One year later, in December 2003, Mapa Teatro presented the second part of the same project, entitled *Prometeo: 2º acto*. This time, they had worked in a different way. On the ruins of the neighbourhood, they used thousands of bedside lamps to demarcate the streets and walls of some houses of the former inhabitants. Due to the total lack of traces of the former inhabitants living there, they had asked the participants to define the most crucial place in their house and to bring pieces of furniture or related objects for a temporal reconstruction of the *barrio*. During the night, small individual and collective actions alternated with video projections on big screens. The project ended with old inhabitants and participants dancing on the ruins.



Proyecto Prometeo, Act 2
© Mauricio Esguerra / Mapa Teatro

The third part of this project took place in the theatre of Mapa Teatro, which physically served as an installation in itself and a kind of a metaphor of the disappeared *barrio*. This was achieved by using every room and every corner of the theatre for different acts of remembering. The fourth part of the project, starting in 2004, was realised at two different places at the same time: in a part of Santa Inés and in the Museum of Modern Art in Bogotá. The title of this project again referred back to the myth of Heracles: *La limpieza de los establos de Augias* (The cleanliness of the stables of Augeas). With this last project, Mapa Teatro managed to create a remarkable movement of coming and going, a continuous transfer between the original, material space of the project, Santa Inés or *El Cartucho*, and the museum as a space of public significance for the dissemination of images. To achieve this the group worked on the basis

of a huge video-sound-installation that enabled them to cross temporalities and spaces, moving in between the construction space and the museum and providing perspectives from inside and outside the construction site. On one side of an enclosing fence they installed twelve television monitors which transmitted the images of the demolition of the last building of *El Cartucho* on a loop. In front of these ‘windows to the past’ they placed three pillows with integrated cameras inside. The footage from these cameras was directly transmitted to the museum where the images were projected in real size onto a wall. Another camera was installed on the terrace of the only building that had remained preserved. This camera filmed — also in real time — the process of the construction of the park that had been kept invisible from the citizens of Bogotá. In this way, images from the past, present, and future were



merged, creating heterogeneous time-layers. Simultaneously, the project created a disparate movement of people. Former inhabitants and workers visited the Museum of Modern Arts for the first time in their lives whilst regular visitors of the museum went for the first time to the neighbourhood of Santa Inés. Against all expectations, the cameras on the pillars remained intact until the end of the exhibition. According to Rolf Abderhalden, it was remarkable that the community valued the images created more than the expensive objects of the cameras themselves. The symbolic necessity for memory outweighed economic needs.

In their very last project in *El Cartucho*, called *Testigo de las ruinas* (Witness of the ruins), Mapa Teatro reflected on their own role as artists being at the same time witnesses. Once more the group shared their concern with those who were directly affected by the process of demolition. They invited the very last inhabitant to intervene with an act of farewell and she did what she had always been doing at that place: prepare *arepas* and chocolate milk. Performed as an act of resistance against oblivion, Mapa Teatro assisted this act by creating four displays wherein they documented the images, stories, and testimonies of the destruction process and the transformation of the former neighbourhood into the non-place of the Tercer Milenio Park. The specific dramaturgy of this project started from concrete local concerns and communities, detecting and documenting a silenced (living) history and performing it by using diverse aesthetic means. At the same time, the project was informed by a huge variety of elements of Western repertoire. Through this dramaturgical strategy Mapa Teatro translated the history of *El Cartucho* into a hybrid, transdisciplinary, and docufictional political theatrical language.

The company has applied the same strategy to work with the classical Western genre of opera. In 2014 they staged the opera *Orfeo Chaman* in Bogotá. This work was created together with the European ensemble

for Early Modern music, L'Arpeggiata, led by the Austrian harpist and conductor Christina Puhar: 'An ensemble where opera singers and singers of traditional and folk repertoire, have worked, with enough talent to turn their style and staging, into evidence of a time where creative curiosity does not admit limits' (Mapa Teatro, 2020a1). Departing, once again, from a Greek myth — this time Orpheus — Mapa Teatro combined Western music, ancient Greek, and Amerindian mythology alongside various kinds of narratives from the entire Latin-American continent that are, at first sight, incompatible. For example, an important character in *Orfeo Chaman* is Nahual, Orfeo's jaguar-double who guides him through his ayahuasca ritual to be able to communicate with spirits. However, as a novice, Orfeo was not properly the shaman but rather just undergoing treatment — as more and more tourists do in the Amazon region today. 'This dramaturgical method', the music scholar Daniel

Villegas claims in a forthcoming text, 'references a violent reality without representing it, as the actual challenges of Colombia's indigenous population — destruction of their territories for extractive projects and cocaine production, accompanied with the murder of their social leaders — continue behind the denials of the right-wing presidency again in power'.²

2. I am quoting here a manuscript of a lecture which Daniel Villegas Velez presented in September 2019 in our International Dramaturgy course at the University of Amsterdam: *Orpheus in Latin America: Universality, Mimetology, and Myth*, p.27.

Villegas describes the hybrid, multifaceted theatrical language of Mapa Teatro as a 'certain operation involved in the pasticcio as a form' (2019: 27), referring to the practice of merging fragments out of diverse art works into one new form. I would like to explore to what extent it is justified to discuss the work of Mapa Teatro in the context of aesthetics and dramaturgies of decolonisation. Far from simply trying to label their work with a notion that has recently been broadly discussed and used in Western cultural and political debates, I intend to contextualise the theatrical work of Mapa Teatro in the broader context of a long legacy of decolonial practices in Latin America and specifically Colombia. From this perspective Mapa Teatro do not represent an isolated phenomenon. Their theatrical work needs to be located in the Colombian theatre landscape. Although they have developed a radically idiosyncratic theatre language compared to the form of political theatre developed in the 1970s, they share an engagement with the anatomy of colonial violence and its (untold) histories. Since the 1970s, several theatre groups like La Candelaria, Teatro Libre, or Teatro Experimental de Cali have worked successfully using the method of *creación colectiva* that they developed in the course of a movement called *Nuevo Teatro Colombiano* (Röttger 1992).³ This movement came about in the 1960s from a specific urgency to fight against dependency and for liberation. One of the pioneers, the director of Teatro Experimental de Cali, Enrique Buenaventura (who had also been trained in Paris), was directly inspired by decolonial perspectives brought forward by philosophers and cultural theoreticians such as the pan-Africanist and black American sociologist William Edward Burghardt Du Bois and the

3. For material concerning similar theatre movements across Latin America, one might turn to the writing of Beatriz Rizk (1987).

Martinique-born psychiatrist Frantz Fanon. These thinkers described the effects of coloniality as an operation of tearing or ripping, producing a 'wound in the being' by violent acts which dislocate territories, bodies, memories, and knowledges. Such authors described the cruel, paradoxical situation of being colonised while at the same time not being recognised as colonised. W.E.B. Du Bois for instance introduced the term of second-sight, to describe this peculiar situation for the black American:

The Negro is [...] gifted with second-sight in this American world, — a world which only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness, — an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder (1997 [1903]: 38).

Frantz Fanon, a pupil of the Afro-Caribbean poet and politician Aimée Césaire, described the violent logics of colonialism with the apocalyptic words: 'For the black man there is only one destiny. And it is white' (1986:12). Homi Bhabha echoes this painful dilemma in this introduction to Fanon's book *Black Skin, White Masks* in the following way:

His voice is most clearly heard in the subversive turn of a familiar term, in the silence of a sudden rupture: "The Negro is not. Any more than the white man." The awkward division that breaks his line of thought keeps alive the dramatic and enigmatic sense of the process of change. That familiar alignment of colonial subjects — Black/White, Self/Other — is disturbed with one brief pause and all the traditional grounds of racial identity are dispersed, whenever they are found to rest in the narcissistic myths of Negritude or White cul-

tural supremacy. [...] [T]he very place of identification, caught in the tension of demand and desire, is a space of splitting. The fantasy of the native is precisely to occupy the master's place while keeping his place in the slave's *avenging* anger. 'Black skin white masks' is not a neat division; it is a doubling, dissembling image of being in at least two places at once which makes it impossible for the devalued to accept the colonizer's invitation to identity: 'You're a doctor, a writer, a student, you're different you're one of us.' It is precisely in that ambivalent use of 'different' — to be different from those that are different makes you the same. [...] It is not the Colonialist Self or the Colonized Other, but the disturbing distance in between that constitutes the figure of colonial otherness (1986: IX and XVI).

I am quoting Homi Bhabha quite extensively here because his analysis provides striking evidence of Fanon's influence on the core assumptions of postcolonial critique. Bhabha turned the division and displacement that is defined as the space of splitting of the colonised subject into a productive force by coining the term 'third space' (1994: 36). This term refers to a hybrid that is radically heterogeneous and discontinuous, inviting the I and the You to navigate in this third in-between space, which can neither be reduced to self nor to other, nor to the colonised or the coloniser. The third space is moreover a space where notions of space and time can no longer be conceived as homogenous or self-contained.

Parallel to the rise of postcolonial critique at Anglo-American universities, scholars in Latin America have developed a political-intellectual project enabling them to learn from and think together with Latin American realities and actors (Walsh: 31). Here they seek to outline decolonial approaches springing from their own local-global histories. They claimed the construction of the so-called Latin American paradigm of peripheric postmodernism *avant la lettre*. Postmodern concepts like discontinuousness, fragmentation, citation, and heterogeneity

are here seen as in fact deeply imbedded in the paradoxical colonial experience (Richard 1989, Dussel 1993). From this perspective, decolonisation is to be understood as a project of alter-epistemology. Zulma Palermo was one of the first who called for a decolonisation of knowledge against 'epistemological violence' (2010: 81) — a silent form of intellectual 'genocide' engendered by the European colonial legacy of the hegemony of knowledge. That is to say a binary knowledge that can be traced back to the conquest of the Americas and the coloniality of power (Quijano 1999) as the 'darker side of modernity' (Mignolo 2009: 39-55) and globalisation. This revision of the constitution of modernity was brought forward with the foundation of the Modernity/Coloniality/Decoloniality Project in Bogotá (Escobar 2005), uniting a large number of Latin American professionals from different disciplines. It projects a decolonial thinking that implies an 'epistemic and political disobedience that consists of *the appropriation of European modernity while dwelling in the house of coloniality*' (Mignolo 2009: 45, italics mine). With the establishment of the *Grupo de Estéticas* in 2009 in Bogotá, a focus on decolonial aesthetics was added to the project. This group argues that Western European aesthetics since the 18th century have configured a canon of normativity which has classically rejected embodied forms of sensing and perceiving and popular forms of art and culture. By incorporating these normative aesthetics as a key hegemonic concept in the colonial matrix of power, popular forms of artistic expression have been subjugated and colonised subjects have been forced to imitate the Western canon. 'Decolonial aesthetics', consequently, has been conceived as a

double trajectory, that of the artist who is no longer creating on the principle of imitation [...] and that of a set of conceptual, theoretical discourses that on the one hand provide decolonial readings of canonical Western aesthetics (modern, postmodern, alter-modern) and, on the other hand provide, together with artists who are themselves theoreticians and conceptualizers [...] the prospec-

tive trajectories of decolonizing being and decolonizing knowledge
(Mignolo and Vazquez 2013:13).

Appearing *in between* modernity and coloniality, decolonial aesthetics seek the re-existence of popular culture and arts through everyday aesthetic practices and senses, alongside being a critical intervention within the world of contemporary arts. Its central claim is that '(d)ecolonial aesthetics departs from an embodied consciousness of the colonial wound and moves towards healing' (Mignolo and Vazquez 2013: 6). This happens through the unveiling of the wound by making it visible and tangible, by giving the 'scream' a voice. This embodied consciousness of the colonial wound reveals the true anatomy of violence intrinsic to the specific entanglement of modernity and coloniality in Latin America: the physical violence of elimination, the economic violence of exploitation, the epistemic violence of naming, and the aesthetic violence of normative values. Decolonial aesthetics prepare the ground for what some writers call the *hacer decolonial* (Órtiz Ocaña/Arias López 2019; Gómez Moreno 2017) — a decolonial 'doing' that invents and searches for critical, hybrid ways of thinking and making art from the perspective of the subaltern. This implies 'making visible decolonial subjectivities at the confluence of popular practices of re-existence, artistic installations, theatrical and musical performances, literature and poetry, sculpture and other visual arts' (Mignolo and Vazquez 2013: 2). This claim goes back to the central legacy of the Latin American social movements which emerged in the 1960s and 1970s. Inspired by the liberation theology of leftist Latin-American theologians like Leonardo Boff and Marxist theories of dependency contesting exploitation and claiming liberation (Dussel 1977), decolonial aesthetics assert the agency of popular cultures in fighting for independence against colonial and hegemonic powers (Walsh 2018: 16).

The 1960s: The rise of collective creation in Colombia

El Nuevo Teatro Colombiano (The New Colombian theatre) was founded in 1969. One of its most important concerns was to undo mimesis.

If colonial conditions meant being forced into mimesis and being rejected

whilst practicing it, negating mimesis was seen as a potential way out of this bind. What did that mean particularly for the theatre? Theatre as a genre in itself had been violently implanted into the cultural life of the inhabitants of Latin America, having been imposed by the Spanish conquistadors to convert the indigenous people to Christianity. Theatre history in Colombia until the 1960s may be seen as a history of imported or imitated theatre and drama from Europe.⁴

4. For the complex history concerning the relationship between dominating traditions of European theater and the extensive performance traditions of Amerindian and African populations that partly survived through popular festivities and rituals, see Diana Taylor and Sarah J. Townsend 2008: 1-28.

If theatre in Colombia were to overcome the imitation of European theatre, Enrique Buenaventura concluded, it had to confront the drama of violence and the violence of drama that dominated the colonised continent (Taylor 1991). Consequently, the Colombian theatre movement at the end of the 1960s took some radical decisions. Rather than obliging artists to go back to their origins or to deny the violent Christian European acculturation, the complicated entanglement of modernity and colonialism triggered Colombian theatre-makers to use Western theatre techniques to perform the Colombian reality. These theatre-makers transformed the traditional system of creation into *creación colectiva*, going against the hierarchy of the literary text and the social

stratification of separated artistic roles — such as playwright, director, and so on. Instead of staging European or North American drama texts, theatre groups started doing research on defined social problems in certain Colombian communities or across the country, for instance by doing fieldwork concerning the operations of drugs mafias in the countryside. Having gathered documentary material, these theatre-makers started to improvise using narratives, testimonies, documents, and music from a certain region or social group. Theatrical scenes and images were composed from this material which in their turn were combined and edited into performance. Interaction with the audience was a crucial element in this process of researching and performing Colombian realities. These theatre-makers often stayed with those whose testimonies and stories they were collecting, later returning to these communities to present their performances and discuss necessary changes. In this way they created performances within open processes that allowed them ‘to reach a quality of the unknown’ (Buenaventura 1976: 320, my translation) and deliberately included errors and insecurity.

The most prominent performance of that time in Colombia was *Guadalupe años sin cuenta* (1975) produced by the theatre group La Candelaria and performed more than 3000 times inside and outside the country (Röttger 1992). This performance deals with one of the most devastating historical periods in Colombia, known as *La Violencia* (1948-1985), which claimed thousands of lives yet was silenced in official history books. This period of violence began with the assassination of the left-liberal presidential candidate Jorge Eliécer Gaitán in 1948. This event provoked a spontaneous uprising, referred to as the *Bogotazo*, and led to the terrible and cruel period of *La Violencia* due to the conflicting interests of the liberal and conservative parties. *Guadalupe años sin cuenta* recounts the violent conflict between farmers in a region of the Colombian countryside called *Llanos Orientales* and the Colombian government who sent their armies to suppress the uprising of those

who were suspected of being members of the liberal party. This military intervention and the precarious conditions of living in *Llanos Orientales* — characterised by lack of land, poor working conditions, lack of social measures, clientelism, corruption, repression, and extreme violence — triggered the formation of guerrilla movements in the early 1960s challenging the dominance of traditional parties and proposing an alternative ruling order. In 1964 the First Guerrilla Conference of the Southern Front took place, led by the Communist Party, and in 1966 the communist group *Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia* (FARC) was fully institutionalised as a guerrilla army. The FARC began to expand their influence by entering into different regions of the country as a social movement. However, they remained mainly a defensive organisation with roots among peasants who, after *La Violencia*, kept facing constant harassment by powerful landowners and ranchers supported by the army.

To construct the performance of *Guadalupe años sin cuenta*, La Candelaria used the collective creation method. Intending to bring the history of violence to light, this theatre group went to *Llanos Orientales* to do research — interview people, collecting testimonies and stories, and, last but not least, learning the specific popular music of that region. All this material was then integrated into the final performance.

Anatomía de la Violencia en Colombia

Los Incontados: un tríptico by Mapa Teatro refers directly back to *Guadalupe años sin cuenta*. This does not imply that Mapa Teatro sticks to the form of political theatre of that time. On the contrary, while *Guadalupe años sin cuenta* was staging the story of the farmer's resistance in a quite epic form, Mapa Teatro denies any coherent fabula. They rather confront the violence by merging different stories and time into a multi-layered collage of images from which unthought-of and unthinkable memories and experiences emerge. Rather than reiterating old theatre practices, the aim of Mapa Teatro is to reconnect the present with specific moments of local political history. Nevertheless, the title of their performance already indicates a certain connection. While *Los Incontados* means those who are not counted or those whose stories are not told, *sin cuenta* means without counting or without story. The title *Guadalupe años sin cuenta* here hints not only at the untold (silenced) history of the *Violencia* and its uncountable victims but also at the story of Guadalupe Salcedo Unda, a liberal guerrilla commander and predecessor of the FARC. In 1957, Unda was assassinated under circumstances that were never brought to light. Uncovering this history, *Guadalupe años sin cuenta* brought up the endless circle of violence that was still present in 1975 by starting and ending the performance with a depiction of this assassination. Meanwhile, the first scene of *Los Incontados* starts at the very moment in historical time where the story of *Guadalupe años sin cuenta* ends, namely in 1965, the year of the inauguration of the guerrilla movement. In this scene a group of children in school uniforms is listening to the radio to hear the (original) voice of Camilo Torres, a radical priest and predecessor of the liberation theology who fought in the *Ejército de Liberación Nacional* (ENA), the National Liberation Guerrilla army:

‘It is time to stop the celebration of carnival and start the revolution for real.’ On their website Mapa Teatro quote Paul Celan from his poem *Erhört/Answered*: ‘Los insepultos, incontados, allí arriba, los niños, están listos para saltar.’ (Celan 2014: 85)⁵ (‘The unburied, uncounted, up

there, the children, are ready to jump’). It seems as if Mapa Teatro is hinting at a broader political and poetic revolution, taking resistance beyond the violent reality in Colombia.

5. The German original of this quotation is ‘Die Un-/bestatteten, ungezählt, droben,/die Kinder,/sind absprungbereit’.

Los Incontados: un tríptico resulted from a research project called *Anatomía de la violencia en Colombia* that was developed between 2010 and 2014. The notion of *anatomía* refers on the one hand to the cartography of the body and on the other hand to the activity of segmenting as in a surgical operation. The group investigated elements of virulent violence in current daily Colombian life, linking these back to the epoch of *La Violencia* in the 1950s. By doing this, Mapa Teatro detected and exposed the wounds identified by decolonial aesthetics, celebrating the force of resistant festivity as an antidote against the vicious circle of violence and the politics of death (Palermo 2010: 80).

The project consisted of three different parts that were brought together in a synthesis in the one-hour performance of *Los Incontados: un tríptico*. The reference to the triptych denotes a threefold trinity: the pictorial aesthetics of the performance; the fusion of the three different parts conducted between 2010 and 2014; and three specific topics that the performance deals with in relation to the ongoing violence in Colombia — paramilitarism, narco-trafficking, and guerrilla armies. Together these three forms of organised violence constitute multiple forms of substate power structures controlling regions all over the country. Like in *C’undua*, the three distinct parts of *Los Incontados: un tríptico* are each based on site-specific research and are informed in different ways by the ethnofictional practices that characterise the work of Mapa Teatro.

The notion of ethnofiction is used by Mapa Teatro to hint at their creative research practice of blending documentary ethnography and fiction that reflects the ‘disturbing distance in between [self and other] that constitutes the figure of colonial otherness’ (Bhabha 1986: XVI). The first part of the play, *Los Santos Inocentes*, deals with a ritual annual celebration in Guapí on the 28th of December. Guapí is located in the isolated region of Timbiquí on the pacific coast of Northern Colombia, which, to this day, is still disconnected from the rest of the country due to lack of transportation. The festival of the devil that takes place there evolved in quite an idiosyncratic manner. Mapa Teatro describes this anachronistic and somewhat horrifying festive event with the following words:

Men covered with grotesque masks, wearing female clothes and accessories and holding a whip in their hands, run through the streets and hit everybody they encounter on their way. Full-grown men and women as well as children, the majority with African roots, appear to try to escape the strokes, but strangely enough many of them throw themselves to the dirt to receive them. It is a *fiesta*, but nevertheless, for those who have never been there, it could seem to be about something else: a punishment, a collective catharsis, a nightmare, or a paramilitary massacre? (2020b, my translation)

Los Santos Inocentes (The Holy Innocents) in fact goes back to the Christian liturgical medieval commemoration (on the 28th of December) of the biblical account on Herodes’ massacre of the innocent children in Bethlehem to eliminate the newborn Jesus. This specific liturgical moment is merged with the first masked dance that was introduced by the Spanish colonisers: *La Danza de Matachines*, the dance of Christians and Moors. In Guapí, the ritual also resonates with the former presence of the FARC in that region and the counter strike of paramilitary groups who killed approximately 3000 innocent farmers between 1994 and 1996. The climax of the delirious ritual results in a collective shouting:



Mapa Teatro: *Los Santos Inocentes*
© Felipe Camacho / Mapa Teatro

‘Get out of here, paracos (paramilitary), get out of here, guerrillos!’ Additionally, one cannot help thinking of the violence of the Christian colonisation of the indigenous people. Indeed, in this unique act multiple temporal layers of historical violent interventions are closely entangled, echoing cultural, political, and colonial violence throughout history. In a unique way, the event represents the disruptive spatial-temporal experience of postcolonial subjectivities. The fiesta is shaped by many layers and defines a space of being that is wrought from interruption, discrimination, and despair yet at the same time it is also a joyful outburst. ‘En toda fiesta está metido el enemigo’ (In each party the enemy is involved) is used by Mapa Teatro as a headline or motto for this part

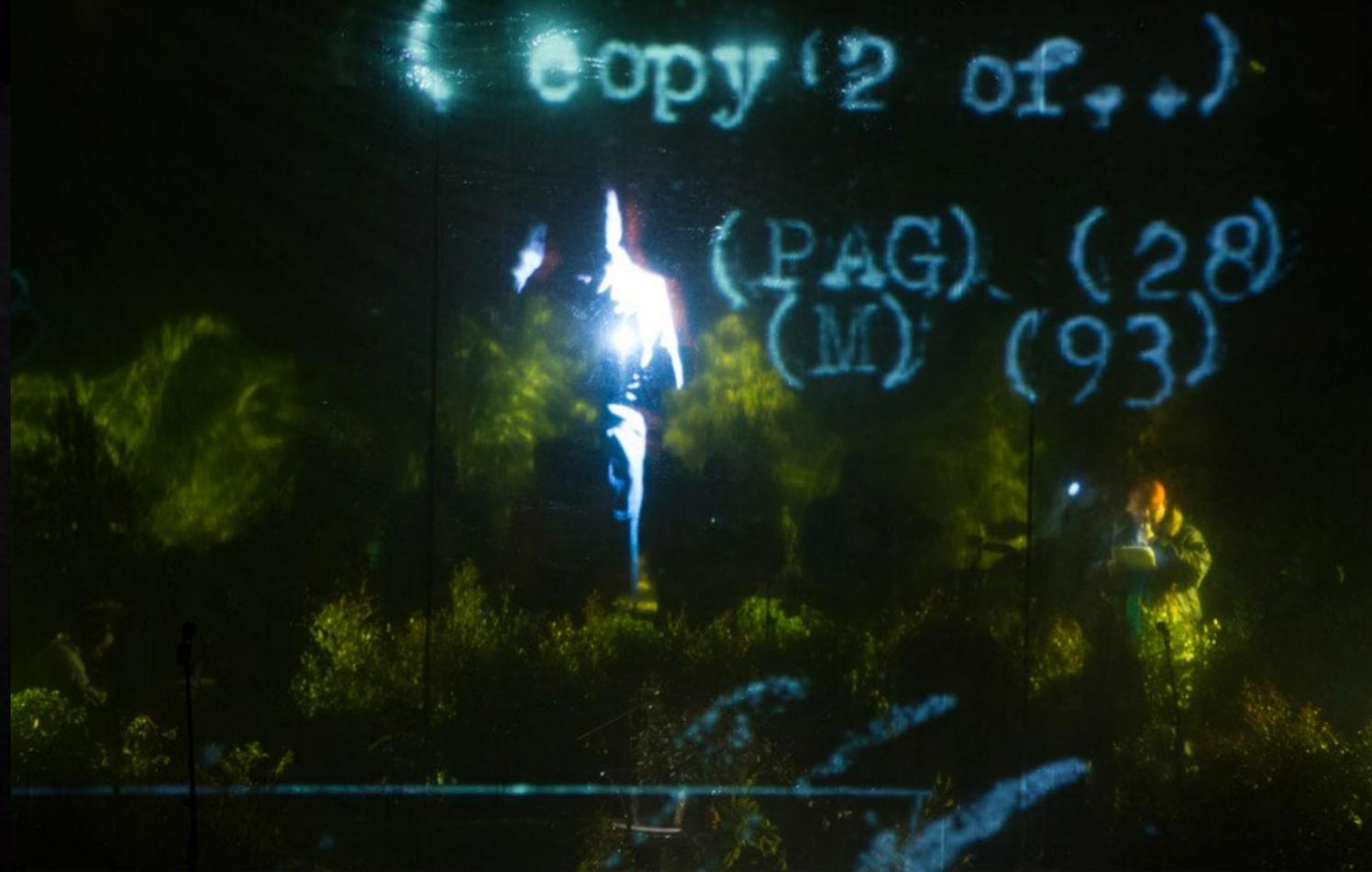


of their project. It sums up quite nicely the emotional complexity of this event as its participants hover between the pain of history and festive joy.

In 2009, on the occasion of her birthday on 28th of December, Heidi Abderhalden Cortés decided to change her own birthday ritual radically and went to Guapí. She was so overwhelmed and distressed by the psychedelic multi-layered mixture of violence and festive excess that she decided to document the event on film. This material became part of a delirious cinematographic and scenic montage that was presented in 2010 at the Festival de Teatro de Bogotá, forming the initial idea of Mapa Teatro’s whole project on violence.

Wir spielten sogar in der
Hacienda Nápoles."

"También tocábamos en sus fiestas privadas.
Incluso llegamos a tocar en
la Hacienda Nápoles."



Mapa Teatro: *Discurso de un hombre decente*
© Felipe Camacho / Mapa Teatro

Los Santos Inocentes was followed up by *Discurso de un hombre decente*, the second part of the project. This time, a very specific document served as a departure point — a speech by the drug lord and leader of the Medellín Cartel, Pablo Escobar, that was found in his pocket after he had been killed in December 1993 by a Colombian surveillance team in Medellín. In this document, which was allegedly declared classified by the CIA, Escobar announced that he would become the next Colombian president. Mapa Teatro converted this into a micro-film and a declassified archive and projected this material in the presence of a series of real-life characters to have experienced the terror of narco-trafficking: an international expert on narco-trafficking and violence, a hip-hop musician who lived under the violent domination of criminal

narco-trafficking in Medellín, and the former leader of a music group that had been forced to entertain Escobar and who had become disabled during a bomb attack. These persons were joined by an actor playing the fictional character of a journalist obsessed by narco-trafficking. *Discurso de un hombre decente* was presented for the first time in 2011 as a lecture performance, in coproduction with Kaaitheater in Brussels and Siemens Stiftung, as part of the Spoken Word Festival in Brussels.

The third part of the project, *Los Incontados*, was an installation commemorating the period of *La Violencia* and the guerrilla movement in Colombia, presented in 2014 at the Biennale of São Paulo.

Los Incontados: un tríptico

The one-hour performance of *Los Incontados: un tríptico* superimposes the three parts of *Anatomía de la Violencia in Colombia* like panels. It results in a pictorial palimpsest dramaturgy which is slowly built up in stacked layers of pictorial fragments which merge into one nightmarish hologram on stage; a palimpsest that in the course of the performance more and more will be ripped in shreds. The performance is introduced by a long tableau vivant of about six minutes, depicting the birthday scene of little Heidi in 1965, listening to the radio voice of Camilo Torres in the intimate, private space of a living room.

This picturesque mise-en-scène unfolds in a kind of a small box enclosed by a transparent wall. It reminds us of the old medium of a diorama, invented in the early nineteenth century by Louis Daguerre. The diorama enabled spectators to experience a moving image, looking through a dark tunnel at, for example, a landscape scene painted on an enormous canvas. The painters of these canvases used specific techniques of layering colours and light effects to create the illusion of the landscape changing between dusk and dawn. Later in the nineteenth century, this early cinematographic device was applied in Museums of Natural History to expose scenes with exotic animals or people in a three-dimensional way. At the end of *Los Incontados: un tríptico*, Mapa Teatro confronts the audience with its own exoticism by mirroring the spectators in the transparent fourth wall of the box. The theme of exoticisation is also explored within the fictive figure of the American journalist obsessed by narco-trafficking who consumes and reproduces crime and murder the fascination for a thrill.

According to Mapa Teatro *Incontados: un tríptico* confronts the two entangled topics of the festival of the living and the celebration of the dead:

In different places and times, the *fiesta* has been infiltrated by the actors of the conflict through multiple forms of camouflage. In Colombia, this has changed into a privileged scenario for the eruption of war. For decades, the *fiesta* in its different expressions has been converted and used as a celebration not only of life but also of death (2020c).

Incontados: un tríptico reflects and dissects how the break-out of war and violence has burst into the public, private, and intimate spheres of Colombian citizens' lives, deeply affecting them over decades. The three topics related to *Anatomía de la Violencia en Colombia* — paramilitarism, narco-trafficking, and guerrilla armies — are combined with three narrative lines which run like threads throughout the performance: the birthday, the delirium, and the failed revolution. The dioramic performance space allows these narrative lines to intersect with the topics of the three parts of the triptych in an accumulation of sounds, rhythms, pictures, persons, documents, and shreds of text. These elements are called up again and again like spectres haunting the stage. In the course of the performance, the initial tableau vivant of the private living room transforms into a kind of hybrid third space that is filled up more and more with actors, stories, projections, and voices documenting the anatomy of violence in Colombia, ending in a delirious festive outburst.

This reimagining of past and present works across temporalities and creates a space-time constellation that resists any coherent narrative. Instead, the space of the birthday party of little Heidi will be invaded one by one by the distinct actors of violence, accompanied by the reiterating voice of Camilo Torres, who repeats, again and again, the same sentence: 'It is time to stop the celebration of carnival and start the revolution for real.' By transforming in this way, the theatre space depicts the metamorphosis of the old dream of a revolutionary festival of liberation into a nightmare of violence. The first uninvited visitor of the birthday



Mapa Teatro: *Los Incontados: un tríptico*
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Mapa Teatro: *Los Incontados: un tríptico*
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party is a guerrillero in uniform, entertaining the child with magic tricks and offering her a Che Guevara T-shirt as he emerges out of the smoke produced by a fog machine. This hint to the strong relation of the Latin American version of communist struggle with the international movement is staged by the deployment of children wearing huge heads resembling the faces of Marx, Lenin, Mao, Che Guevara and Fidel Castro. These anachronistic pictorial scenes where times and spaces clash, as well as local and global concerns,⁶ are structured once more according to a dramaturgy of shredded palimpsest. The invasion of the child's birthday party is staged via the opening up of the initially closed back wall of the tableau vivant to reveal a back space of the stage.

6. Colombia also served as a more or less hidden battleground for U.S. interests to fight against communism after the Cuban revolution.

Here scenes and images of Escobar's narcotraficking activities and the festivities of *Los Santos Inocentes* are revealed layer by layer, all interfering in the private space of the living room.

These multi-layered discontinuous scenes seem to rise out of a delirious, horrific, cocaine-addicted fantasy yet in fact — loyal to the practice of ethnofiction — most actors involved in the performance were part of the reality they depicted. Mapa Teatro invited several real-life witnesses to take part in *Los Incontados: un tríptico*, keeping the documentary character alive. For example, Don Danilo, the musician who had been engaged by Escobar and suffered injuries during a bomb attack; Jeihhco, a rapper who worked in Medellín whilst it was paralysed by the dreadful and relentless activities of the drug gangs; and children from the Carmenza de Sánchez Institute Martial Band in Bogotá all participated. Such perspectives of concrete local experience of violence were merged during the performance with shreds of global references. The Colombian reality may be seen as a product of a long colonial history and global involvement creating lags of time, space, and collective and personal experience. When one takes into consideration the history of subjugation of the region by global forces of imperialism and

colonialism throughout three centuries, followed by two more centuries of postcolonial domination, one will understand that this reality has had a great impact on the configuration of Colombian identity, generating colonial subjects and subjectivities. Although Colombia stopped being a formal colony in the first half of the 19th century, the end of a colony did not signal the end of colonialism (Taylor 1991, 1). Latin America remained the peripheral 'other' of the Western narrative of global history, a position that Walter Mignolo aptly describes as the colonisation of space and time and the universalisation of Western history (Mignolo 2014). Consequently, *Los Incontados: un tríptico* claims that the violence inherent to the country's history is not confined to Colombia's own borders, but also, and equally importantly, has its roots in the relations between Colombia and international politics. Not only does the dialectical image of the head-parade of communist icons expose this inter-relatedness, the same goes, for instance, for the following text sung by rapper Jahhico referring to Ronald Reagan's declaration of his (failed) 'war on drugs' in 1986:

It's not a secret to anyone that the drug trade has made a few fellow countrymen very rich. Society has never been able to conquer vices. The available budgets and police officers for this battle will never be enough. The war on drugs is lost. If it weren't for hot money and dollars coming into the country, we would be going through a very serious economic crisis. Drug trafficking is the number one globalised business in the world and there is no way of stopping it. All countries buy and sell drugs, even the legalisation of drugs will not stop the drug trade.

Moreover, this intertextual gesture is accompanied by an intermedial interlude projected onto a white screen which is part of the multi-layered scenography. Before the Escobar scene starts, we get to see a fragment of Charlie Chaplin's *Modern Times* (1936) — the famous cocaine



Mapa Teatro: *Los Incontados: un tríptico*
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joke that made a great impact on cinema in its time. After being mistaken for a communist, Chaplin's main character, the tramp, is put to jail where he accidentally takes a heaping dose of cocaine during dinner after confusing it with salt.

The short hilarious cinematographic interlude about the destiny of a 'communist' in the 1930s U.S. is counteracted at the end of the performance by a staging of the cruel destiny of a communist in the 1930s at the other side of the world. In the invaded living room space a puppet is left. When an actor starts to animate it, we learn that it represents Vladimir Mayakovski, famous for his political poems and theatre. The Mayakovski puppet recounts a dream he had on 3 April 1930, ten days before he shot himself, disillusioned because of the failed Russian revolution: 'The bullet that penetrated Vladimir Mayakovski's heart also shot to pieces the dream of communism and signalled the beginning of the communist nightmare of the 1930s' (Jangfeldt 2014: 26). This final scene can be seen as an ironic meta-picture connoting the intervention of conflicting U.S. and Soviet interests in Latin America as the peripheral other. However, at the same time, this same scene triggers a meta-reflection on Mapa Teatro's practice of producing political-poetical events through the construction of ethno-fictions and simultaneously exploiting a wide range of disruptive references to a diverse international repertoire of artistic means, media, aesthetics, and ideologies; wrecks of revolution. The Marxist-Leninist myth shattered. The puppet of Mayakovski recounts a dream which is saturated by ruins. Shreds of images pop up that have already passed by in another context. He is stopped in the metro by secret service officers who accuse him of carrying a bar of soap with him. He is subsequently brought to a tribunal with judges in military uniforms to speak before an audience of children in school uniforms. He is forced to enter a locomotive in which an executioner wearing a hood and holding a whip in his hand forces him to recite his poems by saying 'Sing, poet!'

and whipping him. Mayakovski decides to recite his worst poems, filled with exaltation and rhetoric. The puppet then declares: 'Then, I, Vladimir Mayakovski, poet and revolutionary, woke up.' Following this we hear slowly swelling voices saying: 'Get out of here, paracos, get out of here, guerrillos'. Finally, before the curtain closes, the audience is able to read, the following words projected onstage: 'This is a tradition that is lost in time. You have to be from here to feel a little pleasure in the pain'. This clear statement of a local voice which might be a voice from Guapí, yet also the voice of the performance, resonates with the dramaturgy of decolonisation as a practice of decontextualising and recontextualising. This takes up the intertwined threads of references to recompose them again and again into reshuffled images, layered like an archaeological site where the colonial wounds have been covered. As such an anatomy of violence is formed, engendering frictions, including between pleasure and pain.

Conclusion

‘Dramaturgies of decolonisation’ is certainly not a label that has ever been claimed by Mapa Teatro themselves. Why then would it make sense to analyse their work through this lens? I think that in a time when the topic of decolonisation suddenly resonates strongly throughout Western academic and artistic institutions and practices, it is important to stress the specific legacy of this particular position. Indeed this legacy goes back to postcolonial artistic traditions, intellectual histories, and embodied experiences situated in the Global South, in this case in Latin America. Dramaturgies of decolonisation are determined by an ongoing friction between local and global perspectives, as caused by the historic entanglement between modernity and coloniality. While coloniality — the darker side of modernity — preconditions the achievements of (Western) modernity, the achievements of modernity cause the experience of (violent) ruptures, clashes, and discontinuities in the colonised world. When I claim that Mapa Teatro perform a ‘decolonial doing’ as it is defined by recent Latin American theories of decolonisation, I put forward the position that their dramaturgies are based on a geopolitical and bodily knowledge that is marked by colonial difference. Consequently, Mapa Teatro have developed a theatrical language that contributes to the challenges of unveiling epistemic violence. By creating transdisciplinary artistic laboratories where experimental temporary communities are established to do research on forgotten or ignored stories or cases — what we might also call wounds — Mapa Teatro implements a dramaturgy — defined as a way of working on actions — of disruptions. Here Mapa Teatro merge micro-politics and poetics as well as local and global points of view by means of multiform visual and auditive aesthetics that open up sensual perception. •

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Adapting

Copla

The Interplay of Languages in Making
The Copla Musical

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KEYWORDS

Cultural translation, Copla, musical theatre, foreignisation/domestication, intercultural adaptation

PALABRAS CLAVE

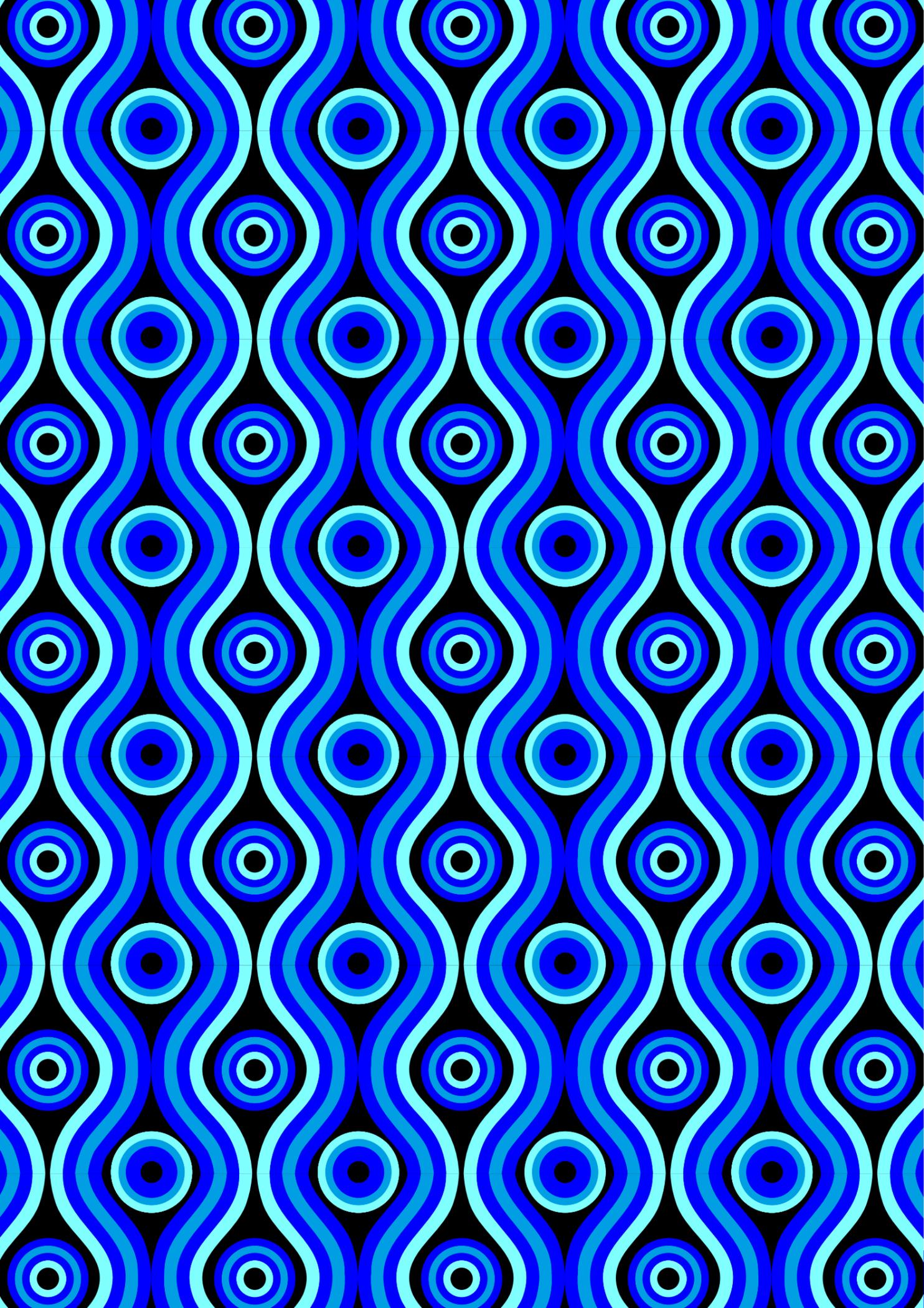
Traducción cultural, Copla, teatro musical, extranjerización/domesticación, adaptación intercultural

Summary

The process of creating *The Copla Musical* involved the translation and integration of twentieth-century Spanish *copla* songs into a theatre narrative in English. The songs had been rarely translated before, let alone presented in a theatrical context outside Spain. The development of this show involved the collaboration of an international team who helped transform a culturally and historically charged artistic form by tapping into the intercultural potential and subversive nature of the material. The results of this work were then presented internationally in the form of a contemporary theatre production. This practice opened questions of how cultural translation may effectively function in a global Anglo-centric musical theatre industry. In this article, I will engage with translation debates and discuss how the selection and translation of songs impacted on performance and music languages also subject to cultural translation. The article aims to explore how new dynamics of collaboration and creativity conditioned the making of *The Copla Musical*, an intercultural project from conception to execution.

Resumen

El proceso de creación de *The Copla Musical* supuso la traducción e inserción de algunas canciones de copla española del siglo XX dentro de una narrativa teatral en inglés. La copla ha sido raramente traducida o presentada en un contexto teatral fuera de España, y el desarrollo de este espectáculo implicó la colaboración de un equipo internacional que ayudó a transformar esta forma de expresión artística de importante carga histórica y cultural. A raíz de este proyecto, se desveló el potencial subversivo e intercultural del material y los resultados han sido presentados internacionalmente como obra teatral contemporánea. Este proyecto ha cuestionado las políticas de traducción en una industria de teatro musical globalizada y marcada por el anglocentrismo. En este artículo, me adentraré en debates de traducción y exploraré cómo la selección y traducción de canciones ha impactado en los lenguajes performativo y musical de la obra, también susceptibles a una traducción cultural. El artículo explorará las nuevas dinámicas de colaboración y creatividad que han condicionado la creación de *The Copla Musical*, un proyecto intercultural desde su planteamiento hasta su ejecución.



Throughout the last century, musical theatre has increasingly become an Anglo-dominated industry where opportunities for cultural exchange are rare and often limited to translations of Anglo-American commodities exported around the world. Translation theorist André Lefevere argues that the distribution and regulation of cultural capital by means of translation depends on the needs of the audience, the patron or initiator of the translation, and the relative prestige of the source and target cultures and their languages (1998: 44). In this article, I will explore the linguistic negotiations and politics of translation involved in the making of my musical theatre show *The Copla Musical*. Through the development of this artistic project, I have rebelled against the current impositions of musical theatre in Spain, which is heavily influenced by Anglo-American imports and uniform globalising tendencies. In exploring the potential of Spanish *copla*, an historical Spanish cultural form that did not cross Spanish-language boundaries,¹ I aim to contribute to reversing this uniform tendency. In *The Copla Musical*, I look at the political and linguistic implications of *copla* as an historical song genre that, throughout the twentieth century, creatively

1. While it is relatively easy to connect to audiences through the performance of *copla* in Spain, this does not work as easily outside Spanish borders as there is scant knowledge of these songs. Some *copla* artists were exiled to Latin America during the dictatorship, and some of the most renowned performers like Lola Flores and Concha Piquer have occasionally performed in international venues like New York's Carnegie Hall or the Parisian Olympia an exclusively Spanish *copla* repertoire, mostly unknown to these international audiences (Sieburth 2014).

managed to slip past censorship mechanisms at a time of dictatorial control in Spain, becoming popularised at both ends of a divided country and society. By doing this, I challenge the current market flow of many Anglophone musical theatre imports arriving to Spain but few Spanish exports making it abroad.

The development of an autochthonous musical theatre tradition in Spain was disrupted during the Francoist dictatorship from 1939 to 1975 and then progressively replaced with the importation of Anglo-American musicals in the period that followed the transition to democracy post-1975. This historical disruption of Spanish musical theatre occurred at a parallel historical moment to the American integration of song and plot into what is known as ‘the book musical’ between 1927 and 1943).² The Spanish musical theatre of this period was populated with *copla* songs. These are evocative songs that find their first musical foundations in folkloric forms like *pasodoble* and *flamenco* and are mainly differentiated from those musical forms by their theatrical quality. Despite the popularity of *copla* in Spain to this day, its relationship to other song styles and musical theatre forms from the U.K. and U.S.A. that have prevailed internationally has not been explored in any degree of detail. However, noting the increasing sensitivity towards mega-musical³ imports in Spain,⁴ I have, for the past decade, researched historical comparisons between *copla* and musical theatre produced in Britain and America with a view to facilitating the intercultural exploration

2. The establishment of the book musical is pinned to the period between the opening of the American musicals *Showboat* (1927) and *Oklahoma!* (1943) that were the first musicals to integrate libretto, score, and choreography with a dramatic goal.

3. Playwright and scholar Dan Rebellato defines mega-musicals as ‘visually spectacular, quasi-operatic musical theatre productions, many of them globally successful, performed thousands of times in front of millions of people in hundreds of productions in dozens of cities worldwide’ (Rebellato 2006: 98).

4. Marta Mateo (2008) and Mia Patterson (2010) explain in detail the growing demand for Anglo-American mega-musicals in Spain throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

proposed in my Practice-as-Research (PaR) show *The Copla Musical*. This project investigates *copla*’s roots as a storytelling form, its position as a folkloric genre, and its role as a subversive tool in Spain during the twentieth-century.

In creating *The Copla Musical*, I followed a phased intercultural process focused on collaborating with a group of artists representing both Anglophone and Spanish cultures. This process also involved presenting each iteration of the work to a diverse audience from Spanish and non-Spanish backgrounds who experienced the show from various cultural perspectives. My collaborators throughout the various phases of development have included the American directors Sarah Johnson and RM Sánchez-Camus, the British directors Dom Riley and Tian Glasgow, and the Spanish directors Reyes Hiraldo, Andrea Jiménez, and Enrique Muñoz. Similarly the creative team has included a variety of actors, musicians, and artists from British, Spanish, and other international backgrounds.⁵ This example of PaR looks at different traditions of musical theatre in Spain, Britain, and America and attempts to create a show that draws on all of these. The intercultural creation of a modern *copla* musical also engages with the principles underpinning the creation of musicals in the globalised twenty-first century. I would argue that the process of crafting a hybrid form of musical theatre through collaborative processes reflects the manner in which musical theatre generally developed in America, that is to say through appropriations of new forms and functions from other local and foreign cultures.

5. This included artists from Brazil, Greece, Colombia, Portugal, Italy, and Germany.

In this article, I will explore the dynamics of translation, history, and culture involved in the making of *The Copla Musical*. To do this I will engage with the debate of foreignisation versus domestication in the translation of texts and discuss the theories of translation and intercultural exchange as presented by Lawrence Venuti, Sirkku Aaltonen,

Steve Gooch, Eugenio Barba, André Lefevere, and Richard Schechner, among others. This research identifies the discourses of dramaturgy and performance style(s) in the context of the dominant paradigms of musical theatre produced in America and Britain and analyses how an intercultural approach drawing on a specific Spanish tradition challenges and explores the creation of a new musical by bringing material that has not circulated outside the Spanish-speaking world, in this case *copla*, into the arena of Anglo-American musical theatre. At the same time, the practice generates questions that challenge, renew, and complement current theories concerning intercultural adaptation.

An Introduction to our Intercultural Processes

The Copla Musical explores how the *copla* songs that once formed part of revues and folkloric theatre shows might be adapted and integrated into a contemporary musical theatre show conceived and presented outside Spain, thus negotiating the cultural identity of *copla* in alternative linguistic and cultural contexts. This practice aims to combine this Spanish folkloric song-form with principles inherent to musical theatre artworks found in Britain and America that I group under the term 'Anglophone musical theatre'. Anglophone musical theatre has drawn on and adopted a variety of indigenous art forms through its historical development. Therefore, it could arguably also facilitate the integration of Spanish *copla* into a book musical structure that could generate new interest in the genre outside of Spain. As per the book musical integrative

Poster of *The Copla Musical*, 2012
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structure of plot and songs, the individual self-contained narratives of participating *copla* songs in *The Copla Musical* required a process of restructuring to fit the newly written dramatic text in English.

Copla songs often tell stories of love, jealousy, and disillusion. Here the singer commonly exposes their religious beliefs, protests abuses of power, promotes national traditions such as bullfighting, or professes their love for the homeland, its landscapes, and its customs. Song narratives are mostly defined by an emotional journey in which the character either resolves their conflict at the end of the song or, as often occurs, dies. These self-contained narratives have structural journeys consisting of a beginning, a climax, and an ending within the short timeframe of three or four minutes. Integrating a selection of sixteen songs into *The Copla Musical* involved several compromises, such as modifying or opening the songs' beginnings and endings in favour of a longer narrative. The longer narrative of *The Copla Musical* aims to introduce spectators to the political and historical context of the songs. As such its plot is set in 1939, taking the audience on a journey from the Spanish Civil War into post-war Spain and America, through the experiences of a transgender artist exiled to America. This is a direct parallel to the reality lived by many artists that did not align with the socio-political impositions of Franco's dictatorial regime and were persecuted because of their beliefs, identities, and sexual orientations.

The selection of songs was made according to thematic concerns and their suitability to contribute to storytelling. As author of *The Copla Musical*, I spent numerous years crafting the script in negotiation with various songs that in turn determined some plot points and character developments. Like most creative processes in musical theatre, the storytelling impulse started with the writer, their creation then being handed to a group of actors and directors to facilitate dramatic exploration and the transformation of words into actions. With aims to create an

equitable basis of exchange, I gathered an international team of mainly Spanish, British, and American actors and directors that collaborated in the creation of the work. Additionally, the input of other international artists such as a dramaturges, lyricists, and musical arrangers has been essential in creating a bridge between Anglo-American and Spanish musical theatre cultures to facilitate this cultural exchange. Shannon Scrofano questions the possibility to develop a cross-cultural dialogue without sacrificing the unique identities of individual speakers (2012: 290). This is since in a creative engagement like this, artists must be willing to let go of their own cultural referents in order to understand how to position themselves within the project. Participants must be open to adapt their cultural knowledge and mode of expression for a common cause: a bridge of readability that represents an intercultural commitment. But what does it take for this cultural bridge to become the final goal, the performance?

Translation theorist Lawrence Venuti explains that a translator must consult many different target-language cultural materials (dictionaries, texts, values, paradigms, ideologies) throughout their activity, and that this consultation both reduces and supplements the text, even when source-language cultural materials are also consulted (2012: 24). This process is replicated to a variable extent in the creation of *The Copla Musical*. In leading the writing and production processes of this PaR project through its several phases, I have identified as a Spanish author and asserted myself as being representative of my Spanish culture, especially when collaborating with British artists. Nonetheless, since 2007 I have lived and been fully immersed in Anglophone culture, within which I encounter cultural values, paradigms, and ideas that I interact with at both personal and creative levels. The meeting of Spanish and English values is an unavoidable consequence of my life in England. However, this must also remain an active initiative as part of an effort to approach and understand a whole signifying system in which I did

Translating Copla Into Musical Theatre

not grow up or develop my cultural references. In seeking the positive acceptance of *The Copla Musical* and in the general interests of this research project, I have put my best efforts into becoming immersed within the target culture of the U.K.. However, this is not necessarily the case of my British collaborators: none of them spoke Spanish, neither were they familiar with Spanish culture before this project, and none had any previous knowledge of *copla*. Their experience of Spanish culture was filtered through my own, as well as through my artistic vision as the project's lead artist. In principle this does not sound like an equitable basis of exchange since both cultural agents do not participate in the project with equal conditions. Nonetheless, the act of collaboration was a chief motivation of this project in which we attempted to establish the relevance of new and hybrid forms, as driven by an understanding of the needs of the show to speak to today's world.

My artistic vision guided a process focused on incorporating other artists and, through a collective act of will and effort, expressing that vision on stage for others to experience. In *The Copla Musical* I used the source, Spanish *copla*, to explore the historical development of Spanish musical theatre and its potential externalisation beyond Spanish culture. My personal practice aims to rejuvenate *copla* in an international context while critically reflecting on the intercultural processes that are implicit in my research of historical revisionism in international musical theatre making. Practice enabled my position as a researcher and as an artist, allowing me to explore changing modes of readability from one culture to another. By producing a seemingly familiar form of musical theatre for Anglophone audiences, the 'known' was placed onstage to be witnessed. However, at the same time the 'not known' (*copla*) was also placed at the same intersection, in direct relation to the 'known'. The challenges of adapting the 'not known' into the 'known' affected several areas of the project including the dramaturgy, music, lyrics, performance, production, and reception of the new intercultural work.

As defined by Venuti, 'translation is the forcible replacement of the linguistic and cultural difference of the foreign text with a text that will be intelligible to the target-language reader' (2012: 18).⁶ Venuti asserts that translators receive minimal recognition for their work and that praise occurs by operating in an unnoticed manner.⁷ The transparency that Venuti refers to is, in most cases, challenging to achieve and, if taken too literally, can potentially be counter-productive. Such is the case with *The Copla Musical* in which the translation of *copla* songs takes place in a new historical and geographical context that differs from their original site of production in post-Civil War Spain — a political context marked by artistic censorship. The social relevance of *copla* songs in Spain is manifest in their role as part of the collective memory of Spanish society and as a key component of popular culture throughout a difficult period in the country's history. *The Copla Musical* needed to be formulated for an audience in Britain that would not be familiar with *copla* or its history. This audience needs, I would argue, to understand the contents of the show in order to engage with it. Alternatively, other strategies may be put in place to appeal to the emotions, as the original song lyrics did.

6. Venuti specifies further that while 'this cultural difference cannot be fully eliminated, it must however be reduced in favour of intelligibility in the new culture, which in itself offers a new set of creative possibilities' (2012: 18).

7. 'The illusion of transparency is an effect of fluent discourse, of the translator's effort to ensure easy readability by adhering to current usage, maintaining continuous syntax, fixing a precise meaning' (Venuti 2012: 1). Venuti defends that 'the more fluent the translation, the more invisible the translator, and, presumably, the more visible the writer of the foreign text' (2012: 2).

Venuti talks about aiming for an ‘illusion of transparency’ to ensure easy readability of the original works in the new language (2012: 1). But how can translation make social, political, and personal contexts visible in the limited text enclosed in the lyrics of a song? *Copla* songs were mostly written and reached their peak of popularity during Franco’s dictatorship in Spain from 1939 to 1975. The meaning that these songs might achieve in twenty-first century England and beyond is unlikely to be concerned with the historical references that influenced the creation of the songs because their new audience is not privy to this history. In order to achieve an ‘illusion of transparency’, one must question how to convey the contextual messages of these songs and also reflect on whether they can stand alone outside the context in which they first existed. Ultimately, we need to consider the relevance of the songs’ historical premises for the songs to be presented in a new language, out of their original context. Margherita Laera defends that ‘a translation must above all “create a context” for the foreign text in the target-language performance. [...] The creation of a new context is necessarily achieved in collaboration with the director of the new theatre version’ (2011: 215). In *The Copla Musical* there is a double adaptation at play: firstly there is a linguistic translation of the song lyrics from Spanish to English and secondly there is a dramatic adaptation that involves the insertion of the newly translated lyrics into a longer narrative. This dramatic adaptation provides opportunities to further contextualise the original meanings and significance of the songs within the new narrative.

The Copla Musical, 2014
Director: RM Sánchez-Camus. Performer: Alejandro Postigo
© John Kentish



Many of the songs included in this project were authored by composer Maestro Quiroga and lyricist Rafael de León, one of the most prolific writing teams of *copla*.⁸ As this project advanced through its research stages, I sought permission from Manuel López-Quiroga, son of the prolific composer of the same name and inheritor of the copyright⁹ of his father's songs,¹⁰ to use some of these songs within *The Copla Musical*. Permission was granted and I proceeded to undertake the translations of sixteen of Quiroga's songs that would become part of different versions of *The Copla Musical*, in collaboration with a team of British lyricists. The translation of these songs went as follows. Firstly I attempted to create a direct translation from the Spanish original in verse that my British collaborators then modified to achieve greater connection with English rhyme, prose, and general idiosyncrasy. Following this I then reviewed the text again to ensure that the modifications matched the show's dramatic narrative while preserving the essence of the original material. This team activity encouraged a transparent discourse and the illusion of authorial presence that Venuti writes about. As there is no single authorial voice dominating the translation of the lyrics, these translations may be seen to remain faithful to the original writing of *copla* songs that were themselves a many-authored, cooperatively produced product. At the same time, such collaboration also helped develop

a new narrative for *The Copla Musical*. For example, in the adaptation of the *copla* song 'Tattoo' shown below, we can see the journey from the literal translation of the Spanish original lyrics that respected the Spanish grammatical construction of each verse, to the reordering of the sentence in a manner that adheres more naturally to English prosody and grammar, and finally to a rewriting that takes some artistic licences in order to develop the dramatic atmosphere of the song in the context of the show. This particularity about grammatical reconstructions demands special care when placing the stresses in verses, especially for the melody to underline the expressive nature of the words, as well as the original affectation of the musical beats:

SPANISH ORIGINAL

Errante lo busco por todos los puertos,
a los marineros pregunto por él

LITERAL TRANSLATION

Wandering I'm searching for him
at the ports
And to other sailors I ask about him

GRAMMATICAL REWRITING

Since then I've been searching and
wandering the ports
And I ask the sailors if they know of him

DRAMATIC REWRITING

Since that day I've wandered and searched
all the dockyard
Not a soul has heard of, or once seen
his face

8. Song titles in the project include: Y sin embargo te quiero (But I Love You Anyway), Te lo juro yo (This I Swear To You), María de la O, Dime que me quieres (Tell Me That You Love Me), and Tatuaje (Tattoo).

9. In relation to authorship, British and American law define translation as an 'adaptation' or 'derivative work' based on an 'original work of authorship' whose copyright, including the exclusive right 'to prepare derivative works' or 'adaptations', is vested in the 'author'. The translator is thus subordinated to the author who decisively controls the publication of the translation during the term of copyright for the 'original' text, currently the author's lifetime plus fifty years (Venuti 2012: 8). In Spain, this expands up to 70 from the death of the author in accordance to EU Law.

10. Editorial Company Seemsa, overseen by Manuel López-Quiroga y Clavero, owns the rights to most *copla* songs included in *The Copla Musical*.

Throughout the process of translation, we kept thinking of the new dramatic purposes of the *copla* songs inserted within *The Copla Musical*. We treated the English lyrics as monologues and dialogues set to musical underscoring in order to gain new insights into how and why the characters might need to sing their thoughts and how these songs might advance the narrative, sometimes with the assistance of underscored dialogues. Taking this approach, the new lyrics attempt to maintain deep emotional truth while they activate dramatic structures. Venuti presents a theoretical basis from which translations can be read as texts 'in their own right', with an aim to demystify transparency

(2012: 17).¹¹ Following his theory, it would be fair to say that *The Copla Musical* is a text of its own that departs from well-known but also historically and geographically localised sources and reinterprets them in a new context. Here a new set of signifiers is applied to accommodate and strengthen the value of the original sources. As such, *The Copla Musical* was created out of a negotiation between my love towards the Spanish original songs and the pragmatic idea that translations must function dramatically in the context of a musical theatre show for a U.K. theatre audience. Translation in this case needed to fulfil the objective of connecting with the audience and the sense of authorial presence is not a priority.

The *copla* songs in *The Copla Musical* try to evoke the historical function they originally held. In the late 1920s and early 1930s, *copla* became a dominant musical genre in Spain's intellectual, political, and artistic spheres and was disseminated through performances in cafes and cabarets with audiences from different social classes. During the years of the Second Republic from 1931 to 1936, *copla* songs were popularised across a divided population of opposing ideologies. This popularity continued for both factions throughout the Spanish Civil War between 1936 and 1939. However, at the start of Franco's dictatorship in 1939, fascist propaganda appropriated and manipulated these songs, as they did with many other art forms that had flourished in Republican Spain. Thus, during the Franco regime, *copla* singers were forced to present strong conservative images in tune with the national-catholic ideals of the regime. Those artists who did not align with the regime's ethos were persecuted, exiled, or at worst assassinated, as was the case of playwright Federico García Lorca, one of the first writers of *copla* songs. Nonetheless, many artists continued writing *copla* songs with implicit messages

11. Venuti's theory sees transparency as one discursive effect among others wherein translation is a process by which the chain of signifiers that constitutes the source-language text is replaced by a chain of signifiers in the target language which the translator provides on the strength of an interpretation (2012: 17).

and signifiers that managed to navigate censorship and connect with oppressed populations at the time such as women, gypsies, leftists, and LGBT closeted citizens. As the songs shifted their distribution focus from theatres and cabarets to the radio, their reach extended beyond expectations and managed to bring hope into many people's existences.¹² This history of these songs, widely known among older populations in Spain, might be seen as key to a Spanish audience's connection with them. However, concerning the attempt to convey some of this context to a non-Spanish audience, Venuti identifies some violent effects of translation that could apply to the project of *The Copla Musical*.¹³

One of the biggest risks of translating *copla* songs in this theatrical context is to distort their original idiosyncrasy to fit a constructed image of Francoist Spain. The songs are subject to misinterpretation in their new settings and international audiences run the risk of framing and classifying *copla* within the parameters of their own historical knowledge, therefore creating an image of *copla*'s cultural identity that adheres to a fascist ideology. Indeed, this risk is already very much present with interpretations of *copla* within Spain.¹⁴ Crossing national and cultural borders to export a controversially politicised genre only maximises the challenge of preventing misinterpretation. Other concerns responding to Venuti's proposed violent effects of translation relate to the characteristics of the

12. This is why Stephanie Sieburth refers to *copla* as "survival songs" for those oppressed during Franco's fascist dictatorship (2014).

13. Some of these effects are 'the construction of national identities for foreign cultures, the maintenance or revision of literary canons in the target-language culture and of dominant conceptual paradigms, research methodologies, and clinical practices in target-language disciplines and professions [...] constructing or critiquing ideology-stamped identities for foreign cultures, affirming or transgressing discursive values and institutional limits in the target-language culture' (Venuti 2012: 19).

14. During the dictatorship, censors changed some lyrics of existing *copla* songs, generating a lasting image of association to Franco's ideals. This image was often reinforced by the performance of the genre by artists of known allegiance to the fascist regime.

form of musical theatre itself such as the metrics of the songs, types of rhyme, semantic considerations, and how those are reinterpreted in the new language. Spanish is a syllable-based language, as opposed to English, which is stress-based. The regularity of Spanish rhyme, like most Romance languages, is very different from the irregularity of English rhyme and this affects the structuring of the language of songs.¹⁵ A clear example of this distortion can be exemplified when adjusting the *bulería* rhythm¹⁶ of the *copla* song ‘Carceleras del Puerto’ (translated as ‘Jailers of the Port’) for prosodic considerations. While the Spanish original lyrics matched the accents of *bulería*, this was not always the case in the English translation. The decision of altering the accentuation of this rhythm was made in order not to complicate the readability of the lyrics in English and to naturalise their delivery (Postigo 2016: 105).

Most studies devoted to translation and music have so far been centred on opera, a genre in which the text is primarily transmitted through singing. This is often the case as well for musicals, although musicals are ‘more realistic than opera in terms of singer-role matching and are closer to productions of plays’ (Mateo 2008: 320). While opera generally uses subtitles in its performances, musicals performed in foreign countries where English is not generally spoken (including Spain) are translated. This divergence is mostly due to social, historical, ideological, and economic factors rather than technical or artistic ones (*ibid.*).¹⁷

15. As dramatist Colin Teevan puts it: ‘You cannot actually translate an Alexandrine into English and achieve the same effect. One always has to devise a strategy, a correlative form, you can choose a non-verse form or an iambic pentameter form’ (in Laera 2011: 222).

16. Bulería is a Spanish rhythm with beats specific to Flamenco music. There are a total of 12 beats, with the phrase beginning on the 11th, accentuated as follows: 11 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10.

17. The translation of musicals is affected by the semiotic complexity of the text, the ephemeral and transitory nature of its reception, the multiplicity of agents taking part in a single production, and the difficulty of describing the target texts, variously labelled as ‘translations, versions, adaptations, and/or rewritings’ (Mateo 2008: 321).

As Marta Mateo recalls, there is danger in adapting foreign musical theatre texts according to what is assumed performable based on cultural expectations. These expectations might not always match the stylistic boundaries of the form and might call for an expansion of the audience’s cultural boundaries. Gideon Toury emphasises that the nature of translating is conditioned by ‘factors that govern the choice of text-types, or even of individual texts, to be imported through translation into a particular culture/language at a particular point in time’ (Toury 1995: 98). Mateo defends that while the source text of a musical is sometimes a factor in choosing its production, the most commercially successful shows rely largely on their popular music. There is a ‘universal’ nature to these works, whether or not the music is known worldwide or the scripts deal with cross-cultural and timeless issues (Mateo 2008: 334).

The absence of a cultural connection is one of the main problems in exporting a foreign musical to Spain, as demonstrated by the case of long-running U.K.-U.S. musical *Jersey Boys* (2005), based on a biographical narrative of the 1960s rock ‘n’ roll band *The Four Seasons*. In Spain, there are simply not strong enough cultural references to make the product widely appealing, or, at more basic level, understood. In musical theatre, there are internal consistencies that need to be observed, such as the interaction of music and text and the intertextual references that are created through those interactions. Musical motifs often recall other musical experiences attached to a specific culture. These referents are not shared across cultures because of linguistic, cultural, and historical specificity. As such, in the translation process, cultural proximity (or being too source culture-specific) can hinder musical translation. In Spain, Anglo-American musicals are frequently adapted to a Spanish context. For instance, the translation and adaptation of original libretti like *Victor Victoria* (1995) and *The Producers* (2001) have experienced strong text changes in order to gain

Foreignising / Domesticating Debate

acceptability in the target society (Mateo 2008: 57).¹⁸ In these and other cases, although the texts often remain source-specific, a strategy to tone down the reverence towards the foreign source is implemented. This results in a process of ‘acculturation’ that removes the cultural anchoring of a piece and eliminates or minimises the relationship to any specific culture (Aaltonen 2000: 55).¹⁹

Venuti argues that ‘the translator always exercises a choice concerning the degree and direction of the violence at work in any translating’ (2012: 19). As co-translator of the *copla* songs and author of *The Copla Musical*, I am responsible for the compromises made in the interpretation and choices in the translation of the songs. The consequences of this responsibility are determined by my personal experience of *copla*, acquired through years of research rather than a lived-experience of its development period. Nonetheless, my personal experience echoes the past experiences of some of the communities that originally identified with *copla*. Being displaced from my country sparked a new-born interest in exploring my Spanish cultural identity through the study of *copla*. It is as an immigrant that I have noticed the evocative power of *copla* and developed a personal relationship with these songs that has made me consider studying and disseminating my experience of *copla* to other cultures. My re-contextualisation of *copla* in a new language and cultural setting allows non-Spanish audiences to encounter *copla* through my artistic lens and with no other referents in English to locate the form.

As Laera notes, theatre translators metaphorically pull in two opposite directions — towards ‘on the one hand, the source (con)text, and on the other, the target (con)text’ (2011: 214). The opposing worlds of source and target feature at the centre of Lawrence Venuti’s definition of domesticating versus foreignising translation strategies. Venuti establishes an opposition between these two forms of translation, favouring foreignising translation that ‘signifies the difference of the foreign text, yet only by disrupting the cultural codes that prevail in the target language’ (2012: 20).²⁰ This translation method is dominant in countries like France or Germany. Anglo-American culture, on the contrary, is dominated by domesticating theories that ‘recommend fluent translating, reducing if not simply excluding the very difference that translation is called on to convey’ (2012: 21).²¹ The domesticating method is very much aimed at facilitating the understanding of receiving audiences and as such Venuti warns of a risk of the appropriation of foreign cultures for domestic, cultural, economic, and political agendas (2012: 18).

The debate concerning foreignisation and domestication is relevant to the adaptation of the original Spanish *copla* lyrics into English for *The Copla Musical*. Throughout the writing of the piece I often questioned whether I should try to maintain the idiosyncrasy of the original lyrics

¹⁸. Moreover, American poet Charles Bernstein reflects on why contemporary writing is enforced by its economic value. He affirms that ‘we are not free to choose the language of the workplace or the family we are born into, though we are free, within limits, to rebel against it’ (Bernstein 1986, in Venuti, 2012: 5).

¹⁹. Aaltonen also argues that this cultural relocation is a useful method when a translator wishes to guarantee the intelligibility of a foreign play as a piece of theatre (2000: 256).

²⁰. For Venuti, this translation strategy can be a form of resistance against ethnocentrism, racism, cultural narcissism, and imperialism in the interests of democratic geopolitical relations: ‘The theory implies that in its effort to do right abroad, the text must do wrong at home, deviating enough from native norms to stage an alien reading experience’ (2012: 20).

²¹. ‘Domestication replaces source-language features that are not recognizable with target-language ones that are’ (Venuti 2012: 21).

So, you gave your heart, yes but at what cost?



The Copla Cabaret, 2015

Director: Andrea Jiménez. Performer: Alejandro Postigo

or prioritise accessibility in the new language. Indeed, this dichotomy is often present in any translation work at the beginning of the process.²² Throughout the development and various international presentations of *The Copla Musical*, I have attempted different strategies to try and find the right balance between foreignisation and domestication. In the English performances of the show, songs often combine verses in

English and Spanish, thus maintaining a small percentage of the original Spanish lyrics. It is assumed that untranslated verses will remain inaccessible to audiences in terms of dramatic content. However, the English translations provided before or after each Spanish delivery offer context and a sense of the song, telling enough of the story so that non-Spanish-speaking audiences can still follow the general narrative. In this way these audiences are also offered a glimpse of what the song sounds like in its original language. I have experimented extensively with this idea. In some performances songs have been performed fully translated, while in others they have mixed English and Spanish. This has been the case as well when the show has been presented in Spanish-speaking countries where the songs have been sung in their original versions but sometimes English verses have been included to test the audience's acceptance.

²² Jean Graham-Jones addresses this translator's dilemma: 'Do we translators make the play accessible to the audience or do we make the audience accessible to the play? Do we attempt to do both?' (in Laera 2011: 214). Translator and dramatist Steve Gooch also warns about the 'twin crimes of translation: academicism, where obscure literary or social references are pursued to the detriment of idiomatic English; and the opposite ill where, in order to make an irritating foreigner "accessible", an off-the-peg style is reached for' (Gooch 1996: 17).

The debate between foreignising and domesticating approaches in translation has consistently featured across international currents of thought. In Friedrich Schleiermacher's words, there are only two methods of translation: either the translator leaves the author in peace, as much as possible, and moves the reader towards them or the translator leaves the reader in peace, as much as possible, and moves the author towards them (in Lefevere 1977: 74).²³ In *The Copla Musical* I have often veered from one extreme to the other. Whilst I consider it vital to preserve the original meaning and context of the songs, it is also essential to try and speak 'culturally' to the reader (or spectator) by adapting both language and cultural referents. In the case of *The Copla Musical* the latter is especially important since the acceptance of the project partially depends on its relationship with its audiences. To a certain extent, I want to send the spectator abroad, yet to do that I need to be able to 'anglicise' the foreign universe in question. There is, thus, some inevitable ethnocentric reduction of the songs, as Venuti suggests. My fear is that untranslated concepts in *copla* songs remain impenetrable to non-Spanish audiences and that this possibly results in a lack of dramatic appeal to those audiences without a very specific interest in Spanish folkloric culture, especially in this type of folklore developed more than half a century ago. By compromising some details, such as argots and manners of expression, the hope is that the spectator will be more drawn into the narratives told in the songs. However, in this situation the audience will inevitably miss some original references, so it seems impossible to win on both fronts. For instance, the protagonists of some *copla* songs were gypsies that spoke a language named

23. Venuti elaborates on Schleiermacher's dichotomy as choosing between an ethnocentric reduction of the foreign text to target-language cultural values, which might be seen as equivalent to transporting the author to the audience's cultural context, or an ethnodeviant pressure on those values to register the linguistic and cultural difference of the foreign text, which might be seen as equivalent to sending the reader abroad to the author's cultural context. These are Venuti's definitions for the processes of domesticating and foreignising within the debate he establishes (2012: 20).

caló. *Caló* words are likely to remain completely inaccessible to foreign audiences, even though they are commonly accepted in the Spanish versions of the songs despite their meanings not always being widely known. As Ivo Buzek (2013) points out, *copla* is generally written in an Andalusian flavoured Spanish and splashed with a few words from *caló* language to give the folklore a slightly exotic taste.²⁴

Accents and modes of speech are also something to take into consideration in translation. For instance, Eugene Nida, an advocate for domesticating translation, defends that transparency and accuracy in translation depend on generating an equivalent effect in the target-language culture (Venuti 2012: 22). This implies that communication is then controlled by the target-language culture. For Venuti this therefore seems less an exchange of information than an appropriation of a foreign text for domestic purposes (*ibid.*).²⁵ When thinking of applying these methods to *The Copla Musical*, I would argue that if Andalusian words/accents were, for example, translated into Northern English words and expressions, that would compromise characters' backgrounds and distance the songs from their cultural heritage. This was a method of domesticating translation that I chose not to engage with, demonstrating one of the reasons this project sits in the middle of the debate between foreignisation and domestication. However, according to French translator and theorist Antoine Berman, even when applying a foreignising choice, 'an otherness can never be manifested in its own

24. 'Las coplas generalmente [son] escritas en un español andaluzado y salpicadas con alguna que otra palabra del caló para darle al folklore un sabor ligeramente exótico'. (*Copla* songs are generally written in an Andalusian Spanish and sprinkled with a few *caló* words to season the folkloric form with a light exotic taste) (Buzek 2013: 39). The writings of Ropero Núñez (1978) provide another interesting source on this topic.

25. An example of this equivalent can be seen in Laera's translation of Bola Agbaje's *Gone Too Far!* (2007) from English to Italian. The Italian translation 'plays on the language differences between the rich and dominant North (Milan in particular) and the disadvantaged, dominated South of Italy' (Laera 2011: 215).

terms, only in those of the target language, and hence always already encoded' (Berman 1985: 87-91, in Venuti 2012: 20). This also implies that Andalusian features or heritage might prove unreadable to the target English audience. For Berman, who is a defender of domestication, the priority should be the effect of the text in the target culture. In theatre, this might happen even more prominently, as words are heard as opposed to only read. In practice, Andalusian accents tend to shorten words, aspirate some consonants, interchange /s/ and /z/ sounds, and apply a cadence or musicality to the phrasing. This sometime presents a challenge for non-native Spanish speakers to fully understand Andalusian speech and this challenge is exacerbated when applying these features to performance texts and songs in English, often rendering them practicably illegible.

As we can see through the few examples given, there is a difficult challenge in presenting *copla* songs out of their historical context. Klaudyna Rozhin speaks about 'the difficulty presented by the cultural context of foreign plays, and claims that although there are ways of domesticating foreign concepts, these are likely to undermine the otherness of the text' (in Aaltonen 2000: 256). Venuti talks about the illusion produced by fluent translating wherein the translator's invisibility at once enacts and masks an insidious domestication of foreign texts, rewriting them in the transparent discourse that prevails in English and that selects precisely those foreign texts amenable to fluent translating (2012: 16). In any case, *copla* songs are difficult to consider as transparent or amenable to fluent translating. This is maybe why this translation has not been fully attempted before²⁶ or that it has been attempted in Spain mainly for comedic purposes such as on television shows. The thought of providing an accurate translation of a genre like *copla*, that is so historically

charged, often results in parodic gestures aimed at Spanish audiences that reinforce the idea of *copla* being 'untranslatable', as no other culture would have the history and tools to fully understand all the layers and the idioms of these songs. *The Copla Musical* makes a non-exhaustive (as there are thousands of *coplas*) but qualitative research-led attempt at trying to recreate the value of a selection of songs in a new context. Here, even if the songs are presented out of their traditional time and place, their context is also recreated in the narrative and dramaturgy of the play.

It is not immediately apparent to audiences that *copla* songs offered a subversive tool of resistance to the Franco regime. American scholar Stephanie Sieburth talks about the enduring power of these songs.²⁷ A translation that could reproduce this power and the infatuation that Spanish audiences felt towards these songs needs to include some contextualisation of the realities people experienced at the time, whether of repression or a cultural attraction and identification with social, political, and sexual symbols of freedom. In this context, for dramatist Steve Gooch translating plays can only be an 'act of love' that relates to discovering in the original play some new and slightly exotic quality that the home audience should know about: 'like a love affair with a fascinating foreigner whom you feel compelled to introduce to your family' (Gooch 1996: 13). My challenge when translating *copla* songs is to assume the position of the foreigner and to present my cultural background to the new culture I am now immersed in. Effectively, in reverse of Gooch's process, I want international audiences to love *copla*, yet my question remains — how may I share my Spanish experience of *copla* and make non-Spanish audiences feel or understand it? This question prompted the development of a different show, *The Copla Cabaret*, in 2015, a follow-up iteration within my PaR process that revolved specifically

26. Prior experiments presenting some *copla* songs in Anglo-speaking contexts are limited to Spanish stars like Lola Flores or Marifé de Triana who performed internationally in the USA in the 1970s and 1980s, but the songs would be performed in Spanish.

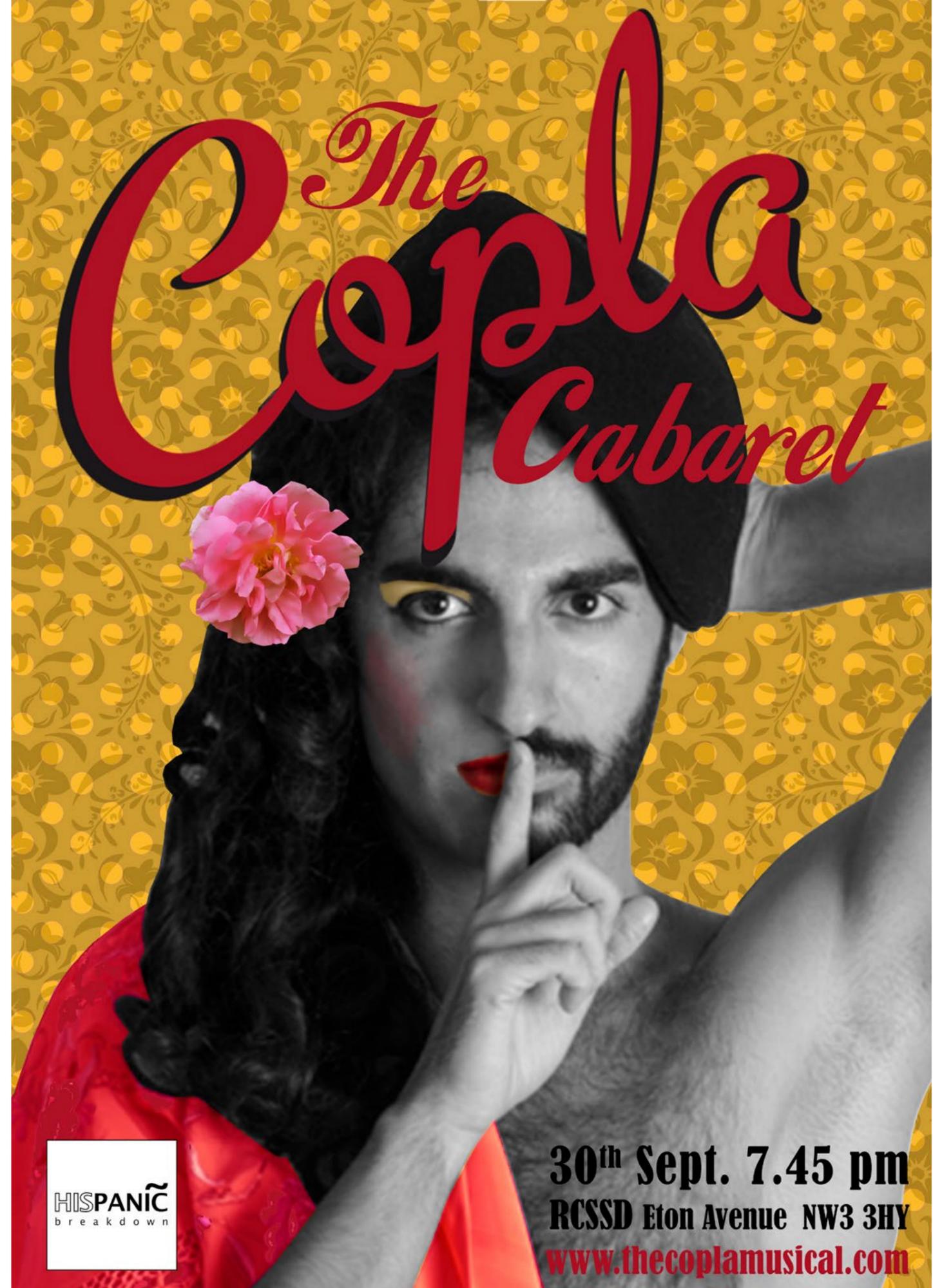
27. In *Survival Songs: Conchita Piquer's coplas and Franco's regime of terror* (2014) Sieburth theorises on how *copla* songs helped people work through feelings of terror and grief in ways that were politically safe and emotionally manageable.

around the translation and presentation of *copla* to non-Spanish audiences in the style of an interactive cabaret. Gooch interestingly points out:

If you love a person, after all, you hate to see your view of them misrepresented or misunderstood – even if you yourself are blind to their worst qualities. ‘Faithful’ certainly can mean ‘objective’ in this context because the translator’s subjectivity necessarily stands behind his or her efforts. This is not simply a matter of how you view the foreign work, but also of the geographic, cultural and social limits through which your unconscious use of your home language has been formed (1996: 18).

Any translation is subjective and, as Gooch suggests, I want audiences to see what I regard as the best of *copla*. Within my subjectivity, I have chosen for the project some of my favourite songs that I found fitting alongside a newly written dramatic narrative through which, in turn, I have equally tried to enhance the songs. In addition, I have channelled the songs through a performative style in which my personal interpretation of them is even more present. All of this has been a labour of love, entirely personal and subjective but, as Venuti observes, legitimate and unique ‘in its own right’ (2012: 17).

Poster of *The Copla Cabaret*, 2015
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The Performance of English Copla

In his introductory article to *Stages of Translation*, Steve Gooch acknowledges that ‘actors can’t act what they can’t perceive, and if a translation doesn’t communicate directly, directors rarely have enough time to provide a compensating explication (always assuming they’ve seen the difficulty themselves)’ (1996: 13). Gooch’s faith in the actor and director seems limited and presumably he wishes them to not face the additional challenge of cultural translation. In *The Copla Musical*, however, both actors and directors exist at the core of the creative process, which in turn is fully dependant on their intercultural bond. Spanish and British performers bring distinct interpretative qualities into this project, given their various trainings and cultural influences. A performer’s adaptation to a foreign culture involves a gradual and organic transformation that reflects their growing cultural awareness. In a musical theatre project, an actor-singer’s performance normally becomes fuller and more animated, especially in the use of gesture, facial expressions, and diction, once they understand the musical and semantic subtexts at play. In the case of *The Copla Musical*, actors from English-speaking backgrounds were briefed on the characteristics and style of *copla* so that they could intellectually engage with the songs’ features and background. Nonetheless, I would argue that actors can only achieve deeper and more empowered performances of the songs when their understanding is embodied and not exclusively intellectual. In my experience, such embodied understanding amongst English-speaking actors has often been achieved by exploring a full rendering of the *copla* songs’ dramatic potential in relation to the structure of the overall story that is written in English. Songs in musical theatre often help storytelling through the expression of feeling. Similarly, in my work *copla* songs

have been translated into English with a strong dramatic purpose that in my view helps preserve the emotions that exist in their original lyrics.

However, what happens after translation, for example, to the Spanish performers facing the responsibility of singing these songs and telling a familiar story in a new and unfamiliar language? Violeta García has been a performer in *The Copla Musical* for many years. She used to sing Spanish *copla* professionally but in this project she has undergone a process of artistic self-discovery, reshaping her cultural understanding through the reinterpretation of *copla* in a new context.²⁸ The transmission of interpretation begins with the assimilation of technical knowledge that the performer learns and personalises. Spanish and British performers need to find their own way of handling these materials. Spanish actors need to perform the new English *copla* while preserving the implied emotions they identify in the original songs. Meanwhile, British performers find it helpful to know the original style and context of *copla* songs, however mimesis is not a useful tool in this intercultural process. In my experience, if actors apply their own cultural skills to singing English *copla* then they will probably develop more nuanced, textured, and compelling performances.²⁹ By approaching the text from their own cultural knowledge, British performers slowly build their awareness of the material’s original culture, which in turn brings them closer to the audience’s comprehension, expanding this circle of intercultural exchanges.

²⁸. ‘Singing *Copla* in English is weird, especially when being used to singing it in Spanish. In exploring how to find the best way of singing English *Copla*, I realised that the more I shaped the phrasing and articulation attending to the rules of English language, the closer I got to finding a new truth in this so particularly Spanish genre’ (Violeta García. Interviews with the cast of *The Copla Musical*, London: Roundhouse, 2013).

²⁹. A performance approach that is commonly encouraged in musical theatre is ‘to imbue songs with psychological realism, organically, delivering the lyrics as if they were a realistic passage of conventional prose [...] The theory behind this approach suggests that by treating the text as a monologue set to music, the actor will gain new insights into how and why the character might need to sing the thoughts’ (Bell 2012: 252).

Eugenio Barba defines inculturation as ‘the process of passive sensory-motor absorption of the daily behaviour of a given culture’ (1991: 219). A performer’s adaptation to a foreign culture involves a gradual and organic transformation, which is also a reflection of their growing cultural awareness. Ian Sanderson is a British actor who has been involved in *The Copla Musical* since 2011. By 2013 Ian had developed a stronger sense and understanding of *copla* through performing the songs in English that led him to a more visceral performance of these songs. Native English-speaking performers are thus modified through their contact with Spanish culture and are transported somewhere new and unusual yet specific. As Richard Schechner puts it:

Performing someone else's culture takes a knowledge, a “translation” that is different, more viscerally experiential, than translating a book. Intercultural exchange takes a teacher: someone who knows the body of performance of the culture being translated. The translator of the culture is not a mere agent, as a translator of words might be, but an actual culture-bearer (1991: 314).

In this sense a culture-bearer will facilitate the understanding of their culture through different practices of translation involving various languages, including musical and performative ones. *The Copla Musical* is full of culture-bearers and their function varies depending on their position within the project, starting with the author and performers from Spain who are familiar with the tradition of *copla* and ending with the lyricists, musical directors, and other collaborators who come from an Anglophone musical theatre background. Juxtaposed with the culture-bearers of the Spanish, British, and international artists involved in this project, there is a wide multicultural audience that completes the exchange. This exchange differs depending on each audience demographic. Whether the show is performed to non-Anglophone audiences potentially aware of any artistic parallels with *copla* or simply a cultural

understanding of other historically politicised musical forms, or whether audiences are first encountering this culturally-loaded form, we all complement each other.

This intercultural process positions the dynamics of the new English *copla* at the forefront, and encourages the cast and creative team work together to find out how it must be performed for each segment audience. In touring this project, we have experienced that it is not the same to perform *The Copla Musical* in Bolivia than in Bulgaria, or to perform it in Sitges to a mainly English expat community relocated in Spain, or to perform English *copla* to an entirely Spanish audience in Seville. My re-imagination of *copla* follows a method to re-engage with cultural codes that are put into perspective and need to be revised for each contemporary audience. This process has probed the notion of cultural sensitivity through the complex dialogue already inherent in collaborative performance. Through addressing cultural sensitivity, I have sought to render transparent the challenges — and some potential solutions — provoked by one of the central intercultural aims that I pursue in my work: maintaining cultural visibility on both sides of a cultural dialogue through a process of identifying cultural frames of reference. This discourse is mainly defined in terms of a target British audience, yet without erasing or flattening the Spanish source material and its culture. On the contrary, although speaking the language of Anglophone musical theatre, Spanish *copla* still manages to keep a visible identity, whilst translation into English allows *copla* to be presented in new international contexts. This intercultural experiment highlights new dynamics of collaboration and creativity and illuminates a way forward for intercultural musical theatre as a distinct form within the dominant Anglophone, West End-Broadway genus.



The Copla Musical, 2012, by Alejandro Postigo. Director: Sarah Johnson
Performers: Ian Sanderson, Alejandro Postigo, Spencer Irwin, Imanol Fuentes
© Camilla Greenwell

Conclusion

The Copla Musical originally aimed to produce a full-length musical that re-imagined and expanded *copla* beyond its Spanish context. During Franco's dictatorship between 1939 and 1975, *copla* represented a series of national-catholic values imposed by the fascist regime. This prompted dissident artists to defy censorship and explore powerful subtexts to relate to oppressed populations. This politicisation of *copla* diverted from its original entertainment and poetic purposes prior to the Spanish Civil War of 1936 to 1939, and paved the way to transform *copla* into a subversive tool of expression in democracy after 1975. In the political climate of the twenty-first century, these songs still register a new cultural significance in the realm of musical theatre as they enter in contact with other histories and identities. Further possibilities for identification with the melodramatic narratives and emotions embedded in *copla* lyrics become available inside and outside of Spain, whilst social links and ambiguities such as those experienced by homosexual groups silenced during the dictatorship can now be explored artistically through reinterpretations of the form's historical subtexts. These significant possibilities entirely depend on how *copla* is translated and presented into new cultural settings.

Throughout the development and multiple iterations of *The Copla Musical*, I have tried to facilitate a cultural connection that permits the readability and acceptance of *copla* as a cultural form that may contribute to the making of musical theatre in Anglo-dominant contexts. While doing this I have made equal efforts to maintain the songs' idiosyncrasies as informed by the historical matters that remain key to the identity of *copla*, calculating the balance between foreignisation and domestication within translation as discussed above. Throughout this process, I have challenged Venuti's notion of an 'illusion of transparency' since

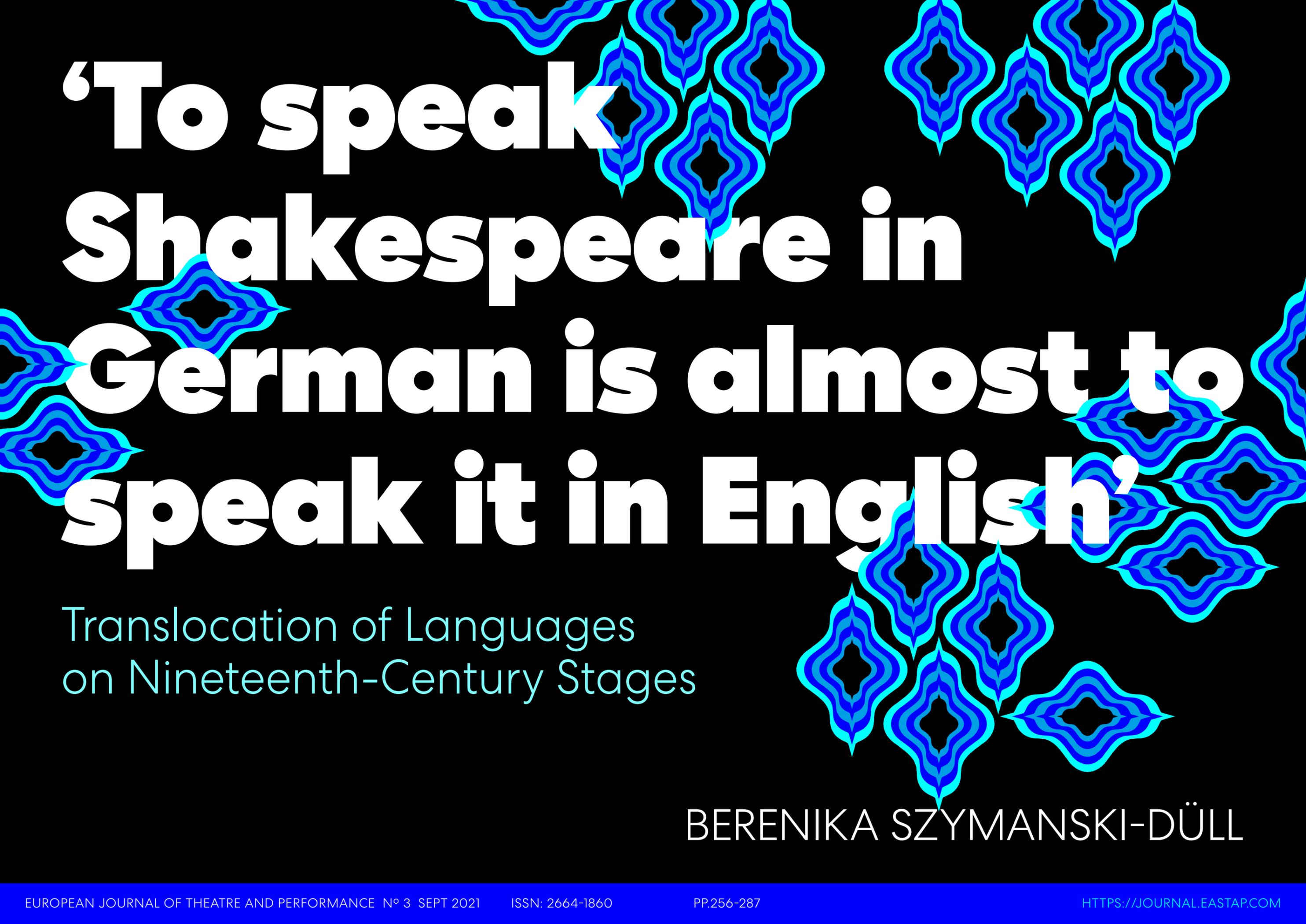
our process of translating *copla* was overt and required an intercultural effort from adaptation to performance. This process involved actors and musicians as much as lyricists and dramaturges as they were all encouraged to reflect on their own experience of *copla* and bring their cultural knowledge and identities into the adaptation and performance of the art form. In selecting the songs and coordinating the adaptation process, I have safeguarded most of the songs' original contents yet at the same time I have ensured that *The Copla Musical* exists in its own context as a 'text in its own right'. In this way I have tried to navigate the potential violent effects of translation outlined by Venuti. However, it is my 'act of love' for *copla* that has empowered *The Copla Musical* to become my own contribution towards expressing this essential form across different cultural contexts.³⁰

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³⁰. For more information about *The Copla Musical*, please visit www.thecoplamusical.com

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**'To speak
Shakespeare in
German is almost to
speak it in English'**

Translocation of Languages
on Nineteenth-Century Stages

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KEYWORDS

Bilingual performance, non-native language, nation building, contact zone, nineteenth century

SCHLÜSSELWÖRTER

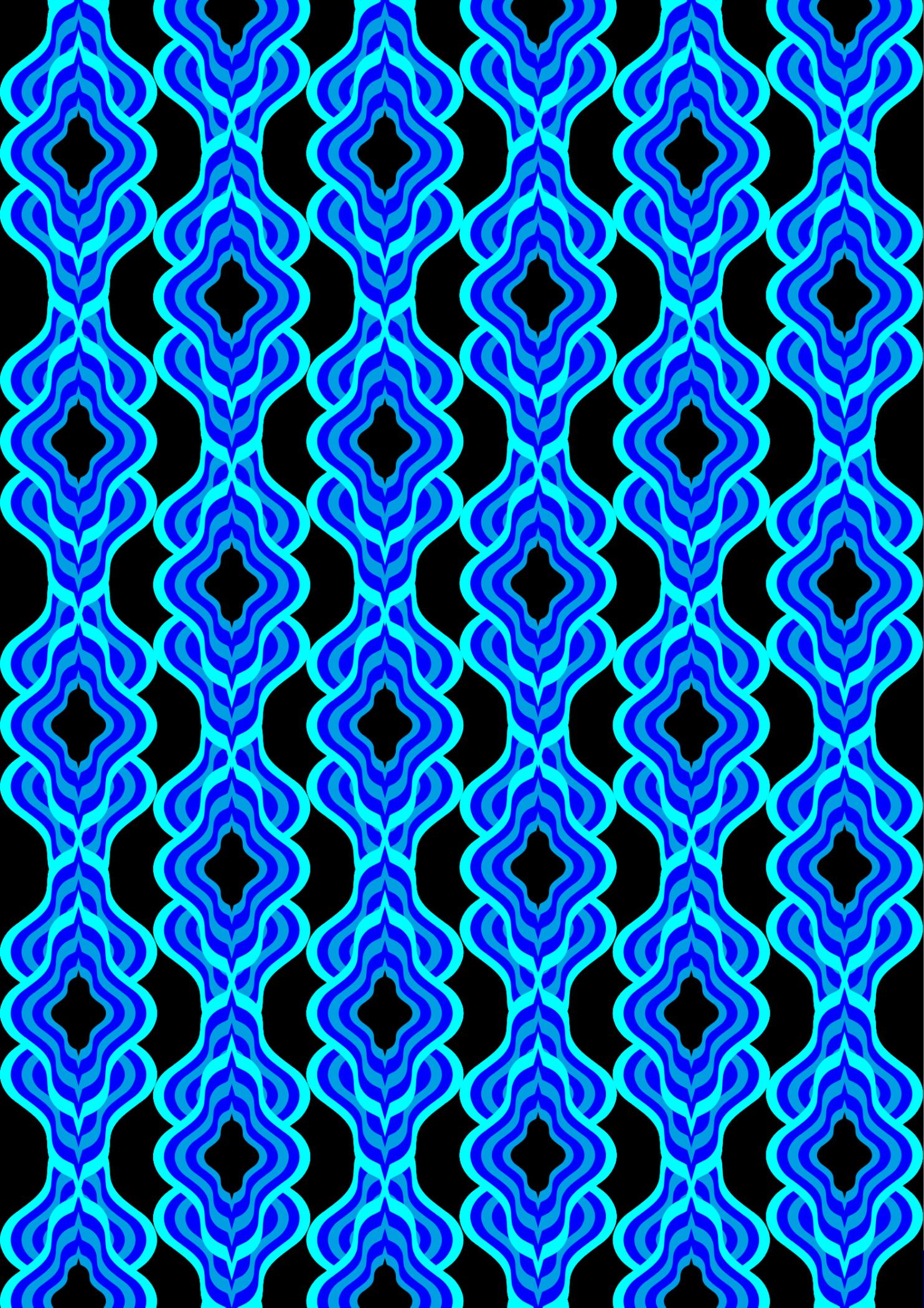
Bilinguale Aufführungen, Fremdsprachen, Nationenbildung, Kontaktzone, 19. Jahrhundert

Summary

During the nineteenth century technical developments and the associated advances in transportation encouraged mobility and connectivity and greatly expanded the actor's sphere of action. These developments paved the way for theatre to become a transnationally, even globally connected medium with numerous possibilities of cross-cultural encounters and entanglements. In this context, languages left their national contexts by travelling the world with actors. In this article, I will pursue this translocation of languages by focusing on two cases: bilingual performances and performances of actors who have performed in non-native languages. Focusing on the USA, I aim to examine these concrete language practices in theatre as spaces of encounter or contact zones in a time characterised by strong nation building processes.

Zusammenfassung

Im Verlauf des 19. Jahrhunderts haben technische Entwicklungen und die damit verbundenen Fortschritte im Transportwesen Mobilität und Konnektivität gefördert und so den Aktionsradius von Schauspieler*innen enorm ausgedehnt. Diese Entwicklungen ebneten dem Theater den Weg, sich zu einem transnationalen, ja global vernetzten Medium mit vielfältigen Möglichkeiten kulturübergreifender Begegnungen und Verflechtungen zu entwickeln. In diesem Zuge verließen auch zahlreiche Sprachen ihre nationalen Kontexte und reisten mit den Schauspieler*innen um die Welt. In meinem Beitrag werde ich dieser Translokation von Sprachen nachgehen und zwei Beispiele fokussieren: bilinguale Aufführungen sowie Aufführungen von Schauspieler*innen, die nicht in ihren Muttersprachen aufgetreten sind. Mit einem Fokus auf die USA möchte ich diese beiden Praktiken als Räume der Begegnung bzw. als Kontaktzonen in einer Zeit untersuchen, die von starken Nation-Building-Prozessen geprägt war.



It occurs to me that, for all their boasts about having the biggest and the most of everything, Americans, when it comes to art, are surprisingly devoid of patriotic self-confidence. It is false to say that the public craves only plebeian entertainments.

But it is assumed that performances of quality come from abroad. Foreign actors make quite a splash here and, if French or Italian, are expected to perform in their own language, which no one understands. Rachel triumphed with Adrienne Lecouvreur [...] some twenty years ago; and ten years ago Ristori made a very successful, lucrative tour throughout the country. Thinking about this now, I confess to feeling a twinge of envy. But, no, don't conclude that I dream of resuming my career here. In what language? No one would want to hear our native tongue [...].

(Sontag 2000: 140-141)

These words were written by Maryna, the protagonist of Susan Sontag's novel *In America*, to her Polish compatriot and friend, Henryk. Although they are fictional, they nevertheless address characteristic aspects of the theatre in the second half of the nineteenth century. Technical developments in this era and the associated advances in transportation encouraged mobility and connectivity and greatly expanded the actor's sphere of action. Many national stars, aspiring actors and dancers, and sometimes even whole companies seized the opportunity

USA, Language, and Contact Zones

to travel the world performing on stages in different countries and continents. Thus, Eduard Devrient — an important figure in German speaking theatre at the time — stated rightly that ‘everyone rushed into guest tours’ (Devrient 1905: 295).¹ This is as much the case for Adelaide Ristori (1822-1906) and Rachel Félix (1821-1858), mentioned in Maryna’s words above, as it is true of stars like Sarah Bernhardt (1844-1923) or Eleonora Duse (1858-1924) who to this day are well-known even outside the world of theatre especially because of their successful tours abroad. All these figures transgressed not only territorial, but also cultural boundaries, which had several impacts on the theatre business: theatre grew to become a transnationally, even globally connected medium with numerous possibilities of cross-cultural encounters and entanglements. In this context, many different mother tongues left their national contexts and travelled the world with performers. Since a large part of acting practice, especially within ‘high culture’, was based on language, it seems relevant to ask how this translocality of languages was implemented in theatre practice in a time of strong nation building processes. In this article, I will pursue this question by exploring two practices already mentioned in the opening quotation: firstly, the case of bilingual performances and secondly performances by actors who performed in non-native languages. I aim to examine these concrete language practices as spaces of encounter or contact zones, asking what consequences they may have provoked. Geographically, I will focus on the United States as it is the country which was — as Sontag’s protagonist Maryna describes — one of the most popular travel destinations for European touring actors in the second half of the nineteenth century. I choose to focus on the United States also because of its history of migration marked by a constant oscillation between national ambitions and openness to foreign influences.

To describe situations of cultural encounter, Mary Louise Pratt developed the concept of the ‘contact zone’ that she defines as those spaces ‘where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power, such as colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths as they are lived out in many parts of the world today’ (Pratt 1990: 34). As this quotation shows, the conditions for interaction that arise in contact zones are not the same for everyone. This circumstance is associated on the one hand with ‘asymmetrical relations of power’ but on the other with different cultural imprints and thus different practices, views, and opinions. This, in turn, harbours enormous potential for conflict and is determined by tensions between dominance and marginality, potentially promoting dispute and exclusion. At the same time, an encounter in a contact zone is reciprocal as it is able to set negotiation processes in motion and thus produce various forms of agency. Contact zones are thus special spaces of communitisation that are always generated anew performatively and that are the result of the joint presences of those involved in them. The emergence of contact zones consequently questions existing concepts of community — such as those of nations —, problematises traditional ideas, and evokes reinterpretations. In this context, Pratt stresses the key function of language as a medium of communication and emphasises — following Benedict Anderson — that both spoken and written language played an important role in the processes of building modern nations:

Languages were seen as living in ‘speech communities’, and these tended to be theorized as discrete, self-defined, coherent entities, held together by a homogeneous competence or grammar shared

1. All translations into English are mine unless otherwise acknowledged.

identically and equally among all the members. This abstract idea of the speech community seemed to reflect, among other things, the utopian way modern nations conceive of themselves as what Benedict Anderson calls 'imagined communities'. (Pratt 1991: 37)

In the form of writing such as books, newspapers, or magazines but also in the form of theatre, various vernaculars played a crucial role in nation-building processes and created networks of people who would eventually constitute the literary elites that would rule certain groups as nations (Anderson 1986).

This seems interesting with regards to the USA because despite linguistic diversity due to the country's settlement and migration history, language can also here be ascribed an important role in terms of community building. After the War of Independence between 1775 and 1783 when thirteen British colonies rebelled against their motherland and founded the United States of America, English — the language of these settler colonies — became the language of the newly founded republic. Although there were attempts to allow other languages — such as Greek or Latin — as national languages, precisely in order to distance themselves from the former colonial power of England, these were ultimately not a serious alternative. Over time a new variant of English, American English, prevailed. The propagation of this language was a major concern of the nation's most important thinkers. For example, in his *Dissertations on the English Language* Noah Webster pleaded for the independence of American English: 'As an independent nation, our honor requires us to have a system of our own in language as well as in government. Great Britain, whose children we are and whose language we speak, should no longer be our standard' (Webster [1789] 1951: 20). Given the close connection between language and nation, it is therefore not surprising that important political manifestos were written in English, that English-language newspapers and magazines were founded, and that the

first literary works to praise and to defend the new nation were written in English. Despite these trends, however, it must be noted that parallel to this development, a great linguistic diversity can be observed within the young US nation. This goes hand in hand with the fact that numerous migrants living in the country and continually arriving not only continued to cultivate their own culture but also their respective national languages. This was, for instance, the case in Little Germany — also called 'Kleindeutschland' — a prototypical district of German immigrants in New York where German restaurants, churches, street signs, and clubs were common. German was the language that connected everyone and that strengthened the sense of community. Theatre also played an important role in this structure, initially in the form of amateur theatres in the 1840s and from the 1850s onwards also on a professional level.

In this context, I would like to refer to Pratt again. For even if certain elites propagate the model of a homogeneous community with a common language, it does not mean that this community functions according to the rules and the ideas of these elites:

Despite whatever conflict or systematic social differences might be in play, it is assumed that all participants are engaged in the same game and that game is the same for all players. Often it is. But of course often it is not, as, for example, when speakers are from different classes or cultures, or one party is exercising authority and another is submitting to it or questioning it. (Pratt 1991: 38)

From this perspective, the history of the USA since the colonisation of North America has been the history of interactions of different cultures manifesting themselves in various forms of encounter. These interactions can by no means be described as a mutual exchange or harmonious process but rather as a process in a conflict-laden field (Zapf 2010: 41), that is to say a contact zone.

This is also evident in the theatre of the time that was a part of this field. Theatre was shunned by the early colonies, especially those with British roots. In revolutionary America performing art was initially boycotted and even prohibited by law. It had opponents due to its reputation as being anti-religious, immoral, and frivolous. However, especially after the War of Independence, many permanent theatres were built and with time theatre eventually established itself as an enterprise that not only served entertainment but also brought the first American plays to the stage and established the first national stars of its own. The language of these theatres was, of course, predominantly English. An exception were those theatres founded by migrants, which were primarily aimed at the respective migrant audience by promoting performances in their home language and by inviting stars from their home countries. Over time these migrant theatres also played an important role for American theatre as they created numerous opportunities for encounters between different theatre traditions by, for example, arranging guest tours by their compatriots on US stages. In addition, many European migrants from the theatre business entered the country and tried to make a career in the USA. All this led to the further creation of contact zones.

Following Pratt's term 'contact zone', I understand theatrical contact zones as spaces in which actors, spectators, languages, texts, and aesthetics from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds come into contact with each other within a theatrical framework and thus interact, communicate, and negotiate shared histories and power relations. What makes these contact zones so distinctive is the specific character of theatre based on the exposition of action and language on stage and the communication both between actors on stage and between those on stage and their audience. All these contacts and interactions take place in the here and now and lead to a spatial and temporal co-presence of culturally different people, themes, languages, and aesthetics. This all has consequences not only for the moment of the performance. Before, during, and after the theatrical

event, interactions take place — whether consciously or unconsciously — triggering questions and discussions, entailing negotiations, promoting redefinitions, or creating new forms (see Szymanski-Düll 2017).

Bilingual Performances

In contrast to the present day where guest performances — whether at home or abroad — are carried out by the whole company, in the nineteenth century it was not uncommon that actors also travelled alone with their repertoire of roles and had to perform within the existing structures of the theatres in the respective countries that they visited. For foreign guest performances this often meant giving a guest performance in their own language at a theatre mainly specialising in a migrant audience from that particular country. This was, for instance, the case at the popular German speaking stages in New York like the Stadttheater, the Thalia Theatre, or the Amberg Theatre where immigrant directors like Otto Hoym, William Kramer, Heinrich Conried, or Gustav Amberg brought numerous artists, plays, and operettas from German speaking areas to the USA. For many performers such a possibility of performing in the USA represented a steppingstone in their career since it repeatedly occurred that they would receive further offers for guest tours throughout the country playing on other migrant stages.

A second possibility of acting on stages abroad — mainly within popular dramas like *Adrienne Lecouvreur*, *The Lady of the Camellias*, or the plays of Shakespeare that were well known to the theatre audience of the time — meant performing in a foreign-language context. It was not uncommon for actors arriving from France, Italy, or Germany to be given the opportunity to play on American stages as well. In such cases,

they performed in their mother language while all the other performers acted in English. This resulted in the presence of different languages in one production. When, for example, in winter 1866-1867,² the popular American tragedian Edwin Booth (1833-1893) invited the actor Bogumil Dawison (1818-1872)³ during his US tour to the New York Winter Garden to play Othello, Dawison acted in German, while Booth himself acted the role of Iago in English. The German actress, Marie Methua-Scheller, who emigrated to America played Desdemona in this production, giving a bilingual performance. She acted in English in her scenes with Booth as well as with the company and in German in scenes with Dawison.⁴

2. The productions of this bilingual *Othello* took place on 29 December 1866 and on 2 and 4 January 1867.

3. Dawison made his stage debut in Polish in 1837 in Warsaw. His first German speaking performances took place in 1841 in Lemberg. In 1847 he performed for the first time in Hamburg at the Thalia Theatre. At the time of the *Othello* performance with Booth he was already considered as one of the foremost European tragedians.

4. Concerning this theatre event, see also Watermaier and Engle 1988.

It is difficult to determine whether this production was the first bilingual performance in the USA. Looking at reviews, however, one can find a comment indicating that it must at least have been the first polyglot performance of *Othello*. The way in which the critics treated this bilingual theatrical event, however, leads one to suspect that bilingual performance was not yet an established practice on US stages at this time. Therefore, some critics expressed serious misgivings in the run-up to the performance that, for example, the bilingualism could lead to a contest on stage between Booth and Dawison simply showing their parts instead of interacting with each other. Another concern was that the presence of different languages on stage would result in 'a confusion of tongues' ('Drama' 1867: 7) in which the audience would be placed in

Bogumila Dawison, Dresden 1861

© Constantin Schwendler, Theaterwissenschaftliche Sammlung, Universität zu Köln



a state of incomprehension. In the end the reviewers were indeed surprised to find that the result was very satisfying. A critic from *Albion* magazine stated: ‘We only noticed one or two instances in which an actor proceeded with his part, before his predecessor had given the word’ (*ibid.*). Some other critics expressed praise as the following passage from *The World* shows: ‘Not Paris, with Talma and Rachel; not London, with Garrick and Siddons; have ever witnessed what New York witnessed on Saturday night — the blending of the highest foreign with the greatest native genius in the personification of the principal characters in one of Shakespeare’s most thrilling plays’ (*The World* 1866: 4). This critic from *The World* even claimed that the fact that Shakespeare was so important for German literature and German theatre meant that it was understandable that the bilingual performance went so smoothly because ‘to speak Shakespeare in German is almost to speak it in English’ (*ibid.*).

Of course, it was not that simple. Bilingual performances, that can be related to Pratt’s idea of the contact zone where the foreign and the other comes into contact with the familiar, marked a disruption of formerly homogeneously monolingual theatre. However, this kind of encounter is not to be seen as a dichotomous differentiation where two or more languages are put in contrast on the stage. Rather, it demonstrates what Homi Bhabha describes as the ‘beyond’. This is the ‘moment of transit where space and time cross to produce complex figures of difference and identity, past and present, inside and outside, inclusion and exclusion... there is a sense of disorientation, a disturbance of direction’ (Bhabha 1994: 1). Thus bilingual performances definitely had their own challenges. On the one hand, they challenged the members of the audience and particularly those who did not understand one of the languages represented on the stage. The spectator’s perception oscillated between multiple tongues and they were thus both in a state of understanding and a state of confrontation with foreign, unfamiliar words, which — as some critics pointed out — meant that it was difficult

to understand the play being performed as a whole. On the other hand, bilingual performances also created challenges for the actors who swayed between using their own tongue and interacting with a foreign one. It was generally the case that such actors were not able to speak the language of the person with whom they were acting. They were reliant on certain strategies to ensure that their linguistic deficit was not apparent during the performance. In a letter to a friend, for instance, Booth revealed during a guest tour in Germany where he acted in English within German productions: ‘I have mentally to recite in English what the Germans are saying, in order to make the speeches fit’ (Booth [1883] 1902: 242). Finally, bilingual performances challenged the idea of American English as the national language on stage and reflected the reality of American life at that time that was in fact multilingual.

What should not remain unmentioned in this context is the fact that the repetition of polyglot performances by Booth and by other actors resulted in such performances ultimately becoming established, as the statement of an editor of *Scribner’s Monthly* from 1881 — more than 10 years after the *Othello* performance — shows:

After all, this mixing of languages is not a matter of great importance. Like the use of blank verse or the mingling of prose and verse, it departs from the exact facts of life. The spectators accept it by tacit convention – as they will accept almost any other incongruity, however humorous it may seem, if it be necessary to further their enjoyment, and if it be frankly presented at the start. (‘Foreign Actors on the American Stage’ 1881: 534)

As is apparent from this quotation, the linguistic contact zone within the framework of bilingual performances resulted in a new form of performance that over time even seemed to establish itself as a theatrical convention, being quickly accepted as such by both audiences and critics.

The popularity of polyglot performances is not surprising because they offered the actors of the time several advantages. On the one hand, they allowed stars to present their acting skills on foreign soil; on the other hand, the audience had the opportunity to admire celebrated international actors and to see them in action with national stars. For American theatre operators this constellation meant not only gaining another audience group — that is migrants living in the host country who longed to experience their fellow countrymen and their mother tongue in theatre — but also large profits because the ticket prices for polyglot performances were higher than those for monolingual performances. The tickets for Booth and Dawison's *Othello* in New York, for example, were sold for two to three dollars, which was more than twice the regular price.

Debuts in Non-Native Languages

If we recall the fictional words of Maryna quoted at the beginning of this article, we may remember her statement that not all actors were able to take advantage of the option of bilingual performances because of their nationality and native language. In fact, bilingual performances were reserved primarily for German, French, or Italian virtuosos and of course for English-speaking stars when they gave guest performances outside their home country. Actors from Eastern Europe on the other hand had a hard time acting in their native languages on foreign stages. It is for this reason that Susan Sontag's protagonist calculates that she has little chance of success as a Polish speaking actress.

The figure of Maryna is based on the real actress Helena Modrzejewska (1840-1909) who, in 1876 at the height of her career on the Polish stage,

emigrated to the USA with the hope of also performing in America. She did in fact make her debut on the US stage, yet language was indeed a difficult hurdle. Although there were Polish-speaking stages in the USA they were not — in contrast to most of the German, Italian, or French ones — considered part of 'high culture'. Rather, due to their amateur status they were instead, as Beth Holmgren emphasises, 'a ghettoized circuit' in which working-class Polish immigrants enjoyed themselves (Holmgren 2012: 149). Such a debut was out of the question for the ambitious Modrzejewska.⁵ She decided to try to make her debut in English, although at that time she only spoke a few words. She revealed her ambitious plan in a letter to her mother dated 4 July 1877 in which she somewhat naively wrote: 'I want the spectators not to discover a foreigner in me. I want them to think I come from an English province' (Modrzejewska [1877] 2015: 390). Together with her English teacher, she prepared some roles in this new language from plays that she had already performed in Polish in her home country and of which she knew were popular with US audiences. After many rejections, with the help of influential compatriots, Modrzejewska had the opportunity to make her US debut on 20 August 1877 in the California Theatre in San Francisco with the role of Adrienne Lecouvreur in the eponymous play by Eugène Scribe and Ernest Legouvé. Beforehand, however, she was advised to change her name because the theatre manager, John McCullough, thought that it was too Polish and worried that the American audience would barely be able to read it and may thus be put off from coming to the theatre. In her memoirs the actress remembers the process of finding a name, which was compatible for American spectators:

5. In the letter correspondence of the actress as well as that of her husband – Karol Chłapowski – offers for an engagement in Polish are mentioned several times, but they are never substantiated. See, for example, Modrzejewska's letter to the Krakow family dated 17 October 1876 or the letter from Karol Chłapowski to Józef Chłapowski dated 15 November 1876. Both letters are printed in the correspondence collection edited by Alicja Kędzióra and Emil Orzechowski, *Modrzejewska/Listy*, which was published in 2015.

I told him [...] I might, by the omission of a few letters, make out a name which would sound pretty much like my own, and yet not frighten people away, and I wrote down 'Modgeska.' He smiled again, saying it might remind one of 'Madagascar.' I soon perceived the point, and changed the 'g' into a 'j'. He spelled aloud 'Modjeska.' 'Now,' he said, 'it is quite easy to read, and sounds pretty, I think'.

(Modjeska 1910: 334)

In this way Helena Modrzejewska became Helena Modjeska. Henryk Sienkiewicz, the later Nobel Prize winner and friend of the actress, who was living at the time as a correspondent in the USA, wrote an article for the *Gazeta Polska* about the US debut of the Polish star. It is very striking that in this text he tried to explain to his compatriots not only the success of Modrzejewska but especially her great performances in a foreign language:

I knew that our artist had been studying the English language for eight months. And believe me, to learn the most difficult language in the world in only eight months, and not only the spoken language, but the language of the stage, yes, it is a miracle and only a genius can do it. (Sienkiewicz 1877: 203)

A debut in a foreign language was not customary but it wasn't a novelty either; other actors also tried to use a change of language to establish themselves in another national sphere. This is the case of Bogumil Dawison, who I have already mentioned. He made his stage debut in Polish in Warsaw and only took on roles in German after his decision to establish himself in the German-speaking theatre. Alexander Moissi (1879-1935) switched from Italian to German and the actress Fanny Janauschek (1829-1904) even changed languages twice, first from Czech to German and then to English. Daniel Bandmann (1837-1904) acted in two foreign languages: English and French. In an announcement

of *The New York Times* we can read for example: 'He will first produce "Narcissus," and will make a triple attack upon it by representing it in English, French, and German' ('Amusements at the Theatres' 1879: 6). However, the question remains — how was such a change of language received by American audiences?

The Beauty of Shakespeare's Verses and Foreign Accents

In 1881 an editor at *Scribner's Monthly* claimed that 'no jealousy has ever been shown against foreigners on our stage' ('Foreign Actors on the American Stage' 1881: 522) and gave the inability of these foreigners to speak the English language as the reason for this circumstance. At the very same time, however, he stated that there was certainly a prevailing jealousy against actors from England 'who can step into our theatres without serving any linguistic apprenticeship' (*ibid.*). While in a bilingual performance, as shown above, the alien is highlighted by the foreign actor and his native language and appears clearly as the other and is thus accepted, the use of the English language by actors from England is — as this quotation suggests — potentially problematic. The simultaneous otherness and linguistic similarity apparently provoked unease. Due to the previous attempts of the USA to cut ties with Great Britain, this reaction seems understandable. However, this leaves the question — what about non-native speakers who started to perform in English?

If we consider the cases of Daniel Bandmann and Helena Modrzejewska, it can be observed that the public reaction to their mastery of the English language was divided. This was paralleled by the reactions of

critics, even though Bandmann made his debut in English ten years earlier than Modrzejewska (see Szymanski-Düll 2017). While the reviews contain admiration, for example, for the fact that both actors learned a foreign language in only a few months, criticism — in particular of their pronunciation of this language — is prominent. This criticism became even more scathing when both actors began to play Shakespearean roles in English.⁶ For instance, a critic from *The New York Times* wrote of Modrzejewska's performance as Viola: 'it was frequently impossible to understand her, and some of the loveliest verse put into the sweet mouth of Viola became, as she spoke it, unintelligible' ('Modjeska as Viola' 1882: 4). The same can be stated with regard to Bandmann. *The Daily Dramatic Chronicle*, for example, wrote: 'Daniel E. Bandmann played "Hamlet" so badly that he was hissed a little, and had not the house been "crowded to excess with his countrymen," would have been hissed a good deal more' ('Shocking' 1866: 3). The main argument of the reviewers was that the beauty of Shakespeare's verses was destroyed by the performances of foreign actors, failing to express the meaning of the words. The renowned New York theatre critic William Winter in particular criticised Modrzejewska's Shakespeare performances in exactly this respect: 'In most of Modjeska's Shakespearean performances her cadences of elocution, her mispronunciation of English words, and her foreign accent somewhat marred the beauty of the verse and impaired its meaning' (Winter 1913: 391). To understand this critique, it is worth taking a brief look at the historical relationship between Shakespeare and the USA.

6. Critics from England proved to be even more severe than those from the USA when considering Modrzejewska's performances in their homeland. The actress had indeed been successful there with roles like Marguerite Gautier or Mary Stuart but she struggled to succeed with Shakespearean roles. Beth Holmgren points out whilst summarising the reviews in the British press that 'in the eyes of the Victorian English public Modjeska could never excel as a Juliet on account of her ethnicity and technique' (2012: 180). In the same sense Gail Marshall emphasises that the actress never achieved the same status in Britain that she had elsewhere and stresses that 'she seems to have fallen victim to ignorance about precisely what her nationality might signify' (2007: 63).

Shakespeare was very important for the young US nation. As Alden T. Vaughan and Virginia Mason Vaughan state: 'Shakespeare in America in many ways parallels the larger narrative of American history: tentative beginnings in the seventeenth century, strong but uneven expansion in the second half of the eighteenth century, geographic diversification and heightened sophistication in the nineteenth century' (Vaughan and Vaughan 2012: 1). Shakespeare came with the settlers from England to North America. He was there when the first colonies were founded and experienced anti-theatrical colonial movements that put more emphasis on capable craftsmen, workers, and farmers than on actors with their immoral and frivolous theatre. However, Shakespeare survived this anti-theatrical period in print because — in the eyes of the colonialists and their speakers — his universality, his truths, and his wisdom were able to strengthen the spirit and to improve the morals and the character of the American people. In this sense, Shakespeare, along with the Bible, was one of the most important sources to refer to for moral guidance for people in the USA at the time (*ibid*: 7-15). Norman Hudson, probably the best-known Shakespeare interpreter in the USA in the nineteenth century, whose writings and lectures influenced thousands of Americans, praised Shakespeare as 'the prodigy of our race' (Stafford 1951: 649). Meanwhile, William Cullen Bryant championed the bard's implicit 'Americanness' and Walt Whitman gave him an important role in the evolution of the American democracy (Vaughan and Vaughan 2012: 62). In this sense, many politicians such as John Adams, Thomas Jefferson, or Abraham Lincoln admired the bard's works and used Shakespearean quotations in their political discourse (Levine 1988: 23 and 37). By the end of the eighteenth century and into the nineteenth century, all educated Americans knew Shakespeare intricately. His plays and their parodies were among the most popular on American stages and the bard's works were school readings on the basis of which declamation was practised and moral and patriotic values were taught. Thus Vaughan and Vaughan stress: 'The essence of educational Shakespeare was declamation. School children

recited, often memorized, speeches by Shakespeare's major characters [...] that were explicitly or implicitly accompanied by moral lessons the reader should imbibe with Shakespeare's words' (2012: 72).

In this context, the critique concerning the incorrect pronunciation of Shakespearean verse on stage by non-native speaking actors seems understandable. However, Winter even went so far in his criticism that he not only objected to the accent of the Polish actress but also suggested that the roles of Shakespeare be reserved for actors of the author's 'race'. This point he formulated in particular with regard to foreign-language debuts:

Meanwhile it is a fact, which all the protests made by foreign actors and their over-zealous advocates cannot obscure, that the greatest actors are those who, illustrating a true ideal of Shakespeare's great characters, do so with perfect interpretative art; and the actors in whom that union of ideal and execution has been manifested at the best have been and are actors of Shakespeare's race.

(Winter 1913: 391-392)

In this way the linguistic assessment of performances of Shakespeare in English by non-native speakers was joined by considerations of provenance. Modrzejewska reacted with incomprehension to such reviews: 'To criticize my accent was quite justifiable, but I wondered what my foreign appearance had to do with that matter. Was Juliet an American? Or must all Shakespeare's heroines look Anglo-Saxon, though they belong to different nationalities?' (Modjeska 1910: 380). Daniel Bandmann, too, tried to speak for himself and responded to this kind of critic, especially the critics from England who judged him even more strictly: 'I regret that, being a foreigner, and never having studied the English language till very recently, it is quite possible that I do not pronounce every word with the accent of a gentleman... but I am a hard working student, and zealously anxious to do full justice to the language of my author'

(Bandmann 1868: 7). Here he not only emphasises the efforts he has made to achieve a very good pronunciation of English but also stresses that he is keen to do justice to the Shakespearean language and thus also to the roles that he performs. Helena Modrzejewska, even though she could partly understand the arguments of the reviewers in view of the fact that an incorrect pronunciation could cause the poetics and melody of Shakespeare's verses to lose their beauty, still stresses her efforts to attempt to meet the plays' requirements in her memoirs. Here she gives special attention to her efforts concerning the psychological disposition of the characters and their development in the course of the play:

If the plays are rendered in English by foreign-born actors, their lack of familiarity with the acquired language may make their pronunciation defective, and thus imperil, if not the poetry of the sentence, at least the music of the verse. The latter is my own case, and therefore, whenever my pronunciation was found fault with, I could do nothing but accept the criticism in all humility and endeavor to correct the errors of my tongue; yet I persisted without discouragement, and went on studying more and more Shakespearean part, conscious that their essential value consisted in the psychological development of the characters, and confident that I understood them correctly and might reproduce them accordingly to the author's intentions. (Modjeska 1910: 531-532)

In addition, she tried to refute the argument concerning the doctrine of race by emphasising the bard's universality and by pointing out that Shakespeare did not situate his roles in a certain national context but rather that his characters were international and, depending on the play, often located in a different nation:

We foreigner, born outside the magic pale of the Anglo-Saxon race, place Shakespeare upon a much higher pedestal. We claim that,

before being English, he was human, and that his creations are not bound either by local or ethnological limits, but belong to humanity... Our argument is that when Shakespeare wanted to present English people he located them in England, or at least gave them English names [...]; while he presents Romans, Greeks, Jews, Italians, or Moors, he does not mean them to be travestied Anglo-Saxon, but to have characteristics of their own race and nation. (Modjeska 1910: 530)

While a bilingual performance of Shakespeare — as was the case in Dawson and Booth's *Othello* — did not really represent any national problem for the English-speaking audience in the USA (especially those whose native language was English), a performance in English by foreign actors definitely was a problem, as the examples of Modrzejewska and Bandmann show.⁷ Here the encounter with the other took on another dimension because the other was almost the same whilst not quite being the same. Due to this fact, this contact zone caused not only confusion during the performance but provoked discussions and negotiations questioning the imagined homogenous American identity. I would also link the case of performances in non-native languages to Homi Bhabha's concept of *mimicry*. The figure of mimicry is to be understood 'as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite' (Bhabha 1990: 86). Here we can speak of imitation yet one where cultural differences are not aligned but rather where a dissonance remains and indicates dif-

ference. A performance by a non-native speaker of a language mimics a performance by a native speaker but it is not the same thing. Although there is a convergence, the two are never identical. An unattainable remainder remains and indicates difference. As is apparent from the negative reviews of Modrzejewska's and Bandmann's performances in English, this difference — created in the contact zone — questioned the imagined national homogenous

7. Nevertheless, it is worth mentioning that the reviews of Booth and Dawson's performance of *Othello* are by no means negative about Methua-Scheller's linguistic performance, who after all also performed in English as a German actress.

identity. This difference inscribed itself in the prevailing discourse and presented an intrinsic threat to it, especially from the point of view of conservatives striving for US independence and autonomy and therefore for Americanisation. Thus, while the linguistic difference of bilingual performances was very quickly accepted because, as explained above, the other was clearly marked as the other, in contrast linguistic mimicry was identified as a disruptive factor within the cultural frame of reference. In this way, performances in English by non-native English speakers set negotiation processes in motion and undermined traditional notions of language, in particular those of Shakespeare, on the stage.

However, these negotiations did not mean that artists who mastered the English language had no chance of success in the USA. On the contrary, the oscillation between attempts to forge a national identity and the constant influences of migration resulted, in the end, in a certain openness. Diverse US audiences, who all loved Shakespeare, forgave much, including the thoroughly incorrect pronunciation of Shakespearean verses. Finally, even the very critically minded William Winter retrospectively described Bandmann's performance as Shylock alongside that of Bogumil Dawson, Ernst von Possart, and Ermete Novelli as one of the most successful of a European actor in the USA (Winter 1911: 161). Helena Modrzejewska also managed to convince the severe critic. A not inconsiderable factor in her success was Edwin Booth who, in the 1889/1890 season, offered the Polish actress the opportunity to go on tour and to perform Shakespearean plays with him. In this way, the Polish actress finally managed to reach the Olympus of the US stage. Even Winter applauded her in the end without giving any more importance to her pronunciation: 'Modjeska was fortunate as Juliet, by reason of the exquisite beauty of her face and person, the charm of her sympathetic temperament, and the refinement of her style: she had outgrown the part before she ever acted it in America. Her comprehension of it, however, was complete, and completely indicated' (Winter 1915: 172).

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MACBETH
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 APRIL 29TH 1890.

SCENE.
 SCOTLAND.
 AND
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CAST OF CHARACTERS

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LADY MACBETH	Mme Modjeska
MACDUFF	Mr. Otis Skinner
DUNCAN KING OF SCOTLAND	Mr. Ben. G. Rogers
MALCOLM	Mr. Lawrence Hanley
DONALBAIN	Mr. Rankin Duvall
BANQUO	Mr. Charles Hanford
ROSSE	Mr. Frederic Vroom
LENOX	Mr. Herbert H. Pattee
SEYTON	Mr. Edward Vroom
FLEANCE	Mrs. Beaumont Smith
FIRST WITCH	Mr. Owen Fawcett
SECOND WITCH	Mr. W.R.S. Morris
THIRD WITCH	Mr. Beaumont Smith
DOCTOR	Mr. Frank Marcus
BLEEDING SERGEANT	Mr. James Taylor
DRUNKEN PORTER	Mr. Charles Koehler
FIRST MURDERER	Mr. Charles Campbell
SECOND MURDERER	Mr. Oliver Fiske
FIRST APPARITION	Mr. W.C. Stone
SECOND APPARITION	Mr. Francis Caine
THIRD APPARITION	Mr. John Wolseley
FIRST OFFICER	Mr. George McCulla
SECOND OFFICER	Mr. George Charles
GENTLEWOMAN	Miss Ann E. Proctor

LORDS, LADIES, OFFICERS, SOLDIERS, ATTENDANTS.

PERIOD.
 THE
 ELEVENTH
 CENTURY.
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Wm. B. Mumford, Indianapolis

Silk souvenir program for special production of Macbeth with Edwin Booth and Helena Modjeska, English's Opera House Indianapolis, 04/29/1890. Billy Rose Theatre Division, The New York Public Library. The New York Public Library Digital Collections

In the case of Modrzejewska it is even possible to observe a national co-opting of her within the American press. While at the beginning of her career in the USA she was always presented as a ‘Polish actress’ (Greenwood 1878: 2) and was still counted as one of the ‘Foreign Actors on the American Stage’ in 1881,⁸ a few years later this changed to ‘Polish-American’ or ‘American-Polish actress’. At the pinnacle of her American career, she was finally even completely Americanised. In 1891, after a tour in Europe, the headline of a piece in the *Chicago Daily Tribune* read ‘Modjeska Home Again’ and in 1899 she was finally described as ‘American’ and was counted among the best female US Shakespeare actresses, as the following quote from *The Chautauquan* displays:

America has good reason to be proud of its many actors and actresses who have successfully undertaken nearly all of the chief roles in Shakespeare's plays...First among our actresses should be named Charlotte Cushman, called 'America's greatest tragedienne'... The versatile and charming Modjeska is an ideal Ophelia and a dignified Queen Katharine... There have been famous interpreters of Shakespeare in other lands: Ducis, Sully, Stendahl, Bernhardt, Rhea and Hading, in France; Salvini, Rossi, Ristori, and Duse, in Italy; Fleck, Schroeder, Iffland, Devrient, Seidelmann, Possart, Behrens, and Vogt, Germany. (Parsons 1899: 495)

Here Modrzejewska is clearly placed alongside the American stars. This becomes notably clear with the sentence: ‘There have been famous interpreters of Shakespeare in other lands’, which marks the distinction between the self and the other and positions the Polish born actress within the category of the self. Nevertheless, Helena Modrzejewska remained simultaneously the other. The protagonist of Sontag’s novel *In America*, who I quoted at the beginning of this paper, had a similar experience. Considering Maryna’s career, the fictional Edwin Booth states: ‘I do think it is

8. This is indicated by a 1881 article that appeared in *Scribner’s Monthly* and which was titled: ‘Foreign Actor’s on the American Stage’.

very entertaining that for the last ten years everyone has agreed that the greatest actress in the English-speaking world is a Pole. A Pole with an accent. Yes, Marina. No one mentions your accent anymore, it is part of your magic, but eet ees ver-ree, verr-rre noticeable’ (Sontag 2000: 372).

Conclusion

As a result of international guest performances as well as the migration processes of theatre professionals within the nineteenth century, various national languages transgressed their cultural and territorial borders and led to a phenomenon that can be described as contrary to the nation building processes of the time. Languages, one of the most important instruments associated with modern nations as imagined communities, attained a translocal presence, releasing processes of cultural tensions and negotiations. This questioned the idea of national homogeneity by creating contact zones and inscribing otherness onto the dominating discourse. As demonstrated in this article, taking the case of US stages a distinction between the perception of bilingual performances and performances in English by non-native English speakers can be observed. After initial scepticism, bilingual performances where different languages were obviously combined in one performance, established themselves as a common theatrical practice and became accepted by both critics and audiences. In contrast, with performances in English by non-native English speakers, the encounter with the other took on a different dimension. The mimicry of the native language by non-native actors was identified as a disruptive factor and caused discussions and negotiations. However, due to the oscillation between attempts to construct a national identity and the consistent influences of migration within the USA, foreign actors nevertheless were able to make a career on the US stage even in English. In this way these actors undermined traditional notions of language on the stage, too. •

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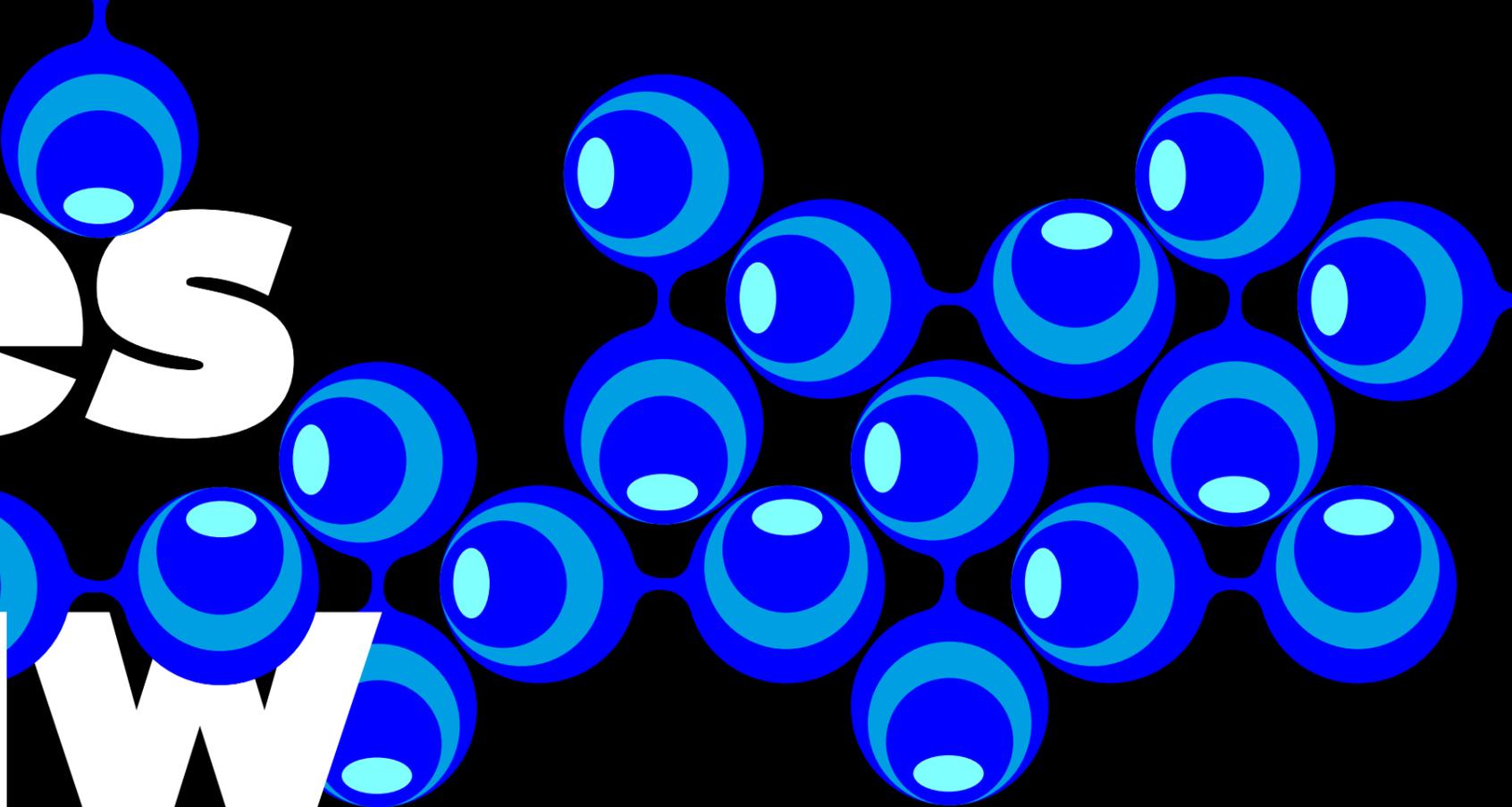
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Voices of Law and Justice

The (Re-)enactment of Legal Discourse
in Tricycle's Tribunal Plays and IPM's Public Trials

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KEYWORDS

Tribunal play, legal performativity, speech acts, Tricycle Theatre, Milo Rau

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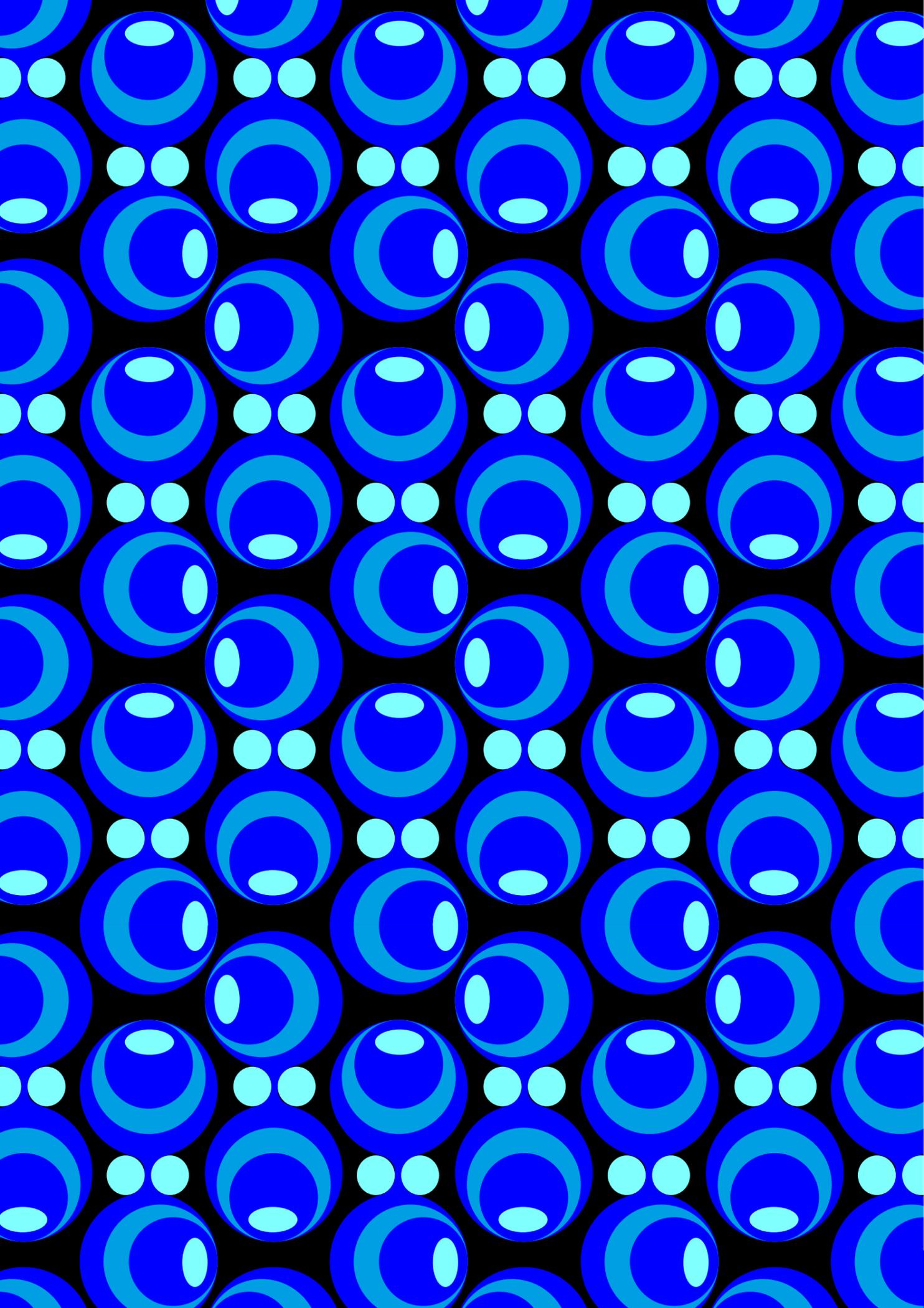
Drame judiciaire, performativité juridique, actes de langage, Tricycle Theatre, Milo Rau

Summary

The Tricycle Theatre produced 'tribunal plays', staged re-enactments of public inquiries about the failings of the British political regime. Theatre director Milo Rau organised tribunals in Moscow — about artistic freedom — and East Congo — about violent economic exploitation. This contribution discusses the discourses of these performances, with John L. Austin's speech act theory as an analytical tool, including the fundamental critique (from Jacques Derrida and others) on this paradigm. This theory is also widespread in legal-theoretical analysis, which allows interesting comparisons. The analysis of representative scenes from these performances allows for the assessment of the 'felicity conditions' (Austin's term) that the characters/witnesses in the (re-)enacted tribunals try to define, in order to affirm their legal and bodily identity in complex political and societal contexts. Do these performances accept Austin's (dis)qualification of theatre and drama as 'parasitical' on presumably more real speech acts?

Résumé

Le 'Tricycle Theatre' à Londres a réalisé des 'tribunaux théâtraux', des reconstitutions d'enquêtes publiques sur les échecs du régime politique Britannique. Le metteur-en-scène Milo Rau a organisé des tribunaux à Moscou — sur la liberté artistique — et dans l'Est du Congo — sur l'exploitation économique violente. Cette contribution traite les discours de ces performances, ayant recours à la théorie des actes de parole (*speech acts*) de John L. Austin comme outil analytique, y inclus la critique fondamentale de ce paradigme (par Jacques Derrida et autres). Cette théorie est aussi bien répandue dans l'analyse théorique du droit, ce qui permet des comparaisons bien intéressantes. L'analyse de scènes représentatives dans ces performances permet une évaluation des conditions de félicité (*felicity conditions*, dans la terminologie d'Austin) que les personnages/témoins essaient de définir devant ces tribunaux (re-)constitués, afin d'affirmer leur identité juridique aussi bien que physique dans un contexte politique et sociétal compliqué. Est-ce que ces performances acceptent la (dis) qualification, par Austin, du théâtre et de la parole dramatique comme 'parasitaires' des actes de parole présumés comme plus réels ?



In the aftermath of the spectacular and highly televised O.J. Simpson trial in 1994, direct courtroom broadcast, theatrical re-enactments, and ‘mock trials’ became immensely popular, in the United States and beyond. The night court of New York City, an exhibition of the way in which the judicial system mainstreams the precarity and the underworld of Manhattan, became an attraction for alternative tourists. A report on this phenomenon reads as a review of a theatre performance (Scott 1999) and the lifestyle website Thrillist puts it on its must-see list (Reilly 2015). The blurring between theatre and performance, on the one hand, and the procedures of law and justice, on the other hand, is not that new. Film directors such as John Ford and Stanley Kramer documented the Nazi concentration camps, their footage being used as evidence at the Nuremberg trial in 1945-1946. This trial would prove exemplary for technological transformations in the judiciary (e.g., simultaneous

translation), an evolution that enhanced the theatricality of the procedure, as Cornelia Vismann argues. This theatrical character of media-tised trials about crimes against humanity can be seen continued and extended in the Eichmann trial in Jerusalem, in 1961, and in the Auschwitz trial in Frankfurt am Main, in 1963 (Vismann 2011: 241-270). In this respect, it might be argued that the upsurge of (documentary) courtroom drama in the 1960s, most outspokenly represented by *Die Ermittlung*, Peter Weiss' 'oratorio' about the same Auschwitz trial, constitutes a kind of reappropriation of the 'theatre of justice' by the theatre itself — on its own terms. *Die Ermittlung* ends with a shocking remark by accused #1:

ACCUSED #1 We ought to concern ourselves
with other things
than blame and reproaches
that should be thought of
as long since atoned for
(Weiss 1968: 199)

No verdict, the judge is left alone, and remains silent in his humble role of 'witness of the witness'. The audience has taken over the role of the judge — that is Weiss' point (Boos 2014: 168-169).

Scholarly interest about the relationship between law and theatre goes in two directions: the theatricality of the judicial events themselves, and the (re)enactments of legal processes by the theatre. This contribution deals, in principle, with the last category: playwrights and theatre directors staging their narratives and their performances as tribunals, based on the formal requirements of legal procedure, but re-arranged to reach a maximal theatrical result — an artistic and a political result. A first collection is the series of 'tribunal plays' edited (not written, as he emphasises) by Richard Norton-Taylor, performed at the Tricycle

Theatre, London, between 1994 and 2012. All of his plays deal with the scars of British society after Thatcher, with the participation of Prime Minister Tony Blair's government in U.S. President George G.W. Bush's Iraq War of 2003 as its low point (Brittain et al. 2014). A second corpus consists of the tribunal performances of the International Institute of Political Murder (IIPM) of theatre director Milo Rau, about censorship on contemporary art such as *Die Moskauer Prozesse* ('The Moscow Trials', 2013) (Rau 2014), and about the ongoing civil war in Eastern Congo such as *Das Kongo Tribunal* ('The Congo Tribunal', 2015) (Rau 2017). Most of Richard Norton-Taylor's plays are editions of previous judicial hearings.¹ Milo Rau and IIPM organise their own theatrical tribunals with 'real' lawyers and 'real' witnesses, even when Rau announces (and stages) clearly a theatrical environment for the proceedings. In both cases theatricality is a supplement to the textual or discursive materials, but in a very different way.²

To assess the supposed particularity of these tribunal plays and performances, I will rely on a set of analytic tools based upon J.L. Austin's speech act theory. Austin's theory allows (relatively) easy access to fundamental problems of performativity, as the poignant criticism of Jacques Derrida, Stanley Fish, Judith Butler, and many others in their footsteps, have demonstrated abundantly. Austin's term '(in) felicity conditions' (Austin 1962: 12-24) denotes the circumstances determining the successful performance of a 'performative' speech act — a speech act intended to cause actual effect in the material world. A speech act should take place within the framework of 'accepted

1. There is one notable exception: *Called to Account* stages a fictitious indictment of Tony Blair for his alleged aggression with regards to the war in Iraq, based upon interviews with actual witnesses (Kent and Norton-Taylor 2007).

2. Milo Rau also staged an imitative tribunal play, in 2009, with *The Last Days of the Ceaucescus*. This play constitutes a 're-enactment', minute by minute, of a 'legal' procedure, but also of a historical event that continues to haunt the present (Le Roy 2017).

conventional procedures having a certain conventional effect' and this actual context should match with these conventions (Austin 1962: 26). Therefore, every speech act must correctly execute the procedure, and all the participants should share the intentions and respect the consequences of the performatives, according to their role and function in the procedure. A trivial utterance such as 'Bring the laundry inside, honey, it's going to rain' (a request) meets these conditions, although legal speech acts allow better, at first sight, this analytical approach. That is because Austin's conventional procedure and conventional effect are the explicit subjects of legal discourse itself. So-called proceduralism — a rigid adherence to legal procedures — even thrives on the manipulability of these conventions.

The '(in)felicity' of the legal-procedural conditions is most often the heart of the legal conflict. The felicity conditions of a theatrical (speech) event are clearly of a different nature, as the performative consequences are fundamentally different. In theatre, the consensus on the 'felicity' of a performed speech acts is never as straightforward as in a judiciary context: when a judge sends an accused to jail, he will be sent to jail. Theoretically at least, since, strictly speaking, the 'felicity' of the speech act does not depend on the actual action: an extradition of an undocumented migrant — i.e., the words of the warrant, validated by a competent officer — is felicitous, in Austin's logic, even when this person goes into hiding. Speech act theory itself cannot tell anything about the success of a request, a promise, an order, or any other 'strong' speech act: the consequences are contingent. The same goes obviously for the consequences of theatrical performances: nobody can be sure if the spectator will or will not change the world or even her/his worldview, after leaving the theatre. One should take care, however, not to subscribe too easily Austin's own qualification of drama — 'mock' speech acts by actors — as 'parasitic' upon normal use of speech, as 'etiolations' of language (Austin 1962: 22). Moreover, 'parasitism' as

a cultural force might even help us to understand the performative nature of legal and theatrical discourse (Pellegrini and Shimakawa 2018: 104).

This article will try to identify some of the 'felicity conditions' of the aforementioned collections of drama, including the supposedly 'parasitical' nature of legal discourse in tribunal plays/performances. 'Parasitical' means here that the re-enactment creates an illusion of justice. In an exaggerated Austinian reasoning, this would mean that the performance imitates the 'felicity' of a legal speech act, that it suggests a 'felicity' (or justice) on its own terms, that it undermines the constitutional monopoly of the judiciary and, at the end of this slippery slope, that it would silence the voices of justice itself. The actual analysis will not end up in this Platonic deadlock, but it will meet, inevitably, fundamental issues of legal and theatrical performativity. Stanley Fish says that, on closer look, the difference between, on the one hand, the 'serious' physical world that the law pretends to describe and to standardise, and, on the other, the 'non-serious' world of (documentary) drama appears to be more of degree than of kind or substance (Fish 1980: 231-244). In terms of audience response and societal impact beyond the 'felicity' of the speech acts themselves, the distinction between these discourses might be quite subtle, without underestimating the violence of the law nor overestimating the sustainability of theatre.

This article is divided into three sections. The first section situates the *corpus* of performances in the larger framework of the tribunal as a form of documentary theatre, considering the track records of, respectively, Nicolas Kent's Tricycle Theatre and Milo Rau's IIPM. Secondly, a theoretical section sketches the landscape of speech act theory and performativity, insofar as it is relevant for law and performance as connected discursive practices. Before conclusions, representative excerpts from the plays will be analysed, in a third and final section, applying theoretical insights to the performance material.

Tribunals as Documentary Theatre

It is possible to write a comprehensive history of the Western theatre by taking tribunal drama as an anchor point, from Aeschylus' *Eumenides* (485 B.C.), over William Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure* (1604), until Bertolt Brecht's *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* (1944) and Arthur Miller's *The Crucible* (1953). They all use the iconic form of the judicial process to make a point about political power, about sovereignty even, and about the different ways that different layers of society perceive, use, and manipulate the force of law. Doubts about the suitability of legal procedure as a dramaturgical blueprint have been expressed since Aeschylus (Tindemans 2005). In a mirroring argument, the theatricality of the legal process itself has been criticised, most notably in Hannah Arendt's report on the Eichmann process (Arendt 1964/2011: 26-32). Contemporary tribunal plays can be situated between two extremes: the seamless imitation and the activist performance. A caricatural example of the first variation is the historical mimicry of the Scopes or 'Monkey' trial in Dayton, Tennessee wherein a yearly re-enactment of the infamous indictment of a teacher of evolution theory is mixed with a bluegrass music contest (Scopes Festival 2020). Chokri Ben Chikha's *The Truth Commission* (2013), about colonialism in Belgium's world exhibitions in the 20th century, provides a good example of activism (Ben Chikha 2017; Tindemans 2016). For this analysis, performances are chosen which also cover both ends of this specific repertoire. The Tricycle tribunal plays are, in text, cast, and design, careful imitations of real hearings, in a replicated courtroom configuration. The IIPM tribunals, in contrast, create their own jurisdictional realities, in discourse and space, with pseudo-legal procedures and outcomes — and activist intentions. The contrast is interesting, since it allows us to

determine more clearly both differences and commonalities in the 'felicity' of these performative discourses.

The tribunal plays of the Tricycle Theatre, produced at the initiative of its artistic director Nicolas Kent, constitute one of the most elaborate corpuses of the 'imitative' type.³ Apart from Richard Norton-Taylor's texts, the Tricycle tribunal plays included productions that could better be qualified as 'testimonial plays' (Brittain et al. 2014). They are based upon interviews that writers Gillian Slovo and Victoria Brittain conducted with witnesses of the events — 'from spoken evidence', as their subtitles say. *Guantanamo 'Honor Bound to Defend Freedom'* (2004) about British detainees in Guantanamo and *The Riots* (2012) about the looting spree in England in the summer of 2011 are examples of such plays. With the exception of *Nuremberg* (1996) and *Srebrenica* (1996, edited by Nicolas Kent), these hearings deal with British homeland issues: arms traffic (*Half the Picture*, 1994), police racism (*The Colour of Justice*, 1999), the Iraq War (*Justifying War*, 2003, and *Tactical Questioning*, 2011), and the 'troubles' in Northern Ireland (*Bloody Sunday*, 2005). The hearings are 'public inquiries', initiated by a government minister, based upon ad-hoc legislation and, since 2005, on the Inquiries Act, with or without judiciary powers such as subpoenaing (Institute for Government 2018). Most of them are concluded with a list of recommendations for government and administration, some of them become politically very sensitive. The severe conclusions of the Scott inquiry (arms traffic to Saddam Hussein's Iraq) lead to an enforced vote of confidence for the government of Prime Minister John Major. Meanwhile, the Hutton

³ Norton-Taylor's editing of the raw transcripts of official hearings reminds of Eric Bentley's pioneering *Are You Now or Have You Ever Been* (1973), a 'theatre of fact' about the interrogations of Hollywood directors, screenwriters, and actors, by the (anti-communist) House of Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC), between 1947 and 1952. Bentley justifies his 'arrangement' of the hearings, sometimes against chronology, with the 'principal shock effect' he wants to achieve: the perception of 'knavery' and 'folly' amongst all the participants, on both sides of the bench (Bentley 1972: X).

inquiry (the ‘sexing up’ of Saddam Hussein’s immediate threat for Great Britain) according to many observers ‘whitewashed’ deceptive collusions between the Blair cabinet and defence specialists (Cozens 2004). The inquiries were presided by senior Law Lords, and they practiced a procedure of forensic hearing, but with fewer formalities: a chairman to the inquiry, counsel to the inquiry and to the parties involved (defendants, identifiable victims, witnesses), cross-examinations. Norton-Taylor says that inquiries, as distinguished from trials, better suit his explicit intention to reveal the truth. They do not just state the facts, but they also expose ‘the attitude of mind, the intellectual sub-culture, of individuals in positions of power and authority’ (Norton-Taylor 2008: 113-114).

Norton-Taylor’s tribunal plays, especially those dealing with Iraq, focus on the (alleged) perpetrators, on those persons — politicians, civil servants, businessmen, experts — who, based on their daily dealings with the cases under scrutiny, are supposed to bear responsibility concerning possible misdemeanour. In Tricycle’s testimonial plays of Gillian Slovo, which are based upon her own research and which do not imitate a realistic courtroom situation, those staged as victims (or bystanders) — young British Muslims suspected of terrorism and sent to Guantanamo, or people involved in the 2011 England riots — get much more attention. Alex Feldman, observing this contrast, refers to the post-Eichmann debate about the theatricality of the courtroom (Feldman 2018: 5-6) — I already mentioned Hannah Arendt’s critique in this respect. Arendt suggests elsewhere, analysing the dynamics of the French Revolution, that a focus on the ‘pathos’ of victims, on pity with their individual misery, risks unleashing violent, inhumane reactions, in the name of humanitarian ideals — as the example of Robespierre has abundantly shown (Arendt 1963/1990: 92).

Arendt’s position has been ascribed to her sympathies for Bertolt Brecht’s epic theatre (Horsman 2011: 15-17), and this might make sense.

A ‘forensic aesthetic’ implies primary orientation toward the language, speech, and gesture of those under (quasi-)legal scrutiny and that operation comes close to Brecht’s *Historisierung* (‘historicization’). In Brechtian theory, historicization means that one social system, in its development, is looked upon from the viewpoint of another, possible (utopian) social system, in order to demonstrate its contingency, that is, the variable character of the connection between human beings and their social environment (Brecht 1967a: 652). As the courtroom and the theatre belong to very different social (societal) systems, the forensic transposition is comparable. Moreover, the impact of the play is supposed to depend upon the transparency and the opacity of the characters’ relationships with the scrutinised ‘real’ matter, without ‘theatrical’ bypasses (or teasers) (Feldman 2018: 13). For *Half the Picture*, the first play of the series, Kent and Norton-Taylor asked playwright John McGrath to write short monologues for an arms trader, an economist, a Palestinian, and a Kurd. Kent wanted ‘to spruce up’ the performance, anxious that the audience would not swallow the ‘static’ and ‘wordy’ piece, as Norton-Taylor told. Critics praised McGrath’s inserts for providing a larger political and humanitarian context, but Alan Clark, a minister of state involved in the scandal that the Scott inquiry was supposed to clarify, saw these interventions (‘soliloquies of Joan-Littlewood-Memorial-Plaque kind’) as biased ideological framing (Megson 2009: 201-202). However, the ‘dry’ inquiring dialogues happened to be the keystone of the play’s success, also due to characters such as chief inquisitor Presiley Baxendale. She had to confront all the arrogance, the deceptiveness, and other vices of the British regime — with the hearing of Lady Margaret Thatcher, former Prime Minister, as its highlight (Stoller 2013: 137-138). Norton-Taylor, who was incidentally *The Guardian*’s security editor until 2016, emphasises that the ‘impersonation’ of the facts, by actors aiming at verisimilitude, is more effective at contextualising the ‘truth behind the Whitehall walls’ than the written word: ‘The experience of watching [...] involves empathy for the victims [...] [and] the search for truth and



David Michaels as Alastair Campbell in *Justifying War – Scenes from the Hutton Inquiry*, 2003
Directors: Nicholas Kent and Charlotte Westenra
© Tristram Kenton – Kiln Theatre

the exposure to injustice [...] places a corporate responsibility on the audience to acknowledge that injustice' (Norton-Taylor 2008: 123-124).

The tribunals Milo Rau and IIPM created in Moscow (*Die Moskauer Prozesse*, 2013) and in Bukavu/Berlin (*Das Kongo Tribunal*, 2015) seem hard to compare with the Tricycle tribunal plays. Milo Rau dived both times into the heart of the actual conflict: the Sakharov human rights centre in Moscow, the exact location of the first religion-inspired attacks on 'blasphemous' contemporary art, and Bukavu, capital of the Congolese province of South Kivu, ravaged by civil war and reckless exploitation of precious minerals. Very diverse situations, but the configuration was essentially the same, with a hearing of actual parties in the conflict, a symbolic place — a human rights centre, a theatre of a Jesuit college — but a different legal framework. In Moscow, three trials concerning blasphemy (two art exhibitions and the short-lived performance of Pussy Riot in the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour) were re-opened and ended with a new 'mock' verdict, in Bukavu (with a sequel in Berlin) hearings about three cases about abuses of economic power in the mines took place, with a comprehensive political decision and no individual or corporate convictions.

Milo Rau's tribunals put the stakes high. His adviser Rolf Bossart endorsed the remark, in the weekly magazine *Die Zeit*, that 'when politics resign, only art can help' (Bossart 2017: 8). Bossart compares the actual exercise of this tribunal with Brecht's 'good judge Azdak' in *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*. This 'mock trial' dealt with the extremely complicated intertwinements between East Congo's richness in raw materials, the misty presence of international economic forces, the aftermath of the genocide in Rwanda, and the incoherence of political society in Congo in general — all factors contributing to violent chaos. The law is only represented symbolically, that is, no conclusion (adjudication) has any effective consequences. But this structural weakness allows precisely

the participants — lawyers, witnesses, and an engaged audience — to 'turn the theatrical space of possibilities for the law, in an unmediated and unconscious way, into a space of realities' (Bossart 2017: 11). What kind of discursive (and linguistic) strategies can be conceived to approach this ambition? Moreover, Milo Rau acknowledges in his opening speech that the jury is cast according to the logic of discourse, not the logic of judgment (Rau 2017: 58). The trials themselves, in Congo and in Moscow, avoid open confrontations; their dramaturgy is not more polemical than the 'agonistic' nature of jurisdiction itself. As Christine Wahl says, Rau 'boils down' (*herunterkochen* in German) the heated conflicts to transform them into a situation of collective experience and reasoning: the creation of an *agora* (Wahl 2014: II). He does so by underlining continuously the artificial character of the proceedings, most simply by being present himself as Milo Rau, theatre director.

In the Tricycle tribunal plays, actors imitated meticulously the lawyers and witnesses they embodied in terms of linguistic accent, body language, and attitude. Rau worked with real lawyers and experts — sometimes politically active — with actual witnesses and defendants, and with a jury (experts in Congo, laymen and women in Moscow), which underscored, paradoxically, the artificiality of the performative situation. Here the lawyer 'plays' the lawyer, they expose and historicise themselves. This radical choice leads to a debate about the security of the event — in both cases, the national regime was suspicious — and more specifically about witness protection. Pragmatic remarks about care for the safety of the witnesses after the tribunal and about perceived bias possibly leading to repression turned into a debate about the mere right to use artistic means to deal with potentially violent political conflicts, especially when this 'artefact' is performed in the high-risk area itself (Geenen and Tyteca 2018). Rau replied, apart from a factual refutation of supposed unsafety, that artistic interventions, even when there is no blurring between 'facts' and 'fiction', are always situated on a symbolic

level — and are thus unsatisfying, by definition (Rau 2018). Again, it's the responsibility of all the participants to turn a space of possibilities into a space of realities. But how can you exclude the realism — i.e., imminent danger, risk of violence — about the political and social endeavour from the discourse that is supposed to initiate the larger objectives, outside the realm of art? Of course, Rau takes care of this translation, but one should see what it actually means, in the performances.

Speech acts, Performativity, and the Theatre of Law

In order to analyse the performative value of a few snapshots from the Tricycle tribunal plays and IIPM's trials, in their own dramaturgical context, it is necessary to give attention to the notion of the 'performative', an essential concept in linguistic-pragmatic, legal, and theatrical discourse. Austin himself illustrates the idea of 'performative utterances', as a category of 'speech acts', by referring to the law. Under American law, a report of what someone else said is admitted as evidence, because this utterance is not so much a report of something this person said (hearsay is not admissible as evidence), but rather something this person *did*, an action (Austin 1962: 13). However, this example does not clarify what kind of action — e.g., deceptive or trustworthy — is meant, which is obviously an important qualification. Peter Brooks remarks that within a confession, for a long time considered as the strongest evidence thinkable in forensic situations such as police interviews, speaking *of* guilt should be strictly distinguished from speaking *the* guilt. A psychoanalyst also makes this distinction in a therapeutic situation, when the analysand confesses. In a forensic context too, the fact that

the interrogated person has overcome the resistance to confess, does not validate automatically the factuality of his or her utterance (Brooks 2000: 117). One of the first references to the (performative) solidity of the law, in Austin's theory, runs here against some ambiguity.

A linguistic theory built upon the supposedly firm ground of the law — that is, normativity itself — happens to be an important source for performance theory, and especially for the concept of 'performativity', as coined by Judith Butler (Butler 1997: 24-25; Butler 1990/1999: XV-XVI) — despite the fact that Austin's theory evinces 'parasitic', pseudo-performative speech. Austin's theory starts with distinguishing 'performatives' and 'constatives': a 'performative' is a speech act that cannot be qualified as true or false, but only as 'felicitous' (happy) or 'infelicitous' (hollow). Performatives can be broken down into three elements: the *locutionary* act, i.e. the mere utterance of a sign in speech, meaningful or not; the *illocutionary* act, i.e. the change performed by the speech act as such; and the *perlocutionary* act, i.e. the effect that the speech act has, independent of the intentions of the speaker. Speech act theory is foremost interested in the *illocutionary* aspect (Austin 1962: 103) since the forces mobilised there belong (almost) completely to language/speech itself. Here words bind the subject: the promise, including its legal value, is the kind of speech act Austin elaborates. He refers, ironically, to Euripides' tragedy *Hippolytos*, to distinguish the objective binding from the subjective intention, thus resulting in *illocutionary* success, but in *perlocutionary* misfire: the moralist can qualify this as a failure, from the context, but the linguist sees/hears a 'felicitous' speech act (Austin 1962: 9-10). Stanley Fish analysed Shakespeare's *Coriolanus* from an 'Austinian' point of view, and he concluded that its dramatic effect lies in the tragic failure of the speaker/character (Coriolanus) to invest enough in the illocutionary authority which should make his speech act, his promise or his command, binding for the audience: the Roman citizens want to see him as a statesman, who respects the

conventional rules, but Coriolanus relies on (his own) independent values (Fish 1980: 205-206).

This ‘misfire’ reveals two difficulties on which Jacques Derrida, criticising Austin, focused: the (conventional) authority of the subject/speaker, and the difference between constative and performative utterances, already problematised by Austin himself (Austin 1962: 133-147). The convention/authority, which determines the felicity of the illocutionary act, is rather indeterminate for Austin, except the citation of the law. As such it is difficult, says Derrida, to generalise this condition. This lack of clarity about context and reference of a speech act could better be conceived as a necessity, and not as an accident (Derrida 1972b: 385). This structural feature, combined with Austin’s aversion to the ‘parasitism’ of the actor, has the consequence that Austin’s logic of speech-as-an-act should be reversed: the (conventionally authorised) subject/speaker does not produce the speech act, but the speech act brings forth (or ‘performs’, in Butler’s logic) the subject. Speech, and communication in general, is based on ‘iterability’: words and their meanings are continuously repeated — and this is fundamentally different from citation, which is non-committal. Tracing back the origin of this semiosis leads to nowhere, except ‘mystique’. Now this risk — of falling into the abyss of infinity, time and again — can be excluded or confronted, but then the performer/speaker meets the moment where authority can only be authorised by itself: violence, in other words (Derrida 1990: 934-937). Derrida tries indeed to retrieve this moment in his bilingual essay *Force de loi/Force of Law*, insisting on the arbitrary foundational act which takes place in every legal case, the judge (or jury) being haunted by the ‘spectre of undecidability’ (Derrida 1990: 1020-1024).

In his second critique on Austin — the constative/performative distinction — Derrida points again to the principle of iterability, which explains better the linguistic character of illocutionary force than Austin’s

insistence on (subjective, conscious) intention (Derrida 1972b: 388-389). The ‘truth value’ of the constative is irrelevant in the performative, but, as Austin himself acknowledges, the validation of this ‘truth value’ or factuality depends as much on the context — loaded with normativity, with rules defining meanings — as the felicity of a performative (Austin 1962: 142-143). Stanley Fish even notes that the philosophical distance between Derrida and Austin is small, and not so irreconcilable as John Searle, Austin’s fellow speech act theorist, suggests (Searle 1977: 198). Their crucial distinction lies of course in the abyssal nature of ‘infelicity’, as Derrida continues to emphasise (Fish 1989: 57-66). In *Force de loi*, he concludes that ‘every constative utterance relies, at least implicitly, on a performative structure (“I tell you that, I speak to you, I address myself to you to tell you that this is true, that things are like this, I promise you or renew my promise to you to make a sentence and to sign what I say when I say that, tell you, or try to tell you the truth,” and so forth)’ (Derrida 1990: 969).

Two final remarks, helpful to an analysis of tribunal theatre, can be made about theatricality/performativity. Julie Stone Peters shows how the emphasis on theatricality in jurisdiction and jurisprudence, put forward by Pierre Legendre, complements Derrida’s abyssal iterability of (legal) authority (Peters 2008: 188-191). Legendre says: ‘Les grands interdits se fondent et déploient leurs effets non seulement par des énoncés juridiques explicites, mais avant tout moyennant des formes et des mises en scène qui ont pour caractéristique de déborder la parole. La théâtralité nécessaire au fonctionnement de la normativité manie l’imparable’ (1989 : 25).⁴ This theatricality, close to ritual, reveals the law as an institutional play of images and accomplishes even more: one

4. ‘The great proscriptions are founded in and deploy their effectivity not only by explicit legal statement, but before anything in mediating forms and mises-en-scène, going beyond speech. The theatricality necessary to the functioning of normativity manipulates the unspeakable.’ (My translation)

cannot argue with beauty, so this theatre produces and ratifies the normativity of the legal order. The ‘unspeakable’ origin of the law — the ‘real’ of Lacanian psychoanalysis — or its *aporia*, its dead-end alley, can only be presented theatrically, thus constituting law’s ultimate tool for authority, for command (Peters 2008: 190). In this logic, theatre can hardly be qualified as parasitical. Ross Charnock however demonstrates how this performativity meets its limit by analysing the iconic judiciary speech act of ‘overruling’ — that is, the substantial change of an authoritative precedent that is protected by the *stare decisis* principle in (mainly Anglo-Saxon) law — within the highest courts such as the Supreme Court in the U.S.A. or the House of Lords in the U.K. When judges speak, according to the so-called declaratory theory (the law is already there, the judge is only its mouthpiece), the actual history of overruling older precedents shows that contradictory rhetorical tricks and circular reasoning are used to hide substantial changes that might be constitutionally weak, thus undermining its own ‘felicity conditions’ (Charnock 2006: 422-423).⁵ The legal theatre does not function smoothly in a secular age, while normativity itself has become a legal-political battleground. The deconstructionist critique of Derrida, the theatricalised *aporia* of Legendre, and the pragmatic analysis of Charnock lead to the same conclusions about normativity: the law does not justify itself, and a reference to the law — both legislation and jurisdiction — to the contextuality of Austin’s speech act theory does not help. Sandra Laugier suggests that Austin’s *rationale* of the illocutionary act, if freed from subjectivity and consciousness, comes remarkably close to the idea of the basic norm Hans Kelsen posited as ultimate defense against the remnants of ‘descriptivism’ in legal theory (including, probably, declaratory theory): his *Grundnorm* is the all too simple

5. The famous Roe vs. Wade case (Roe vs. Wade 1973) of the U.S. Supreme Court, establishing a three-trimester system regulating conditions for legal abortion, is an interesting example. Its lack of normative rigour (or its mere rhetoric) allowed subsequent verdicts to narrow down the scope of a milestone decision perceived as clearly ‘pro-choice’ (Morgan 1977).

pleonasm (or emptiness) of ‘the law is the law’, disguised as transcendental condition (Laugier 2004: 624).

For the purpose of the analysis of Tricycle’s and IIPM’s tribunal plays, some essential things can be learnt from these debates. Derrida argues that, taking ‘iterability’ as a necessary requirement to make any speech act meaningful, the distinction between ‘constative’ and ‘performative’ speech acts is much less relevant than Austin thought: every speech act is performative and its origin is not retracable. For the theatre — and especially for courtroom drama — this is important, since it functions thanks to this performative nature of speech, even if it is illusionary and ephemeral. Moreover, as Legendre argues, theatricality is as essential for the courtroom — also based upon speech acts — to hide its ‘abysal’ foundations. So both law and theatre perform a groundless reality, but, paradoxically, they do everything to sublimate this groundlessness. This might indeed be the basic wager of courtroom theatre, in its double meaning: theatre imitating justice, or justice imitating theatre — and a starting point for the present analysis.

Tribunal Plays, or Tales of Unemancipated Citizens and their Regents

Tribunal plays use legal theatres and narratives as a metaphor and/or as a dramaturgical device, but it remains unsure, *prima facie*, if and to what extent this deconstruction of the ‘theological’ authority of the law is part of their appropriation of legal discourse. Is the transition from the language of the law, in its self-asserted accuracy, to dramatic speech as simple as, for instance, the translation of political rhetoric into

dramatic spectacle? Is it possible to observe any feedback between the ‘aporetic’ character of legal speech and discourse and the ‘affective autonomy’ of language in drama and theatre? Or does legal theatre-of-the-real adhere, paradoxically, to an (outdated) positivistic notion of law and language? An analysis of some fragments from Tricycle’s tribunal plays and Milo Rau’s *Prozesse* could be the beginning of an answer.

The chosen scenes from two texts of Richard Norton-Taylor — *Half the Picture* and *The Colour of Justice* — can be considered as representative. Stephen Bottoms sharply criticises the London wave of ‘verbatim’ plays in London after 1990, and more specifically David Hare’s ‘naturalistic’ docudrama, because they entertain the illusion that verisimilitude — specifically the television-like *mise en scène*, combined with a perfected imitative acting style — reveals irrefutable factuality and truth (Bottoms 2006: 67). Bottoms does not mention Tricycle’s tribunal plays, but they run the same risk, if only by pretending that the transcripts of the hearings are ‘merely’ edited. Chris Megson notes that this (fake) naivety about the literalness of documentary representation was already given up by Peter Weiss himself, when he emphasised the montage character of documentary theatre: ‘unaltered in content, edited in form’ is self-contradictory, and Weiss admitted that openly. *Half the Picture* ends with such a montage, and Lady Thatcher has the final word: ‘I fear there will be much grammar to be corrected.’ (Megson 2009: 199-200; Norton-Taylor 1995: 274). But what does it mean when an edited transcript becomes performance? What is exactly performed — a legally valid statement, an illustration of political arrogance, or something else? Seen as a metatheatrical subtext, Thatcher’s remark also suggests that the hearings — or by extension any hearing — could be seen as a ‘live’ montage of the testimonies, with the presiding judge as the editor. It was not only Scott who corrected the grammar, Norton-Taylor performs this montage a second time — with different cuts and different narrative constraints.

The Scott inquiry, subject of *Half a Picture*, dealt with the eagerness of the British military industry to export arms and technology to Saddam Hussain’s Iraq, immediately after its ceasefire with the Islamic Republic of Iran in 1988. When the trial against weapons manufacturer Paul Henderson in 1992 revealed that the Conservative government had given silent authorisation and that Henderson had a hardly disclosable connection with intelligence services, the trial itself collapsed. Under pressure, Prime Minister John Major appointed Lord Justice Richard Scott to conduct an inquiry. David Gore-Booth was the head of the Middle-East Department of the Foreign Office and played a minor role in the scandal — he justified the silent softening of arms trade guidelines — but he embodied perfectly the elitist mentality of Whitehall, the ‘upper class’ of British civil service. In the play, the function of his character is to ‘perform’ this attitude. His performative plus-value is slightly different in both situations: the ‘real’ Scott inquiry is mainly interested in the lines of (authoritative) advice, leading to a controversial decision of the government, but his performance in the play is focused on the creation of a context — the sub-system of back-door politics. However, in both cases, he performs (and so reveals) a tacit understanding of the instrumental nature of the law regarding ‘major’ political interests. The elitism thus has its reasons. In Austinian terms: how does this context augment ‘felicity conditions’ for the illocutionary force of the challenged decisions?

[CHIEF INQUISITOR PRESILEY] BAXENDALE You say that the original guideline 3 [‘we should not, in future, approve orders for any defence equipment which, in our view, would significantly enhance the capability of either side to prolong or exacerbate the conflict’, 1985] is still in place?

GORE-BOOTH It is kept under constant review and applied on a case by case basis in the light of the prevailing circumstances, including the ceasefire [between Iraq and Iran].

BAXENDALE That is completely ridiculous, is it not, in the light of the fact that it has been amended for Iraq, to completely different words?

GORE-BOOTH I do not think so at all. We come back to the point of whether you think the British public and parliament are so dumb as to realise that there has not been a ceasefire.

SCOTT They certainly cannot have known what the revised wording was.

GORE-BOOTH Indeed not, but it had been decided not to make a public announcement.

BAXENDALE It is not completely misleading?

GORE-BOOTH I do not think so at all.

(Norton-Taylor 1995: 224-225)

The diplomat David Gore-Booth performs here, by defending the secrecy of a re-interpretation of the guidelines, the logic of political deception: his answers are arrogant, but their illocutionary force lies in the blatant (theatrical) creation of a world of different truths — not necessarily ‘alternative facts’ but rather alternative qualifications of seemingly obvious rules. This is risky, because the logic of this illocution is based upon the public denial of its working. The straightforward interrogation of Lord Justice Scott and Presley Baxendale, Queen’s Counsel — their titles enhancing the authority of their questions and the validity of their (legalistic) reasoning — reveal this paradox. In another testimony, witness/defendant Alan Clark, Minister of State for Trade and, later, for Defence Procurement — a notorious wit — states:

CLARK (...) It is a brilliant piece of drafting, because it is far from being restrictive. It is open to argument in respect of practically every one of its elements. I regarded the guidelines as being so imprecise and so obviously drafted with the objective of flexibility in either direction – elasticity, shall I say – as to make them fair game. It denies the ordinary meaning of the English language to say that the guidelines were not changed.

(Norton-Taylor 1995, 238)

Clark even provides intellectual background by suggesting that guideline 3 is a perfect illustration of ‘the constructive tension between positivism and ambiguity’, referring to Alfred Ayer. However, Gore-Booth’s and Clark’s statements, taken together, create, *a posteriori*, a discursive fact, or an institutional fact. This is a fact presupposing ‘the existence of certain human institutions’, in contrast with ‘brute facts’ (Searle 1969: 51), although it is exactly the speech act that blurs the factuality of the institution, be it ‘the Prime Minister’, ‘the Government’, or ‘Whitehall’, by defining the guidelines. Here the law itself, albeit in a soft version, is presented as an empty shell, available for any suitable (cynical) use. The speech act opens up an abyssal series of justifications (‘umbrella politics’),⁶ postponing/distinguishing (*différant*, in the Derridean sense)⁷ the final authority. The difference becomes acute between an actual inquiry which, by its mere existence, constitutes an institutional fact, and the (edited) theatrical representation of the same hearings. The latter begs for a criterium of veracity, which is an implicit (and problematic) characteristic of all documentary theatre (Tindemans 2013). The question is whether the imitative setting of *Half the Picture* characterised by a mimetic acting style and naturalistic sets does justice to the (linguistic) construction of ‘aporetic’ authority that both jurisdiction and drama, albeit in very different ways, require. ‘Suspension of disbelief’ won’t do.

⁶. The term ‘umbrella politics’ is a specific Belgian expression that has the following meaning: ‘People who try to escape their responsibilities are doing umbrella politics. They hold an umbrella over their heads, so that they do not take their responsibility but put it aside and eventually drop it. The word “umbrella politics” only occurs in Belgium, in addition to the expression “opening one’s umbrella”. They may have been derived from the informal French language in which, in this context, “ouvrir son parapluie” is used’ (TeamTaalDavies Vlaamse Overheid, 2007, my translation)

⁷. In French, *différer* means both to postpone and to differ. This ambiguity leads to Derrida’s coinage of the neologism *différance*, about which he says that it is not ‘a concept, but the possibility of conceptuality itself, the playing movement that [...] “produces” these differences’ (Derrida 1972a, 11-12).

In *The Colour of Justice*, discursive constructivism is shown from the other end of the state's institutions. The play focuses on professional misdemeanours amongst authorities (relatively) close to the general public: the police force and their supervisors. *Half the Picture* builds up, dramatically, from untransparent government policy to the concreteness of a commercial deal about lethal weapons. *The Colour of Justice* has roughly the same structure, from inconsistencies about forensic methods (or sheer clumsiness), to the blatant reality of (possibly) institutionalised racism. Richard Norton-Taylor edits sixty-nine days of public hearings about the racist murder of Stephen Lawrence in 1993 followed by a (deliberately?) dysfunctional forensic inquiry, the dropping of the prosecution of the suspected thugs, a failed criminal trial and, on top of it, the cover-up of these flaws by supervising police officers. The Stephen Lawrence case became notorious due to the activism of his parents and the British-Jamaican community, resulting in a public inquiry, on request of Home Secretary Jack Straw in 1997, chaired by Sir William McPherson, a retired High Court Judge (Norton-Taylor 1999: 7-14). In 2012 two suspects were finally convicted after a retrial at the instigation of Keir Starmer, then Director of Public Prosecutions.⁸ Norton-Taylor casts a diversity of witnesses: police officers, an accidental eyewitness, an acquitted suspect, Stephen Lawrence's parents, and his friend Duwayne Brooks, who saw Stephen Lawrence being stabbed. The testimonies of the bereaved fulfil here the same function as John McGrath's fictional monologues in *Half the Picture*: they undermine the firm ground of institutional reality, as created by the police witnesses, which tries to justify itself. These figures are not present for mere empathy, they draw the picture of a 'brute' reality. The illocutionary forces, by which speech acts create the institutional reality the audience observes, are most present in the hearings of the

8. Today, Doreen Lawrence, Stephen's mother, is a 'working peer', which is the term for a non-judicial member of the House of Lords, and she advises Keir Starmer, now leader of the Labour party, on ethnic minorities policy and health issues (Prime Minister's Office 2013; BBC News 2020).

police officers. The interrogation of DC Linda Holden, liaison officer between the police and the family, is particularly telling and theatrical:

[DETECTIVE CONSTABLE LINDA] HOLDEN Detective Constable Linda Holden.

[CHAIRMAN SIR WILLIAM] MACPHERSON Thank you. You do not need actually to lean forward over the microphone but bring the microphone close to you and then everybody will hear what you say. But speak up so the stenographer can hear you across the room.

(...)

[ASSISTANT COUNSEL TO THE INQUIRY ANESTA] WEEKES So you had some experience with a black family and an Asian family at least two years prior to Stephen Lawrence?

HOLDEN Yes.

WEEKES Can I go to the Lawrence family. The relationship with Mr and Mrs Lawrence became very difficult?

HOLDEN Unfortunately yes, it was very, very difficult, yes. There was so many outside agencies from different sorts of parties. I couldn't – I couldn't really get a close relationship with the family because there seemed to be a lot of barriers put up.

(Norton-Taylor 1999: 79)

The opening remarks are neutral and helpful in a normal courtroom, yet they become awkward when imitated on stage, as if the scenery resists the witness. This awkwardness continues when hostility between the police and the Lawrence family is suggested. Activism is not appreciated because it creates a reality beyond the usual emotional empathy: the police officer resists, unconsciously perhaps, the politicisation of the case.

The cross-examination of Stephen Lawrence's mother, by the solicitor of the highest-ranking police officer, is a common demonstration of judicial agonism, but the (linguistic) construction of an 'alternative' reality reaches beyond a fencing contest:

[COUNSEL FOR THE COMMISSIONER OF THE METROPOLITAN POLICE JEREMY]

GOMPERTZ (...) Can I ask you please to look at your note. Those are the names, are they not, that you wrote on the piece of paper and took with you when you went to see Mr Ilsley?

MRS [DOREEN] LAWRENCE Yes.

GOMPERTZ You see, the reason I ask you is that if all the names were written on this piece of paper, they did not include the names Norris or Knight, did they?

MRS LAWRENCE No, people were confused about the names when they came to us.

GOMPERTZ Can I ask you about something quite different now: your journey home from the hospital on the night in question. You went, did you not, to the Welcome Inn?

MRS LAWRENCE No.

GOMPERTZ Where did you go then?

MRS LAWRENCE Can I ask a question here? Am I on trial here or something here? I mean, from the time of my son's murder I have been treated not as a victim. Now I can only tell you or put into my statements what I know of went on that night. And for me to be questioned in this way, I do not appreciate it.

MACPHERSON Mr Gompertz, I think your discretion should be exercised in favour of not asking further questions.

GOMPERTZ Sir I will, of course, accept your guidance.

(Norton-Taylor 1999: 115-116)

The crisis in this exchange shows that Mrs Lawrence is conscious that the words, grammar, and reasonings of Gompertz have indeed illocutionary force: he performs, for himself, the character of the one-sided lawyer, but at the same time he destabilises — politely perhaps — the careful balance that chairman MacPherson tries to uphold between institutionalised authority and 'daily life'. Considering the previous fragment, this balance is politically delicate and a legal assessment of the facts seems to

be a necessary warrant of any political interpretation of the murder and its aftermath, if this institutional setting allows any politicisation at all. In her appreciative review, Janelle Reinelt criticises, on the one hand, the surface realism of *The Colour of Justice*, and its all too Aristotelian theatricality — pity and fear, resulting in katharsis — but she recognises, on the other, the huge societal impact of both the MacPherson report and its theatrical translation as exemplary for contemporary documentary art. The question remains, however, if the relationship between the actual MacPherson inquiry — which was very present in the UK, over the years — and the Norton-Taylor adaptation is purely mimetic, as Reinelt seems to suggest (2006: 79-82). Did Tricycle merely repeat and amplify the actual hearings, or were different, more subtle, illocutionary forces at work? And what is exactly meant by 'societal impact'? If performative speech acts change social reality, as Austin suggests, does the transformation occur, respectively, after the actual (mediatised) events, after the inquiry, or after the performance? The reification of race relations, for instance, an aspect of the Stephen Lawrence case that Paul Gilroy points out, is not the subject of MacPherson or Norton-Taylor, although the linguistic-pragmatic importance is undeniable (Gilroy 2000: 49-53).

If the Tricycle tribunal plays were a public success that often exceeded the expectations of an independent, politically outspoken English theatre company — *Half the Picture* was performed in the Palace of Westminster whilst the BBC broadcasted *The Colour of Justice* — the audience remained a theatre audience, familiar with theatrical codes and critical about aesthetic quality and societal relevance, within a 'niche' of cultural London. The configuration of Milo Rau's tribunals is completely different. Here there were no normal theatre venues and engaged audiences closely related to the parties in the process alongside real witnesses, real politicians, etcetera — yet without any jurisdictional power, as Rau himself announced in his introduction. The trials as such were not edited, although the films — deliberately made to disseminate

the statements Milo Rau made with the performances — are dramaturgically comparable to any process play, as a chronology of revelations, case after case. In May 2013 Milo Rau organised, only a few weeks after *Die Moskauer Prozesse*, and in the same configuration of lawyers, experts, witnesses, and jury, another play entitled *Die Zürcher Prozesse* in Zürich, Switzerland. In that case, *Die Weltwoche*, a weekly magazine with a populist right-wing profile, was indicted for ‘hate speech’ in its inflammatory anti-migration and anti-Sinti & Roma headlines and (manipulated) pictures. Tobi Müller’s remarks about Zürich are equally valuable for both other ‘theatrical trials’, even when the Swiss Milo Rau has much more an outsider position in Congo or Moscow. Müller calls Rau’s trial theatre ‘learning plays’ — *Lehrstücke* in German (Müller 2014: 11). Bertolt Brecht wrote *Lehrstücke* — such as the radically Leninist *Die Massnahme* (Brecht 1967b) — but they were not, or not in the first place, meant to teach the audience, but rather to educate the players themselves: ‘When you perform a ‘learning play’, you should play like students. With a deliberately clear speech, the student tries, going through the difficult passage again and again, to determine the meaning or to store it into his memory.’ (Brecht 1967c: 1022). In the Zürich trial, this meant for Milo Rau that the liberal news media had to learn to set aside their moralism and to look at the grossness of *Die Weltwoche* from the point of view of the rule of law and human rights, including the constitutional and societal limits to the law’s impact.

In Moscow, the (mock) trial dealt with three separate infringements on legally protected respect for religion (‘inciting religious hatred’): the exhibition *Caution! Religion* (2003), the exhibition *Forbidden Art* (2007), and the performance of the all-female punk band Pussy Riot in the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour (2012). Rau had cast representative public figures from both sides, with expert for the prosecution Maxim Shevshenko as the most prominent one. Shevshenko, popular television journalist and politician, maintains that in Russia church and state are one and that

this unity stands for Russia’s historic unicity (Rau 2014: 48). His declarations at the trial express the political and cultural framework that would justify the prosecution on purely legal grounds. His speech could be considered, in Austin’s terms, as sequences of constative utterances — representation of social facts — but with a strong illocutionary force, thus drawing a particular image of rule of law in Russia, that merges tendentious, partisan opinions and attitudes with standards of normativity.

SHEVSHENKO I believe it are the faithful who need defence, here and now. I declare that these ‘artists’ are the vanguard of a liberal-totalitarian state, a liberal-fascist state, which has infiltrated our country. When the action of these girls took place, I wrote in an article that they form the vanguard of a liberal offensive against the heart and soul of the Russian Federation and one should stand out against them. Artists are weapons in the hands of a dark power who wants to destroy all human in man. Therefore I pray you to consider, when you give a judgment, when you have heard experts, lawyers, solicitors, prosecutors, whether a man possesses the right to be a man. Or if, on the contrary, this inhuman power, which bears many names, which even calls itself ‘liberalism’ and whose offshoot postures as ‘action artists’, if this power has the right to penetrate the most sacred place of all. I thank you.

(Rau 2014: 46-47)

The un-judicial arguments of his speech are difficult to refute within the existing judiciary trial framework. Immediately afterwards the ‘verdict’, that is the real meaning of this ideological context despite its commonsensical circularity or absurdity, emerges in all its (radical) clarity. The deliberation of the jury happens to culminate in a tied vote, which legally implies the acquittal of all the accused on all charges. Most penal procedures, under the rule of law, lead to an acquittal in the event of a tie, but Shevshenko reinterprets the result:



Maxim Shevshenko in *The Moscow Trials*, 2013
Director: Milo Rau
© Maxim Lee – IIPM

SHEVSHENKO (...) Three votes in favor [of a conviction], three votes against, one abstention. The verdict doesn't say that they are not guilty. This is a mistake, and I don't understand why the court interprets the judgment of the jurors in this sense. The votes of the jurors are equally divided, exactly in the way as our society has two opinions about this issue. I think that the distribution of the votes of the jurors demonstrates the schism in society. (...) In short, there is no 'guilty' or 'not guilty'.

(Rau 2014: 154)

Shevshenko shrewdly conflates two conventional frameworks, the judiciary and the theatrical. This is an ambiguity that Milo Rau deliberately creates for every tribunal (Zürich, Moscow, Congo) via the extensive and detailed seriousness of their research, factually and politically. This makes an evaluation of 'felicity conditions' particularly hard. Shevshenko's opening speech is a strange example of ideological patchwork. His protest against the tied vote of the verdict is implicitly based upon his earlier sketch of a 'decadent' society: simple legality — *in dubio pro reo* — is not sufficient anymore, a blind application of the rule of law does not do justice to the fundamentals of society at stake. This conclusion should have consequences for a dangerously divided society: Shevshenko's illocution reaches beyond procedural logic. He does not accept that 'proceduralism' — understood as the respect for procedures enabling the anticipation of the illocutionary forces of statements during a judicial process — constitutes precisely one of the pillars of the rule of law. Rau's theatrical framework allows observers to see, quite transparently, the true nature of the political attitude of those who identify state and church as one in Russia.

In *Das Kongo Tribunal*, Rau exploits again the tension between legality and theatricality — raising doubts for the audience about the nature of illocution and degrees of factuality — but the polemical character

of the trial is less outspoken. The trial was split in two sessions, one in Bukavu, one in Berlin, and the Bukavu session gave the impression of a people's assembly, with a very engaged audience, all linked, at least emotionally, to the situation characterised by civil war, exploitation by (multinational) mining companies, and the dubious relations between both. All dignitaries of the region, including Marcellin Cishambo, Governor of South Kivu and his Ministers, and presidential candidate Victor Kamarhe — now disgraced — were present. The court was presided by Jean-Louis Gilissen, a Belgian lawyer specialising in international penal law and previously involved in the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR), which dealt with the 1994 genocide. More than the Moscow tribunal, the Congo tribunal inquired into issues with a larger, even global impact: human rights, of course, but against a background of international economic relationships, post-colonial exploitation and surreptitious power mechanisms, creating together an extremely unbalanced confrontation between governments and multinationals, often backed by their own national governments. The jurors, all experts from Congo and Europe, reached a verdict (in Berlin), clearly denouncing the systematic violation of human rights and proposing mixed national/international penal tribunals. However, it proved much more difficult, if not impossible, to cast the economic misdemeanour and the collateral misgovernance in a legally valid, let alone enforceable mould, partly due to the diversity of actors involved that included representatives of national and regional governments, MONUSCO peacekeepers, European bureaucracies, and international NGOs (Rau 2017: 258-262). Three cases were chosen, supposedly representative of the complexity of the situation. The 'Banro-case' was about a village relocated by force to make way for large-scale extraction of gold and tin. The villagers were robbed of their humble source of income from digging gold. The second case, the 'Bisie-case', dealt with a conflict between large mining companies, local artisanal miners, and rebel groups. When the USA forbade their trading companies to buy raw materials from conflict

areas, jobless *creuseurs* were forced to join militia, with deterioration of the region and more indiscriminate violence as a result. The third case was an inquiry into a recent massacre in Mutarule, which demonstrated the inefficiency of, on the one hand, the passive Congolese government and army and, on the other, carelessness of the MONUSCO ‘protection’ force and international NGOs with their own agendas.

The example of the interrogation of Jean-Julien Miruho, Minister of the Interior in South Kivu, shows how discourse and speech acts create a legal-theatrical reality. Every utterance fits neatly in the legal construction (of government accountability, in this case) and when combined with *decorum* (in gesture, in setting, even in costume), adjudication seems to become self-evident. Miruho had to deal with the Mutarule massacre. After a devastating testimony of a local student leader about the belated arrival of the government at the place of the carnage, he tries to answer, with a clichéd account of governmental impotence:

MIRUHO This witness is a student, that's what I want to say first. (...) I have welcomed a delegation of students, and this student was among them. First: talking about the government, this is not only the Minister of the Interior or the Governor. The government is a whole. We have sent there a protection unit. We have sent there members of our security council. And we ourselves were there, the next day, because we had to organize everything. We ourselves arrived the next day in Mutarule, and we organized there the burial of the victims of the massacre. I don't know, if these were three days. It were not three days.
(Rau 2017: 195-196)

In itself, this is an anecdotal statement, reproducing not the banality of evil, but rather the banality of incompetence, although the setting of the Eichmann tribunal is, *mutatis mutandis*, comparable: (organised)

massacres, millions of victims, heart-rending testimonials, petty bureaucrats, a theatrical setting — simply not with Israeli Prime Minister Ben-Gurion as the theatre director,⁹ but rather artist-activist Milo Rau. The contrast between the actual violence in Congo and the emptiness of the political or legal responsibility is shockingly exposed: the ‘dramaturgy’ of the Eichmann-in-Jerusalem was much more linear, from badly disguised evil to the execution. The testimony of Miruho and the closing speech of governor Cishambo about his fruitless efforts to reform the armed forces in his province (Rau 2017: 232-236) form the first stage in a discursive sequence of weak illocutionary acts — these speech acts are unable to perform actions — gradually culminating in an intellectually impressive, but performatively (politically) powerless, pseudo-verdict without (perlocutionary) consequences. In a remarkable way, this trial shows the ‘groundlessness’ of international law, particularly when immense economic interests are at stake: every action opens a new abyss, renders rules meaningless, and destroys normativity. The political strength (and thus the theatrical impact) of *Das Kongo Tribunal* lied however in its contextualisation, in its effort to de-polemicise the ordeal of a population, even when this leads to awkward utterances by the official ‘lawgivers’ in a lawless situation.

⁹ The Eichmann trial in Jerusalem marked a political shift in the ‘dramaturgical’ function of the Holocaust to legitimise the existence of the state of Israel by associating the murder of 6 million Jews by Hitler’s Germany with the imminent danger (of annihilation) from Israel’s Arab neighbors. Prime Minister Ben-Gurion declared openly that he was not interested in the fate of Eichmann, but only in the spectacle. Indeed, it can be argued that the abduction and the spectacular trial were not necessary to prove Eichmann’s guilt (Zertal 2005: 107-108).

Conclusions

De-legitimisation of arms trade or at least its placement under public control; structural measures against institutional racism with the police; an end to the persecution of (political) artists in Russia; legal action against those responsible for violent economic exploitation in East Congo: these are the concrete societal measures and changes the discussed Tricycle tribunals plays and the Moscow and Congo trials propose or at least suggest implicitly. Is it possible to assess these desired results and evaluate the perlocutionary force of these plays? Maybe together with the non-theatrical hearings on which the Tricycle plays are based? Or together with the rare verdicts of the European Court of Human Rights (concerning Russia) (Press country file Russia 2020) or the International Criminal Court (concerning Congo) (International Criminal Court 2020)? Or are we forced to acknowledge that any artistic effort in this respect is futile and that ‘art taking over when justice fails’ eventually means that art is doomed to fail too? It is indeed hard to assess the direct societal impact of tribunal plays or other forms of ‘theatre of the real’. The formal difference between ‘imitative’ and ‘activist’ tribunal plays does not play a fundamental role: both claim that an artistic intervention — qualifiable as *Historisierung* — constitutes a plus value to legal adjudication, as they contribute to a different, more comprehensive framing of the events at stake. In an analysis of the reception and the effect of documentary film and video, especially forms of activist, ‘committed’ documentary, Jane M. Gaines warns of an overestimation of any social impact. ‘Realistic’ screenings of injustice or violence have resulted, sometimes, in the mobilisation of the ‘politicised body’. But this politicisation is already a preliminary condition, and it is highly questionable whether the result — e.g., the Los Angeles riots in 1992, after the broadcasting of footage of police brutality towards Rodney King — has to do with the genre, with forms of adaptation and

distribution, or with the represented facts themselves. The latter might be more accurate, the document ‘has a special power of which it is a copy because it derives its power from the same world’ (Gaines 1999: 95). Committed documentary makers may opt to use the ‘political mimicry’ that would result from an unproblematised relationship between (reported) reality and recorded images (plus their massively disseminated copies). This is a relation that has only intensified since 1992. But it is questionable if the aesthetics of documentary film — never mind Sergei Eisenstein, Jean-Luc Godard, or Peter Watson — bring about more political action (and subsequent societal change) than the raw footage (rarely) does. There are few reasons to think that documentary theatrical re-enactment has different results. The ‘liveness’ is questionable as an impact factor — except perhaps for the actual audience — but the uniqueness of that experience is lost in (audio-visual) dissemination.

However, there is another issue at stake in the ‘tribunal form’ of documentary theatre, in Tricycle’s strictly scripted re-enactments or in Milo Rau’s contingent (non-recurring and unpredictable) performances. With *Das Kongo Tribunal*, Milo Rau wanted to test the conditions of possibility of a real, legitimate tribunal, choosing three cases out of thousands. Even when the political, economic, and military situation in Congo has hardly improved since 2015, the experience of the tribunal by its participants (and spectators) has changed something in their minds, he claims (Rau 2017: 294-295). The ‘felicity conditions’ of the performative speech act uttered at these tribunals are not to be measured by the actual punishments imposed by a (hypothetical) constitutionally sound judge on those responsible for governmental misdemeanour, racial prejudice, political-religious intolerance, economic exploitation, or indiscriminate violence. A tribunal play is the representation of a representation: the legal configuration translates the factual world, it represents the facts insofar as they can be qualified in legal terms, whilst the theatrical *mise en scène* — no matter how imitative it might

be — translates the first translation, again. Taking into account that the normative framework used in the first (legal) translation has, in its normativity itself, an abyssal character (see Derrida), the *mise en abyme* is only extended, maybe *ad infinitum* — resulting in the indeterminate character of ‘felicity’ itself.

The theatrical gaze, however, makes an alternative interpretation of the efficiency and impact of these productions possible, by interrogating the felicity conditions of legal speech acts or, to be more precise, speech acts in a conventionally accepted ‘mock’ legal context. The discussed examples show how all the witnesses — actors or real witnesses — are trying to create their own context for the perception of the reality of the case as a whole. In the theatre this happens all the time, so the focus can shift to the details, or at least to different details. The Russian journalist Maxim Shevshenko, acting as a ‘mock’ constitutionalist, is excessive in this respect, by re-defining explicitly the notion of rule of law, but others do not fail to do the same regarding, for example, the importance of confidentiality for political decision-making (Gore-Booth), the reduction of social-racial contradictions to private disputes (DC Holden), or the structural inertia of governance (Miruho). In some cases, these affirmations (or even confessions) are to be seen as excuses for what these witnesses experience themselves as transgressive acts. But the (theatre) spectator — not worried about the physical outcome of the process, simply because there is no such outcome: no fine, no jail — observes how speech acts perform their own realities by trying to create their own ‘felicity conditions’, all within the overarching framework of speech itself, without regard to the referential consequences outside the (imitated) courtroom. With regards to the above case studies this would equate to the desired fluency of governmental affairs (Gore-Booth), the imagined convivial and apolitical relationship between police and bereaved families (DC Holden), the unconditional defence of the unity of state and church in Russia (Shevshenko), or the structural impotence

of bureaucracy or ‘statelessness’ in Congo (Miruho). These strategies become transparent in the theatrical event with a precisely circumscribed space-and-time (and a suspension of disbelief) and they are identifiable as postponing/distinguishing (*différant*) devices. Such strategies distinguish between reality and its representation (or iteration), and they postpone responsibilities concerning claiming the rules, applying the rules, or complying to the rules — and all the other versions of law-abiding behaviour (including its opposites, i.e. its infringements).

Heather Schuster says, analysing a case that the Supreme Court of Florida once got entangled in, that the last resort of legal performativity — in Butler’s sense wherein speech acts construct the legal *persona* — is the constitution of the legal subject as a provisional citizenship, never able (or never ready) to acknowledge the complex reality of the body (Schuster 1999: 196-199). This idea is interesting, since it makes legal and theatrical illocution — and thus their felicity conditions, their ‘happiness’ — more comparable. Although Schuster understands this performative failure — which is structural for speech, as Derrida suggests in his critique of Austin — as politically malignant, it can also be seen as a confession of the contingency of any linguistic utterance which pretends to coincide seamlessly with the body — the physical body or, metaphorically, the social body. In the tribunal plays, all characters try to define the context and the conventions in which their illocutionary statement should be felicitous: consensus on paternalistic government, convivial relationships between police and citizens, acceptance of national-orthodox Russia, subservience to political leaders, strong or weak. However, where the law obscures, as a necessary strategy, this inability to discipline the body with speech, the theatre lays it bare. By not being felicitous, by affirming itself as an ‘etiolation’ of real action, the theatre displays vulnerable bodies, even when they are stand-ins such as professional actors. The theatre subtly undermines the ‘paternity’ of the law, it does not accept the provisional nature of legal citizenship as a *fait accompli*. •

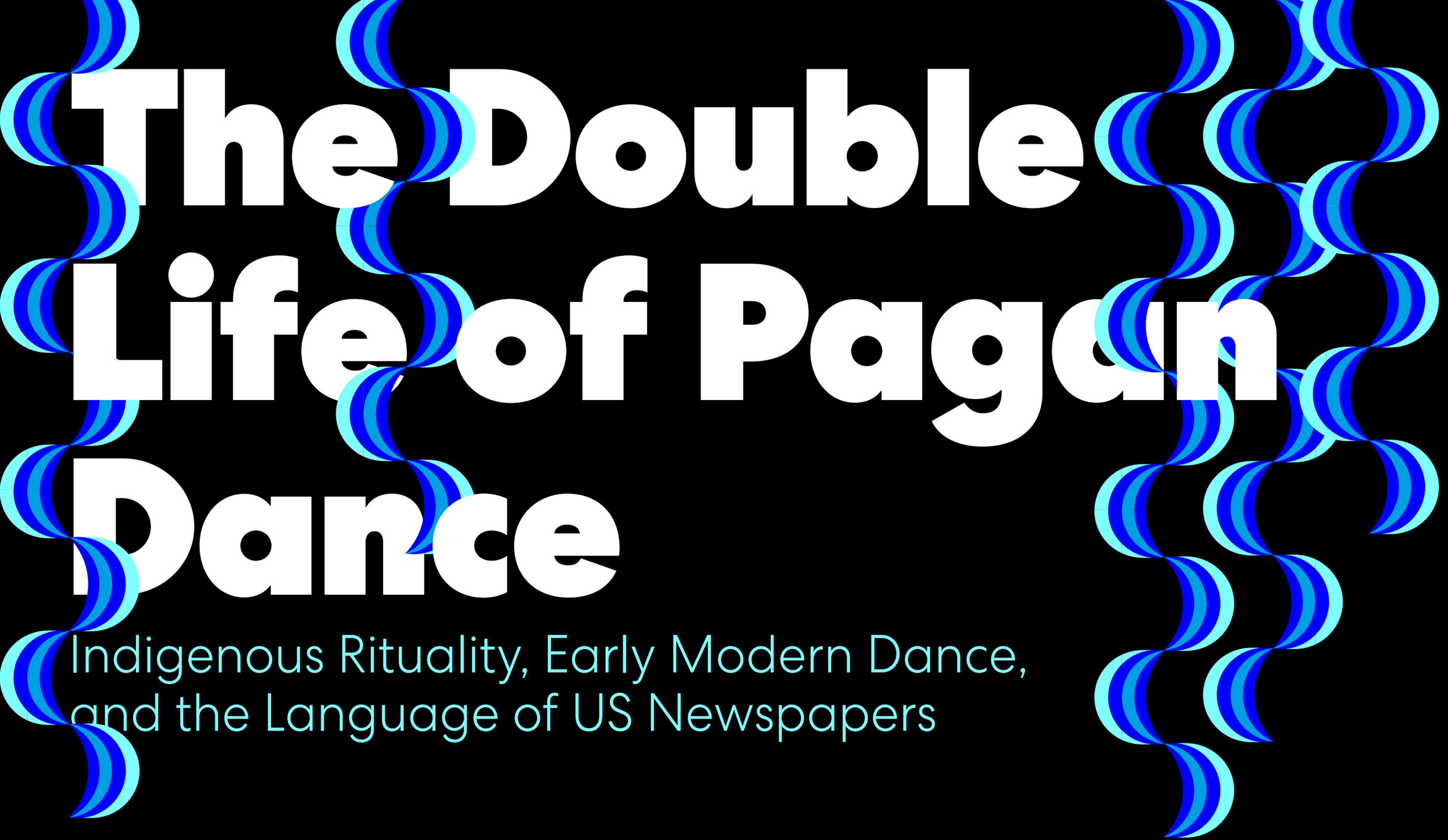
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The Double Life of Pagan Dance

Indigenous Rituality, Early Modern Dance,
and the Language of US Newspapers

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KEYWORDS

Indigenous dance, early modernist dance, 'pagan dance', settler-colonialism, colonisation

SCHLÜSSELWÖRTER

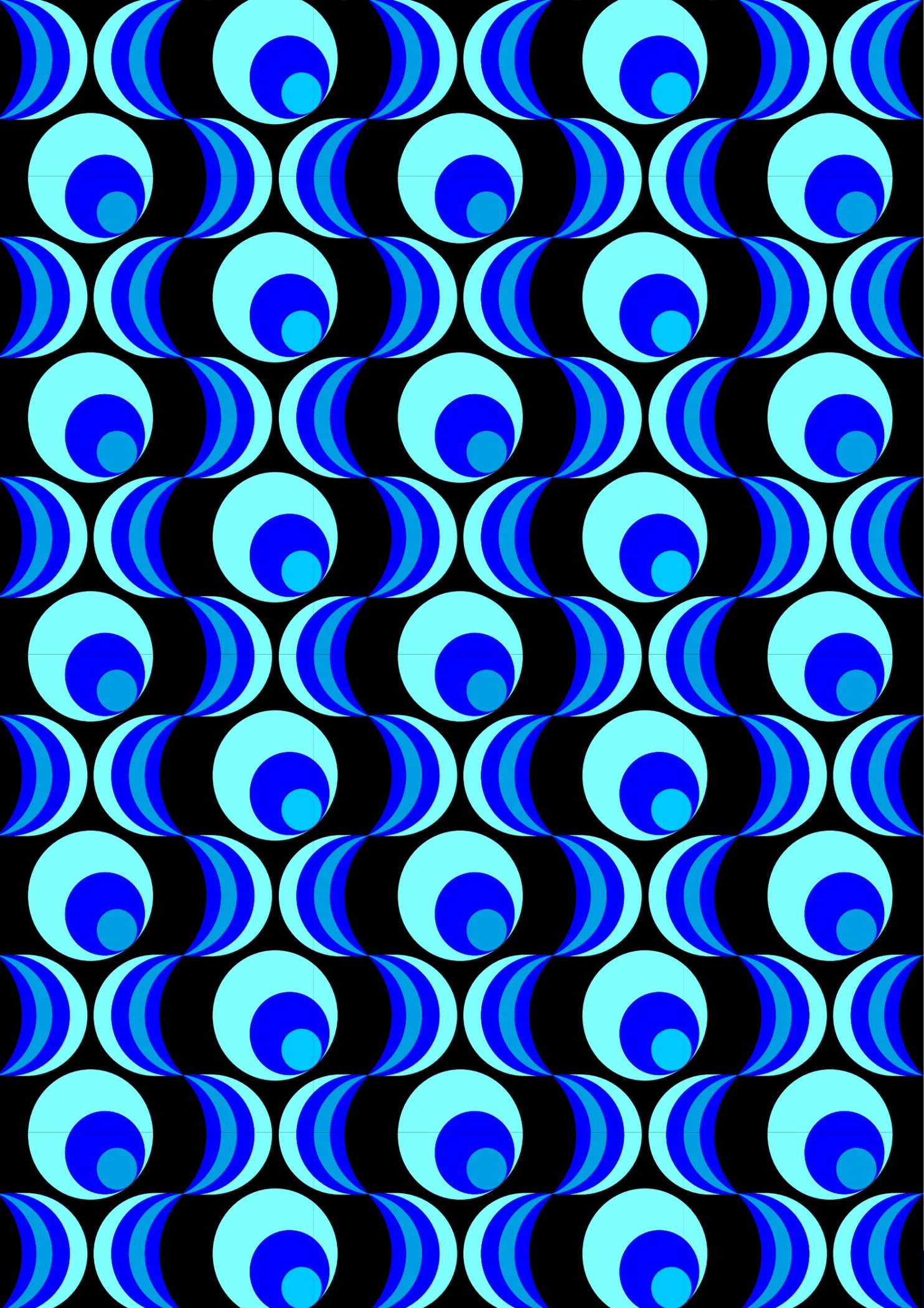
Indigener Tanz, Tanz der frühen Moderne, 'heidnischer Tanz', Siedlerkolonialismus, Kolonialismus

Summary

What can be made of the fact that American early modern dancers employed the term 'pagan dance' to describe their practices, ideologies, and aesthetics when they were surrounded by a public discourse that disparaged Indigenous dance through the very same label? When used to describe Indigenous ritual dances, the term 'pagan dance' performed a complete cultural recontextualisation upon whatever Indigenous dance that was its object – transforming each dance into a justification for a US settler-colonial and anti-Indigenous stance. However, when adopted by early modern dancers, the term 'pagan dance' could be received by the US public as a revitalisation of ancient spiritualism and a garnering of 'native' ritual knowledge. Tracking the term through American newspapers at the turn of the twentieth century, this article investigates the bifurcation of a 'pagan dance' vocabulary that conditioned dance's social and spiritual reception in the US.

Zusammenfassung

Wie ist es zu bewerten, dass amerikanische Tänzer*innen der frühen Moderne ihre Praktiken, Weltanschauungen und Ästhetiken als 'pagan dance' bezeichneten, während der damals zeitgenössische öffentliche Diskurs den gleichen Begriff verwendete, um den indigenen Tanz herabzuwürdigen? Durch die im öffentlichen Diskurs verwendete Bezeichnung als 'pagan' erfuhren indigene Rituale Tänze eine vollständige kulturelle Rekontextualisierung und lieferten so einen Vorwand für den US-amerikanischen anti-indigenen Siedlerkolonialismus. Der Begriff 'pagan dance', der von den Tänzer*innen (?) der frühen Moderne verwendet wurde, konnte von der US-amerikanischen Öffentlichkeit als eine Wiederbelebung des alten Spiritualismus und eine Sammlung von indigenem Ritualwissen rezipiert werden. Der Artikel untersucht den Begriff in Zeitungen der Jahrhundertwende und erforscht die widersprüchliche Verwendung des Begriffs 'pagan dance', die die soziale und geistige Rezeption des Tanzes in den USA prägte.



Introduction

What is a ‘pagan dance’? The term denotes Christian perspectives of ‘unchristian’ dance and the dances of ‘non-Christians’. Ideas of ‘pagan dance’ have been important to Christian historical address of dance and its spiritual meaning since late antiquity (Dickason 2021: 79). Associations between ‘paganism’ and dancing shaped medieval Christian discourses on dance and emerged within religious debates on idolatry and ritual behaviour during the Reformation (Dickason 2021: 78, Drury 2019: 191-193). Since the rise of colonisation, Christian ideas about ‘pagan dance’ have partaken in performing colonial Christendom in language, narratively tying the dances of colonised peoples to the dances of ‘pagan’ Romans who were proselytised by the Church Fathers. The Christian language of ‘pagan dance’ thus connects the expansion of the Church through European imperialism to the establishment of the Church in late antiquity (Dickason 2021: 4).

This article gives a small history that investigates the consequences of Christian ‘pagan dance’ ideas, focussing on a particular context of their expression in articles published and circulated in US newspapers. I show how terminologies of ‘pagan dance’ worked to overwrite the meanings of Indigenous dances with the generalist Christian visions of ‘pagans’ and their dances. I further argue that early modern concert dancers capitalised on the importance of ‘pagan dance’ language in the colonial setting and the public’s consequent familiarity with the colonial rhetoric of ‘pagans’ and their dancing.

THE OLD AND NEW PARTIES.

"There are two parties here," continued the chief. "We call them the old party and the new party. The white men speak of the old party as being pagan and the new party as Christians. I am of the old party, but we are not pagans. A pagan does not believe in God. We believe in a Supreme Creator and Ruler of the universe, who, so far as I can see, is like the God of our brothers who have been won over to Christianity. Our ceremonies of recognition are, of course, very different, but the two parties get along peacefully and harmoniously. There are eight clans among the Onondagas—the Beaver, the Wolf (my own), the Deer, the Bear, the Eel, the Mud Turtle, the Swamp Turtle and the Snipe.

Mrs. Boynton characterized Miss Duncan as the "true pagan woman interpreting Grecian art." In telling of the early life of the now noted dancer Mrs. Boynton said:

"Her mother was very religious and her father possessed an intensely artistic and poetic nature. He was also a lover of dancing. The mother was deserted by the father and had to support four small children. One day when she came home from work, weary and discouraged, the little children gathered around her and said, 'Mamma, tell us about God,' and the poor woman, in a moment of impatience, in her wonderful patience, said: 'Go away. There is no God.' The two older ones went away and grieved. The third child became cynical and skeptical, but the youngest knew no difference. There was never any God to her, but her soul was intensely religious, and so we have the true pagan woman of the Grecian time—Isadora Duncan—interpreting Grecian art to us today. Her art is her religion."

Figure 1. Excerpt from 'The Green Corn Dance: Annual Festival of the Onondaga Indians', *New York Tribune*, 12 December 1897, p. 8. *Chronicling America Digital Archive*. <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83030214/1897-09-12/ed-1/seq-32/>

Figure 2. Excerpt from 'Dancer is a True Pagan Woman', *San Francisco Call*, 8 November 1908, p. 10. *Chronicling America Digital Archive*. <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn85066387/1908-11-12/ed-1/seq-10/>

If the label ‘pagan dance’ generally stands for a Christian view of the dances of a non-Christian world, Indigenous dance, by contrast, encompasses myriad worlds of dance defined differently by the peoples practicing. It is with this in mind that I began researching ‘pagan dance’ as a colonial language, searching for its meaning in American popular writings that historically described Indigenous dances in generalist terms. At the beginning of my research process, I was looking at penny dreadfuls, dime novels, pulp magazines, published sermons, and newspaper articles. I found ‘pagan dance’ tropes used to describe the activities of generic ‘Indians’ in works of nineteenth-century authors including Ann S. Stephens, William Tudor, James Fenimore Cooper, and Henry Wadsworth Longfellow.¹ However, when my searches turned to digital archives of newspapers from around the turn of the twentieth century, I also came across numerous articles that applied the term ‘pagan dance’ and its various tropes and formulas to white concert dance performers, including Isadora Duncan and Ruth St. Denis. I was already aware of the proclivity among early modern dancers to work with ‘pagan themes’ of classical antiquity (Duncan) or Orientalism (Denis). What I began to realise, however, was that these turn-of-the-century newspapers provided a mass-media space where the ‘pagan dance’ imaginaries of early modern American dance shared the page with settler-colonist, anti-Indigenous writings about ‘pagan dance’ in the US. This shared space was some of the most widely circulated and widely read printed material of the period.

This led me to the questions I will be tackling in this article: How important was the language of ‘pagan dance’ to wider discourse on the meaning of dance in the US? To what extent did descriptions of

1. For further insight on the likening of Indigenous peoples of North America to Europe’s ‘pagan’ antiquity among nineteenth-century US authors, see Niemeyer 2015. For a bibliography of anti-dance texts including numerous sermons published in the US, see Marks 1975.

the dance practices of Indigenous peoples as ‘pagan’ in US newspapers shape that discourse? Were white early modern dancers influenced by mass-mediatised descriptions of Indigenous dance as ‘pagan’? In addressing these questions, I focus on US newspapers as sites where public languages and social meanings of dance were constructed for a primarily white, settler-colonial readership. I investigate how newspaper discourses addressed the concert dance forms of settler-colonial culture and the social practices of Indigenous peoples to produce a ‘double life of pagan dance’ in newspaper print. This ‘double life’ at once degraded the sacred practices of Indigenous peoples even as it created cultural capital for early modern dancers. In this sense, this article addresses how mass-mediatised Christian-historical narratives of ‘pagan dance’ became a part of settler-colonial language and thus a part of language-as-colonisation.²

Over the course of the research process, I was able to characterise the meaning of ‘pagan dance’ as used in American newspapers around the turn of the twentieth century. The two articles at the beginning of this introduction (see Fig. 1 and Fig. 2) exemplify how the notion of ‘being pagan’ was understood at that time as a state of being without God.³ This view of the ‘pagan’ was conditioned by the idea that a faith in any but the Christian God would be, by nature, not a true faith (or simply not faith at all). In this context, the term ‘pagan dance’ served as a general label covering several characteristics of how such a state of being

2. By consequence, a limitation of this paper is that it does not address the ‘pagan dance’ moniker and its uses to describe Orientalist dance, classical dance forms of ‘non-western’ peoples, and colonised peoples internationally.

3. On the one hand, these two figures tell completely different stories. Fig. 1 quotes Chief Daniel La Fort of the Onondaga at the reservation in New York. Fig. 2 quotes C.C. Boynton, a childhood schoolmate of Isadora Duncan. Both quoted speakers, despite their differences, define the ‘pagan’ as holding false beliefs that, being such, are essentially likened to atheism, or being without a God.

without God was performed across history. First, ‘pagan dance’ was regarded as a performance of pre-Christian *inheritance*. As such, ‘pagan dance’ inscribed the colonial period into a larger Christian historical narrative extending back to Church Father critiques of ‘pagan’ Roman dances. The term thus facilitated the transposition of Eurocentric ideas of antiquity to the colonial period. Second, ‘pagan dance’ was considered a *transculturally universalist* act. It demarcated a common set of ‘primitive’ ritual practices that human beings in general and across cultures were assumed to ‘start with’ prior to Christian conversion. Third, ‘pagan dance’ was understood as *materialist*. Connected to amusement, festivity, carnal pleasure, gifting practices, and beauty, ‘pagan dance’ was viewed as a spiritual approach rooted in worldliness.

The characterisation of ‘pagan dance’ in terms of inheritance, trans-cultural universalism, and worldly materialism allowed me to refocus my attention upon the particular language that was used to describe Indigenous dances and early modern dance as ‘pagan’ in newspapers. Drawing from this characterisation of ‘pagan dance’, this article’s approach to the overarching topic of this Essays Section on ‘Language and Performance’ is informed by the aim to re-ground dance within its cultural (and colonial) histories. By working with the language of US newspapers, I intend to show that the rise of white early modern dance is not definitively separate from concurrent white suppression of Indigenous dance. The popular mediascape of US newspapers shows a national discourse on the meaning of dance that reused Christian historical language of ‘pagan dance’ to legitimise settler supremacy and delegitimise Indigenous spirituality by use of the same terms. From this perspective, this article aims to show how language can be used as a tool for the politicisation (and policing) of dance through the reappropriation of terms for seemingly opposite ends.

A Note on Materials and Methodology

US newspaper articles of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries can be described as unsituated archival materials: most authors are not named and many texts were circulated among newspapers and reprinted in various towns around the country. Articles, letters, opinions, and announcements were in themselves often composed of circulated and recirculated tropes, clichés, and stereotypes. As common spaces of readership and trade-zones of authorship, newspapers served as a centerpiece to the white American ‘imagined community’ (Anderson 2006: 198). They used language to narratively reshape not only communities but also dance practices while using dance to produce visions of national identity. Consequently, historical US newspapers, despite being primary archival resources, present a vastly incomplete and non-factual lens on history. As many newspaper articles were written by white settlers about Indigenous groups, they reflect a larger system of social and political silencing. This system is poignantly articulated by Boaventura de Sousa Santos, who claims that dominant and colonist groups pronounce that the works and ideas of others ‘deserve being silenced because they are being carried out by ignorant, inferior, backward, retrograde, local, unproductive people’ (2014: 11). Such language is present in many articles I will quote throughout this contribution, and led me to query the archive for its white supremacy.

My own critical approach in this article is informed by the work of Native American scholars whose methods of historical analysis reassess what it means to engage with white-centric historical documents about Indigenous lives. The works of Yankton Dakota scholar Philip J. Deloria, Crow Creek Sioux scholar Elizabeth Cook-Lynn, Muscogee

Creek scholar K. Tsianina Lomawaima, Dakota and Apache scholar Kiara Vigil, and Osage scholar Robert Warrior have been essential to the development of my methods. My research on the colonial language of ‘pagan dance’ in US newspapers is further inspired by Christopher Bracken’s analysis of colonial writings about North-American Indigenous ritual and dance in *The Potlatch Papers* (1997). Focussing on ‘the colonial text where an author’s discourse consistently fails to do what it says it is doing’ (1997: 6), Bracken’s work explores the unravelling of colonial logics within its own writings. The language of ‘pagan dance’ is similarly a colonial logic that fractures as it moves between applications to Indigenous ritual and white concert dance.

In this article, I draw from qualitative datasets I have compiled primarily from the Library of Congress *Chronicling America* digital archive. I have focussed on a segment of time in which the development of early modern dance strongly coincides with newspaper-based discourses on intertribal Indigenous dance practices in the US.⁴ I more specifically start from the late 1880s, with the proliferation of articles on Ghost Dance practices, and end in the early 1930s, when the white concert dancer Ted Shawn began performing his *Zuni Ghost Dance* for a primarily white American public.⁵ My temporal demarcation does not describe the beginning of white reception of Indigenous dance nor the end of its appropriation by concert dancers — as this would be far too wide-ranging for an article

4. Intertribalism is built into the traditional political structures of numerous Indigenous groups throughout North America. A centerpiece of intertribal relations includes the Great Sioux Nation, a political structure held in common by Lakota, Western Dakota, and Eastern Dakota groups. It extends across the Great Plains of the present-day US and Canada (see Hämäläinen 2019). The nineteenth century saw the rise of a number of intertribal religious movements as well, including the Indian Shaker Church of 1881 and the ghost dance religion, which seems to have first emerged around 1869 (see Mooney 1896).

5. The earliest comparison I found between ancient ‘pagan dance’ and Indigenous dance appears in a 1852 article stating that ‘the dances of the Jews and Pagans were doubtless similar to those still practiced by the Indian tribes of America’ (‘Origin of Dancing’ 1852: 2).

of this size. I instead begin with an article on intertribal Ghost Dancing and end with an article about a white man’s ghost dance, bracketing the narrative with a nineteenth-century intertribal dance and its twentieth-century appropriation by an early modern dancer.⁶

Many articles consulted are not quoted in this article but have been gathered into datasets and visualised for reference (see Figs. 7 and 8]. The aim of these visualisations is to gain a picture of the use of ‘pagan dance’ terminologies in US newspapers around the turn of the century. I gathered data on article types, populations each described, newspapers that published such articles, years of publication, and themes of ‘pagan dance’ discourse. My initial dataset included 260 articles that clearly described dance practices as ‘pagan dance’ between 1880-1930. With these, I noted and recorded patterns of language associated with ‘pagan dance’ and used this language in keyword searches to produce larger datasets of articles. I categorised the terms used and populations described, first graphing these according to article types, including pieces on the ‘pagan dances’ of Christian history, of holidays, in the views of preachers, in critiques of social dance, in descriptive pieces, in reviews of concert dance, in the views of missionaries, from tourist accounts, in the articles of reservation newspapers, in film announcements, amateur performance reviews, and pageant descriptions (Fig. 7). I next graphed according to newspaper, looking at what years and types of articles were commonly produced (Fig. 8). These data visualisations helped me make sense of my dataset; more specifically, what kinds of articles discussed ‘pagan dance’, where and when, and what kinds of populations were most discussed.

6. My choice is further informed by Native American historical investigations of the period. Robert Warrior’s *Tribal Secrets* (1995) is a study of Native intellectuals organised around the intertribal political projects and ‘Christian and secular assimilationist writing’ that centred on intertribal spiritual and social ideas beginning in the 1890s (2001: 4). In *Indigenous Intellectuals* (2015), Kiara Vigil pushes back against an historical trend in which the 1880s-1930s have been ‘understood as a decline in Native activities’ (2015: 10).

I found that newspaper writings on ‘pagan dance’ were published nationwide in the period and that they more often described Indigenous populations, histories of Christianity, and social dance than concert dance performance. My data supports the idea that early modern concert dance emerged in newspapers to take up a smaller presence among articles on ‘pagan dance’ after the turn of the century (Fig. 7). With these findings, I theorised that newspaper articles on Indigenous ‘pagan dance’ would have been more commonly read than articles on concert dance, and were thus more powerful in shaping national ideas about dance in popular media than were articles about concert dancers at the time. This buttresses my claim that early modern dancers began addressing themes of ‘pagan dance’ to a white American media that was more generally prone to disparagingly associate ‘pagan dance’ with Indigenous groups.

Given the attention I devote in this article to the terminology surrounding ‘pagan dance’ in US newspapers, it seems appropriate to address my own use of terms. I work with the term variations on the terms ‘early modern dance’ and ‘concert dance’ because similar terms existed in newspapers of the time. Meanwhile, I refer to historical Native Americans either by tribal names or as ‘Indigenous’. The reason for this choice is twofold: on the one hand, the term ‘Native American’ was not in use during the period I investigate, and on the other hand, I wish not to repeat the white habit of simply grouping Indigenous peoples by the political geography of the current domestic US. Instead, my use of ‘Indigenous’ in this article emphatically indicates intertribal solidarity that precedes present-day North American borders and continues to resist US expansionism.

As this article specifically investigates newspapers as a site of dance’s social reception and discursive articulation, I do not extend my arguments to the choreographic, aesthetic, or embodied enactments of Indigenous practices or white dance in the period. I further avoid

They were also advised to supply themselves with arms, and with ghost shirts, which were to protect them against the white man’s bullet. And so was the frenzy warped and twisted to suit the end desired, which was the preparation of the Indian mind, like that of the Jews, for a warrior king and leader. In this way the, ghost dance, in itself as harmless as any other peaceful amusement, was a source of danger. It was thus made the means of preparing the young men, almost unconsciously, to follow that Messiah when he should appear. One would no doubt have been found in due time by these medicine men. I say the Indian Messiah, as originally proclaimed in Nevada was to be a prince of peace, but the medicine men had already transformed him into a warrior king, a character more congenial to the Indian o, today, as it was to the Jews of old, and had any other kind of Messiah appeared he would doubtless have been crucified.

Figure 3. Excerpt from ‘Indian Troubles in America’, *Portland Daily Press* (Maine), 29 May 1891, p. 2. *Chronicling America* Digital Archive. <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83016025/1891-05-29/ed-1/seq-2/>

a performance-analysis approach. My attention is instead devoted to how dance performs within and as language and thus within the discursive sphere of mass media, where Christian and colonial visions of ‘pagans’ have shaped settler-colonist perspectives on the meaning of dance itself.⁷ If this is a small history of dance reception in print, conducted primarily through study of newspapers, in it I nonetheless explore reception as a formative historical power.

1889 – 1890s: The Ghost Dance Religion and Ghostly Historical ‘Paganisms’

I begin my exploration of ‘pagan dance’ with an analysis of the so-called Ghost Dance, as its history provides a telling example of how the discourse in US newspapers refigured Indigenous dance practices to fit ideological and religious biases of a settler-colonist readership. Treated as an ‘age-old’ ‘pagan dance’ by newspapers, the Ghost Dance was in fact a new spiritual innovation. While the earliest dancing practices associated with the Ghost Dance were performed by Paiute followers of the elder Wodziwob around 1869, it was Wokova who in 1889 initiated the Ghost Dance Religion that would become a spiritual movement involving different tribal groups (Hittman 1997: 23).⁸ Working with Christian narratives of the second coming, the Ghost Dance in Wokova’s vein beckoned a return to Indigenous ways of life, of lands to Indigenous hands, and of the herds of animals and family members that were slaughtered under settler-colonial rule. By 1890, the Ghost Dance religion was shared among many tribes across the American West. According to the nineteenth-century ethnographer James Mooney, the tribes involved in Ghost Dances included the Paiute, Omaha, Winnebago, allied Sioux tribes, Cheyenne, Arapaho, Shoshoni, Havasupai, and Kiowa, among others (1896: 654).⁹ The dance was practiced in

⁷ I would like to note that it is also necessary for white historians not to subject historical Indigenous ritual dance practices to yet another amateur ethnographic gaze or claim to authority on the spiritual experience of Indigenous dance.

⁸ Wokova was the son of Wodziwob’s follower Tavibo. He was orphaned at age fourteen and then raised by a devout presbyterian family in Mason Valley, Nevada under the name James Wilson (Hittman 1997: 23).

⁹ The true number of tribes engaged in the Ghost Dance religion is undetermined. Mooney, noting its widespread practice, wrote that it ‘found adherents alike in the everglades of Florida and on the plains of the Saskatchewan’ (1896: 675).

a time when US policy toward Indigenous peoples had the goal that — as stated by the first director of the US Bureau of Ethnography James Wesley Powell — ‘everything most sacred to Indian society is yielded up’ to white American domination (Talbot 2006: 12). As many Indigenous peoples had already been displaced to intertribal reservation lands by the time Powell took his position in 1879, by the 1880s US policy gained an additional focus: that of breaking newly forged intertribal cultural and spiritual bonds like the Ghost Dance under the guise of ‘assimilation’.

In late 1882, an imminent policy of the Secretary of Treasury was printed in newspapers across the US stating the interdiction of Indigenous dance, ‘the penalty for which for the first offense is withholding rations for 15 days’ (‘Telegraphic Items’ 1882: 2; ‘Indian Affairs’ 1882: 2). Thus, starvation was the US’s chosen punishment for dance ritual practices. In 1883, this policy was enshrined in the Code of Indian Offenses.¹⁰ It was implemented by the Commissioner of Indian Affairs in response to a letter from Henry Teller describing the ‘great hindrance to the civilization of the Indians, viz, the continuance of the old heathenish dances’ (Teller 1882: 1). This was followed by the General Allotment Act of 1887, which forced the restructuring of traditional, collective ownership of ancestral lands among Indigenous peoples to the US-American model of private ownership divided into plots (Lomawaima and Wilkins 2001: 77).¹¹ Finally, in February 1890, the

US government illegally broke apart the largest interculturally held body of Indigenous lands — the Great Sioux Reservation. During that time, Ghost Dance practices flourished among Sioux peoples.¹²

Among the resulting segments of the Great Sioux Reservation was the Pine Ridge Reservation. In December 1890, forty-five Lakota performers arrived there after their European tour with Buffalo Bill, returning home to learn of recent US military offensives at neighbouring Standing Rock.¹³ They were further informed that the official expectation by the Bureau of Indian Affairs was to dissuade their people from ‘aggression’ — the definition of which formally included Ghost Dances (Maddra 2006: 86; Moses 1996: 104). Within weeks, on 29 December 1890, US troops slaughtered hundreds of Lakota people at Wounded Knee Creek. A few days later, they buried the frozen corpses — 350 bodies, elderly, adult, and children — in a mass grave (Tinker 1993: 7). Despite the foregoing escalation of US military offenses on Sioux lands, newspapers were quick to blame the Lakota Ghost Dance for the Wounded Knee Massacre. An article published in early January 1891 in the *St. Paul Daily Globe*, for example, states:

An Indian known as their ‘medicine man’ rose from his seat and began to cry out, ‘Kill the soldiers, their bullets will not have any effect upon our ghost spirits,’ and at the same time stooping to the ground and picking up handfuls of dirt, throwing it up in the

¹⁰ The Code of Indian Offenses was adopted as law in 1883. Traditional medicine and shamanic practices, polygamous marriage, gifting ceremonies, and consumption of alcohol were also outlawed. It would nonetheless remain in effect as law until the Citizenship Act of 1924 (Bremer 2015: 272). After that, the American Indian Religious Freedom Act of 1978, with amendments in 1994, granted fuller, though incomplete, religious freedoms to Native Americans.

¹¹ As stated by a 2013 Hearing before the Committee of Indian Affairs of the US Senate, ‘between the years of 1887 and 1934, the US Government took more than 90 million acres from the tribes without compensation, nearly 2/3 of all reservation lands, and sold it to settlers and timber and mining interests’ (2013: 24).

¹² White fears of pan-Indigenous revolt centred on the Lakota and their adaptation of the Ghost Dance to millenarianism. For a more in-depth analysis of millenarianism, see Wessinger (2016).

¹³ It is important to note that Lakota leader Sitting Bull had been shot and killed on 15 December 1890 in an arrest attempt at neighbouring Standing Rock Reservation. The loss of Sitting Bull was a traumatic blow to Indigenous organisers. It caused tribal leaders to flee Standing Rock, including the chief Spotted Elk and a group of Indigenous allies, who travelled to the Pine Ridge Reservation in search of sanctuary with friends during the military offensive. Spotted Elk and his group were intercepted by the military on the way and brought to Wounded Knee under military arrest (Maddra 2006: 93). They died in the massacre.

air, and after a short performance of perhaps two minutes, fired his gun in the direction of the military which started the fight. ('The Pine Ridge Agents Tells [sic] of the Last Skirmish' 1891: 1)

This fictionalised account of the events that transpired at the massacre joins ghost dancing with firing at the US military.¹⁴ The 'medicine man' also served as a common 'pagan' stereotype when such practitioners were outlawed in the Code of Indian Offenses, which argued that medicine men worked through conjuring 'to prevent the Indians from abandoning their heathenish rites and customs' (Price 1883: 4). Thus, in the article cited above, the medicine man provided the 'pagan' figure through which dance and rebellion could be associated.

In general, newspaper discussions of Indigenous dance in the last decade of the nineteenth century articulated the Ghost Dance as an intertribal uprising that mixed 'pagan' and Christian faith with violent rebellion. A discussion of a local folklore society published in the *New York Tribune* in 1890, for example, described the Ghost Dance as a belief that the second coming of Christ would eradicate whites. Quoting the anthropologist Franz Boas, the article further proposed that the Ghost Dance was historically comparable to European medieval 'dancing manias' ('Ghost Dance Craze' 1890: 3).¹⁵

14. Articles tying the Ghost Dance to what newspapers called 'The Battle at Wounded Knee' often depended on hazy associations. This is indicated by the caption of a long article in the *Wichita Daily Eagle* the day after the massacre: 'Attempt to Disarm Sitting Bull's Ghost Dancing Followers Leads to a Deadly Struggle' ('Bloodshed' 1890: 1).

15. In *Choreomania*, historian Kéline Gotman argues that Ghost Dances were seen by whites through the prism of ideas about 'dancing mania'. Gotman notes the relevance of news-cycles to her argument, mentioning the 'panicked circulation of news about the "mania"' (2018: 225). Her work was preceded by the Crow Creek Sioux scholar Elizabeth Cook-Lynn, who argued that fabricated descriptions of the Ghost Dance as 'the frenzied acts of a crazed Indian population' behaved as a 'rational for the mass killing' at Wounded Knee both before and after its occurrence in 1890 (2001: 191). In an unfortunate omission, Gotman does not cite Cook-Lynn.

A subsequent 1891 article titled 'Indian Troubles in America', published in the *Portland Daily Press* described the Ghost Dance as follows:

The medicine men, with the crafty old Sitting Bull in the lead, like the false prophets of old, distorted the peaceful character in which their Messiah was at first announced, joined the new belief to their old ghost dance, mixing the Christian sentiment with the pagan practice. The devotees shouted and danced in circles until they swooned and fell, and in their seeming sleep they saw the happy hunting grounds — the country black with buffalo, just as starving white men have feasted in dreams on every dainty dish known to the human palate. The medicine men told them this vision was to be realized, that *the white man and all doubting Indians were to be destroyed*, that the dead warriors were to come back with the buffalo. (1891: 2; italics added)

These and other articles positioned the Ghost Dance between European and US histories, 'pagan' and Christian belief structures, madness and insurrection by explicit comparison to Christian narratives of 'pagan' others. Newspapers like this attempted to justify military aggression against Ghost Dancers by referring to historical wars between Christian Europeans and 'pagan' tribes.¹⁶ The author of the article just cited, for example, brought to mind how 'Kossack tribes of the rivers Don and Ural and the Caucasus [sic] were the terror of all Europe as well as the Turk and Tartar', and importantly added that these tribes 'were all in respects similar to the American Indian' ('Indian Troubles in America' 1891: 2). Such arguments rhetorically turned the Ghost Dance on

16. An early article on the Ghost Dance, for example, addressed white fear of genocidal reversal, and responded by predicting Indigenous death by government-sanctioned starvation tactics ('Local Brevities' 1889: 3). Not only military aggression but also genocide was justified by harkening to visions of historical wars between European Christians and 'pagan' aggressors.

its proverbial head, transforming a dance derived from Indigenous solidarity and Christianity into a dangerous corruption of the Christian faith. In a sense, these articles negatively connotated Ghost Dances with the idea that, like medieval dancing manias and ‘the false prophets of old’, they should be relegated to history.

There remains a smaller quantity of articles from the end of the nineteenth century that explicitly addressed Indigenous rights and contested negative newspaper narratives on the Ghost Dance by dealing with its ‘pagan’ framing. An 1898 piece in the *Indian Advocate* reshaped the transcultural, transhistorical approach structuring the ‘pagan’ Ghost Dance idea into a Christian universalist argument (‘Paradise Lost’ 1898: 58). Printed in a reservation newspaper, the article was unique in that it argued that there should be space for truly Indigenous ritual practices and Indigenous spiritual voices within the diversity of Christian churches.¹⁷ A satirical article by a missionary priest, Reverend Thomas Dixon Jr., took a more bitter tone and lambasted the Wounded Knee Massacre. Countering US claims to the political right to violently suppress Indigenous dance, Dixon further derided the belief expressed in other articles that slaughtering Indigenous peoples could be justified as yet another Christian war against the ‘pagans’ (Dixon 1891: 7). He instead acknowledged white fear of Indigenous memory: ‘We know that we have made a record of brutality and dishonor covering a century’,

¹⁷ Argued within a paper run by a Benedictine Mission on Potawatomi Nation lands in present-day Oklahoma, the article describes the Ghost Dance as a peaceful and meaningful religious practice. It does so while situated in the Catholic tradition, from a position of close proximity to Indigenous groups that practiced the Ghost Dance: ‘The doctrines of the Hindu avatar, the Hebrew messiah, the Christian millennium, and the Hesunanin of the Indian Ghost Dance are essentially the same, and have their origin in a hope and longing common to all humanity’ (‘Paradise Lost’ 1898: 58). As noted by the Chronicling America digital archive, ‘Father D. Ignatius, the second and last of the Prefect Apostolics in Oklahoma, established the *Indian Advocate* in 1888’. See: <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/45043535/>

‘The form taken by the non-Puritan celebrations in England were particularly obnoxious to the Pilgrim Fathers who were determined that there would be in the colonies no ‘wanton Baachanallian Christmasses’ spent in ‘reveling, dicing, carding, masking, mumming, consumed in compotations, in interludes in excess of wine, in made mirth.’ Participants in ‘evermerry Christmasses’ were harshly denounced by early chronicles as ‘hellhounds’ who spent the holidays in ‘amorous mixt, voluptuous, unchristian, that I say not pagan, dancing, to God’s to Christ’s dishonour, religion’s scandal, chastie’s shipwracke and sinne’s advantage.’

Figure 4. Excerpt from ‘Pilgrim Fathers Frowned on Christmas’, *The Sauk Centre Herald* (Minnesota), 26 December 1929, p. 2. Chronicling America Digital Archive. <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn89064489/1929-12-26/ed-1/seq-2/>

Dixon wrote, ‘that is perhaps unparalleled in the history of Christendom, if it can be matched in heathen or pagan annals’ (Dixon 1891: 7). Dixon’s piece critiques the ‘pagan dance’ descriptions of Ghost Dance practices in newspapers and their dependence on the idea that white, ancestrally European Christendom has the right to suppress ‘pagan’ uprisings. He pointed to such justifications as a cover story for white violence. It is within this social and political context that early modern dance by white Americans took up its place and entered into American discourses of ‘pagan dance’ with its various historical and transcultural reveries.

1900 – 1920s: Measuring Pagan Universals against a Puritan Inheritance

In a sense, the ‘double life’ of the term ‘pagan dance’, in its divided application to Indigenous and early modern concert dance, is easiest to witness in formulaic articles written for Christian holidays.¹⁸ Such articles were also widely circulated and reprinted, and therefore served as central sites for discussions on the ‘paganic’ underpinnings of festivity in Christian life. They were also particularly apt to extend their discussion of historical ‘pagans’ and Christians to present-day Indigenous practices. The tone of many such articles further marvelled at the ‘pagan’ leftovers in white American Christianity, proposing that the ‘pagan’ *other* was lurking within the white Christian settler body. They also expressed the idea that ‘modern’ white American culture derived from a Christian past wherein amusement was long conditioned by neighbourly relations with ‘pagans’.¹⁹ This idea was further explored in local articles describing

¹⁸ The Chronicling America Archive shows that the holiday ‘pagan dance’ theme extends at least as far back as 1833 (see ‘May: From the London New Monthly Magazine’ 1833: 2).

the ‘paganic’ Christmas dances of neighbouring Indigenous communities.²⁰ Many of these articles presented a vision of Christian-‘pagan’ intercultural exchange that clashed with anti-Indigenous articles that framed the Ghost Dance as a dangerous corruption of Christianity.

As Figure 4 shows, these articles discussed either the historical appropriation or interdiction of ‘pagan dance’ on Christmas and other Christian holidays. A 1900 holiday narrative by Peter M’Arthur in the *Pascagoula Democrat-Star* of Mississippi, for example, narrated a story of how the Christians adapted Christmas from Roman Saturnalia, while Indigenous peoples in turn ‘paganised’ the Christian holiday. The article thus wove together a transtemporal vision of the likeness of Christian antiquity on the one hand, to the experiences of missionaries with Indigenous ‘heathen’ peoples on the other hand. It also mentioned the Ghost Dance, ten years interdicted by 1900, within its narrative on pagan-Christian holiday relations:

I spent one Christmas at a mission station among the Indians of the northwest, and when they gathered around their Christmas tree they sang the hymns they had been taught and besides chanted weird, monotonous songs of a maddening rhythm that made me fear that the festival would degenerate into a ghost dance or something of the sort. (M’Arthur 1900: 1)²¹

← ¹⁹ A 1903 article reprinted among newspapers in the northeast described that, ‘among early Christians there were many, too, who dwelt in heathen countries, and not a few of this class, having themselves abandoned the superstitions of paganism for the simplicity of the Christian doctrine, introduced heathen festivals among their brethren’ (‘Christmas Feasts’ 1903: 14, ‘Jewish and Pagan Feasts at Christmas Time’ 1903: 3).

²⁰ An article from Washington D.C., for example, describes the Christmastide dance of the Pueblos while proposing that Christian traditions were being muddled by the ‘paganism’ of ‘Red Men’: ‘Through the open door there sound the drumming of the “tombes.” Nearly naked warriors swept into the church in the contortions of the ancient, pagan hunting dance. It was the beginning of the oldest Christmas celebration of the Southwest’ (‘New Mexico Scene of Yule Mix-Up’ 1935: 4).

In the article, the Ghost Dance was used to signal degeneration — a disparaging term to describe how Indigenous belief systems were either debauched or further deteriorating under assimilation policies, or both.²²

In opposition to the association between ‘degeneration’ and Indigenous holiday dances, a 1912 article concerning Ruth St. Denis used the term ‘pagan dance’ to narrate a holiday-themed dance of regeneration. First recounting that Denis ‘dances with pagan abandon’, the article went on to metaphorise her dance as Christian birth and resurrection: ‘she rises again, taking a cerulean tissue, and dances as the resurrected spirit of Christianity, suggesting the birth of the spiritual age, which succeeded the material’ (‘Club Pageant Gay Festival’ 1912: 11). The article unironically proposed Christian non-materialism on a holiday that had over the nineteenth century become the most materialistic in the US.²³ It did so in a time when intertribal ritual practices, such as potlatches and ‘give-away dances’, were widely critiqued and often interdicted for their association with materialism and gifting practices (‘Give-Away’ 1908: 3; Bracken 1997: 167).

In the first decade of the twentieth century, US newspaper discussions of ‘pagan dance’ were heavily populated with language about Indigenous dance practices, while those on the ‘pagan’ foundations of early modern dance rarely extended their discussion to Indigenous dance.²⁴ The double

life of the term ‘pagan dance’ in US newspapers behaved as two discourses running parallel, though dependent on the same basic principles. Not only was early modern dance and Indigenous dance discussed by newspapers as a set of spiritual practices and beliefs comparable to classical antiquity and pre-Christian Europe; they were also both perceived as mixing pagan and Christian ideas. The difference was that Indigenous dancers were critiqued for so doing, whereas early modern dancers were more often lauded. Profile pieces on Maud Allen, Geraldine Farrar, and Lada (Emily Schupp) show that all three dancers situated their dance as ‘pagan’ by describing the ties of their spiritual lives to ‘pagan’ historical narratives (M’Liss 1916: 11; Bindley 1915: 3; ‘Expression Religious Emotions Through The Dance’ 1914: 12). Among them, Lada particularly articulated her adoption of ‘pagan’ ideas as intermixed with her heavily Christian approach to dance, while Allen’s anti-cabaret position resonates strongly with conservative Christian arguments of the day.²⁵

One of the rare articles that did bring Indigenous dance into its turn-of-the-century exploration of early modern dance was a piece titled ‘Something About Dancing: Wonderful Terpsichorean Art of the Ancients is Being Revived’. Published in the *Ellsworth American* of Maine in 1909, the article focused on the national importance of dance, contextualising

← 21. The *Chronicling America* digital archive shows at least one other newspaper printed this article, also on December 21 of 1900 – *The Florida Star* (Titusville, Fla.). It was likely written by the minor poet Peter McArthur.

22. An 1897 article, for example, entices New Yorkers to witness the degeneration of ritual at the ‘Green Corn Dance of the Onondaga’, informing them in a caption: ‘How the Ceremony has Degenerated’ (‘The Green-Corn Dance of the Onondaga Indians’ 1897: 8).

23. The commercialisation of Christmas happened over the course of the nineteenth century in the US. For a history of American cultural and capitalist changes around the holiday, see Nissenbaum 2010.

← 24. The exclusion of Indigenous dance was preceded in books on transcultural and ancient histories of ‘pagan’ dance, including Genevieve Stebbins’s influential *The Delsarte System of Expression* (1902) as well as Arabella E. Moore’s *The Dance: Ancient and Modern* (1900).

25. In the *Evening Public Ledger* (Philadelphia), Allen argued for the moral superiority of her ‘pagan’ Greek dancing and its naturalism over the ‘frightful, demoralizing’ cabaret (M’Liss 1916: 11). Farrar was quoted by the *New York Tribune*: ‘I am a pagan. This I believe: I hold the fire that makes me what I am, as a temporary vase, and when I am too worn to hold it longer the same volt goes on and finds another receptacle’ (Bindley 1915: 3). In *The Sun* (N.Y.), Lada most deeply associated her dancing with Christian sacred ritual practice and also connected it to ‘pagan dance’ by explaining that ‘dancing was a pagan art, long before the days of Christianity’ (‘Expressing Religious Emotions Through the Dance’ 1914: 12).

the antecedents of the ‘new school’ within a history including the ‘dance of the priestesses in the pagan temples, the choric dances of the Greeks’ (1909: 4). By further referencing biblical, Renaissance, American social dance, and notably, Indigenous dance, the article connected the world’s dances as precursors to the ‘new school’ of American dance, constructing a transtemporal and transcultural context through which modern American dance would emerge.²⁶ In other words, it envisioned American concert dance as embodying a universalist ideology of movement.

As the article turned to investigate the history of dance interdiction in the US, it began to formulate a discrepancy. While noting that ‘only in the Puritanic period has it [dance] fallen into abeyance’, the author also mentioned that Indigenous peoples continued to perform dances ‘until the government, in latter years, put a stop to them’ (‘Something About Dancing’ 1909: 4). In part, US Puritans had historically disallowed themselves from dancing ‘where it provoked civil disorder and perceived pagan practice’ (Wagner 1997: 55-56). Against this background, this 1909 article explored the push-back of early modern dance against American anti-dance history. However, the same arguments of puritan interdiction also composed the Code of Indian Offenses, which was still in effect in 1909. As such, ‘Something About Dancing’ treats the interdiction of Indigenous dance in the US as relegated to dance history even while recognising it as presently enforced.

Newspapers show that the early modern dancers Ruth St. Denis and Isadora Duncan likewise framed puritanism as a Christian history of dance suppression relevant to their self-explication as American artists. Both dancers, while not othering themselves from Christianity, signalled their ‘paganism’ as a way to challenge a puritan hold on white

²⁶ Following coincidental similarities (from Indigenous Sun Dance to the Japanese ‘dance to the sun goddess’) the article argued that non-Christian dance offered an opportunity toward deepening the embodied, spiritual experience of US-American Christians.

American women. Quoted in the *Washington Herald* in 1910, Ruth St. Denis described her conflicted ‘puritan-pagan’ familial inheritance: ‘My mother is a New England woman, with a Puritan conscience and a Pagan love of beautiful things. Before I was out of my cradle she had taught me Delsarte’ (‘Ruth St. Denis’ 1910: 7). Her quote demonstrates the importance of Delsartism to the ‘pagan’ ideas informing early modern dance and relates to the puritan-pagan discourse in newspapers and other popular writings of the period.²⁷

Isadora Duncan wrote a strikingly similar account of puritan oppression of women in her family (Duncan 1927: 46). Her self-description as a ‘Puritanical Pagan’ informed the newspaper reception of her dance practice and legacy, including a *New York Times* obituary by John Martin (1928: 3). What remained unclear in newspapers, however, was the degree to which Duncan tied the idea of herself as a ‘Puritanical Pagan’ to white settler confrontations with Indigenous peoples. In her autobiography *My Life* (1927), Duncan in part described her puritan inheritance through stories told to her by her pioneer grandparents of ‘battling with hordes of hostile Indians’ (Duncan 1927: 98). She believed that, even though her Puritan forebears had been justly taming the ‘wild men, the Indians’ of America, they unfortunately had tamed themselves as well (Duncan 1927: 46). Nonetheless, as Kimerer

²⁷ ‘Puritan-pagan’ popular writings of the period include an 1891 work of fiction, *A Puritan Pagan*, written under the pen name Julien Gordon (Julie Grinnell Cruger). The work was published in segments weekly in newspapers across the country. A 1902 article in *The New York Times* provides another example from newspapers. It quotes William Roscoe Thayer on ‘the anti-pagan legacy bequeathed by Puritanism’ inhibiting American understanding of classical antiquity (‘Pagans Through Puritan Eyes’ 1902: 30). The columnist Marian Cox framed the pagan-puritan concept in nationalist terms within *The New York Times*, stating that Americans are ‘traditional Puritans’ and ‘the inheritors of the Roman genius for law and order’ (1919: 10). The ‘paganism’ of antiquity, which Cox viewed in likeness to modern America, proposed the ‘spell of license’ that for Cox was culturally meaningful to white American life.

LaMothe points out in *Nietzsche's Dancers*, Duncan believed that Puritanism generated the adventurousness and mysticism of American artists like herself (2006: 112). She allied her work with Walt Whitman's poetry, writing that Whitman remained Puritan even as he was 'proclaiming of the joys of the body' (Duncan 1927: 98). Recounting that Whitman's poem *I Hear America Singing* had inspired her to make a dance 'that would express America', Duncan wrote:

It has often made me smile — but somewhat ironically — when people have called my dancing Greek, for I myself count its origin in the stories which my Irish grandmother told us of crossing the plains with grandfather in '49 in a covered wagon — she eighteen, he twenty-one — and how her child was born in such a wagon during a famous battle with the Redskins; and how, when the Indians were finally defeated, my grandfather put his head in at the door of the wagon, which a smoking gun still in his hand, to greet his new-born child. (Duncan 1927: 340)

In this troubling paragraph, Duncan described the birth of her dance practice as akin to the birth of her parent, and she did so within a larger passage that positioned her dance about the birth of the nation as similar to a child born while Indigenous people are killed. In this sense, Duncan's autobiography habitually framed Indigenous peoples as justly vanquished by the birth of America. Only one exception to this questionable alignment can be found in *My Life*. Describing herself standing at the Temple of Athena in Greece, Duncan wrote: 'We could not have the feeling of the ancient Greeks. I was after all, but a Scotch-Irish-American. Perhaps through some affinity nearer allied to the Red Indian than to the Greeks' (1927: 149). Here her famous claim to a Greek 'paganness' may be seen to shift toward a vague recognition of her settler-colonial upbringing, though only for a moment.

1920s – 1930s: The 'Pagan' Spectacle and the Touristic Gaze of Modernist Dance

During the rise of early modern dance, Indigenous dance practices were increasingly subjected to white tourism, especially the Pueblo peoples of the Southwest (Stausberg 2011: 183).²⁸ A 1903 article from the *Daily Silver State* of Nevada emphasised the importance of railroad transit to 'Indian' tourism in the American Southwest with the caption: 'Ready for Snake Dances: Railroad Prepared to Carry People to Arizona' (1903: 1; Fig. 5). Many articles also reported on crowd sizes.²⁹ In 1925, for example, the front page of the *Winslow Mail* of Navajo County forecasted a massive crowd at the Hopi Snake Dance, noting that 'last year more than 3,000 persons witnessed the snake dance, and it is expected that many more will this year make the trip into the Painted Desert' ('Hopi Snake Dance is set for August 19 this Year' 1925: 1). Modern dancer Ted Shawn was among the tourists who visited the Pueblos that year. Previously, Shawn had already engaged with the tourism of the American Southwest as a dancer. Not only was he hired as a performer

²⁸. Pueblo peoples were not legally defined by the US government as 'Indian' until 1913. After that time, they struggled against US policy against their religious practices. As Michele Suina writes, 'In the 1920s, the Bureau of Indian Affairs Commissioner Charles H. Burke used propaganda to attack Pueblo religion to support the Religious Crimes Code and to turn public opinion against the Pueblo Indians' (2017: 89).

²⁹. At the turn of the century, the *Daily Ardmoreite of Oklahoma* informed its readers of the 'Moki Snake Dance', mentioning that 'in 1900 it was witnessed by more than a hundred tourists' ('Moki Snake Dance' 1901: 3). A 1914 *Bisbee Daily Review*, announces, 'Pagan Ceremony to Invoke Rain is Planned for This Week', (1914: 5). This eruption of touristic interest in Indigenous practices was preceded by much public spectatorship already in the nineteenth century, especially war dances (Pisani 2008: 90). See McNenly 2015.

READY FOR SNAKE DANCES

Railroads Prepared To Carry People to Arizona

Railroads in many parts of the west are already making preparations for the Moki snake dance. This dramatic pagan ceremony of the Pueblo Indians will occur at Tusaya, Ariz., in September and is already attracting a great deal of attention as it is a rare event, and until recent years whites were not allowed to witness it.

Figure 5. Excerpt from 'Ready for Snake Dances', *Daily Silver State* (Nevada), 1 September 1903. *Chronicling America Digital Archive*.
<https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn86076224/1903-09-01/ed-1/seq-1/>

NEW MEXICO SCENE OF YULE MIX-UP

Dances of Red Men, Spanish Rites and Anglo-Saxon Gaiety to Mark Celebration.

By the Associated Press.

SANTA FE, N. Mex., December 25.—
It's a mixed-up Christmas here in
New Mexico.

Pagan dances of the Red Men ceremonies of old Spain traditionally observed by descendants of proud Spanish Conquistadors—and the gaiety of the Anglo-Saxon Yuletide, all are blended when the State celebrates this holiday.

Figure 6. Excerpt from 'New Mexico Scene of Yuletide Mix-Up', *Evening Star* (Washington D.C.), 25 December 1935, p. A4. *Chronicling America Digital Archive*.
<https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83045462/1935-12-25/ed-1/seq-4/>

of the Santa Fe Railway in 1914, but in 1923 he also choreographed *The Feather of the Dawn*, a large-scale dance work derivative of Hopi rituals (Shawn 1926: 19; Sherman 1989: 368). When Shawn returned to New Mexico to witness Pueblo Indigenous dances in 1925, he visited in January and attended a Winter Solstice dance at Isleta (Adams 2012: para. 1 of 11). He afterward choreographed his *Zuni Ghost Dance* (1931) drawing from his experience (Sherman 1989: 369-376).

Shawn did not align his artistic identity with ‘paganness’, even while partnering with Ruth St. Denis and co-directing their jointly founded Denishawn Dance Company and School. Whereas Ruth St. Denis — as discussed previously — explicitly addressed how her ‘puritan-pagan’ background informed her artistic practice, Ted Shawn instead worked with Christian historical formulas of ‘pagan dance’ without overtly using the term ‘pagan’. Drawing from the common colonial narrative of ‘pagans’ as developmentally inferior to Christianity, Shawn proposed that ‘the first magic use of dance’ within ‘the superstitions of pre-religion’ was historically supplanted by ‘the use of dance in the liturgy of the religions’ (Sherman 1989: 366).³⁰

In her 2015 book *Indigenous Intellectuals*, historian Kiara Vigil critically discusses white spectatorial events that ‘called upon’ Indigenous peoples ‘to perform Indianness’ and project ‘a past as largely imagined by white audiences’ (2015: 3). Many such spectacles emerged in contexts of white tourism and produced what historian Amy Corbin terms ‘outsider authority’, a term which describes self-appointed white authority on Indigenous cultures oftentimes emergent from their spectatorship of Indigenous communities (2013: 196). Newspapers enticed white viewership by wielding the term ‘pagan dance’. Vigil and Corbin explain

that ‘pagan dance’ came to signify a performed ‘Indianness’ that was rendered understandable to white audiences through references to biblical narratives and settler-colonial histories of Christians and pagans. According to Denishawn dancer Jane Sherman, Shawn would have been well aware of the ‘pagan dance’ language used to describe Indigenous dance spectacles before white audiences (Sherman 1989: 368). From the time he was growing up in Kansas City, variations on articles describing Pueblo dance to tourists nationwide circulated through his hometown newspapers. These articles created white familiarity with the tribes and dances that Shawn would later incorporate into his modern dance works.

Two articles from Shawn’s hometown exemplify how newspaper writings conditioned white touristic interest in Pueblo dance while he was growing up. In 1898, for example, the *Kansas City Journal* published a human-interest piece titled ‘The Zuni and His Dance’ (1898: 15). Shawn would premier his *Zuni Ghost Dance* in 1931. An 1899 article on Pueblo dance titled ‘Indian Dancers Fear Camera’ described the Eagle Dance to Kansas City residents (1899: 6). Shawn would perform his version of this dance in 1923. To investigate newspaper writings on Indigenous dance from the places where Shawn grew into adulthood is to produce a body of records that read in description somewhat like Shawn’s own works. It is impossible to reconstruct what he read, but it is likely that he was well aware of the discourse on Pueblo dances that was circulating through newspapers. In Shawn’s lifetime, Pueblos also closed off their ritual activities to white spectatorship due, in part, to the heavy strain of tourism (Stausberg 2011: 183). The above article of 1899 prefigured Shawn’s approach to the Pueblo interdiction of photography. In *The American Ballet* (1926), Shawn wrote that no white dancer ‘would be able to reproduce’ the Pueblo dances he had seen (1926: 18). Scolieri, however, argues that Shawn articulated Pueblo dance as non-reproducible in order to camouflage that he ‘actively sought to capitalize on the [photography] ban by providing a live-action reenactment’

³⁰. Quoted by Sherman from an undated ‘Credo’ pamphlet written by Shawn. The same pamphlet is also cited in Scolieri’s recent biography of Shawn (2020: 485).

(2020: 24).³¹ Shawn could also capitalise on the attention to Indigenous performances in US newspapers that over his lifetime had produced a white American public versed in standard, mass-mediated views of Indigenous dance, and widely interested in spectatorial opportunities.

Shawn used his outsider authority on performed 'Indianness' in pursuit of defining a new American art of concert dance.³² Interestingly, a newspaper article from 1924 highlights that, in the public eye, the Americanism of the Denishawn Company was connected to their work with Indigenous themes:

Ruth St. Denis and Ted Shawn are not only American born, but have evolved a school of dance which is American and not European in any sense. Every dancer in the company is American born. And this company has pioneered in dealing with subjects the inspiration for which was found upon this continent. Ted Shawn has produced an Aztec ballet 'Xochitl' [...] and a Hopi Indian ballet 'Feather of the Dawn'. ('Ruth St. Denis and Ted Shawn Will Come to Bismarck with Big Ballet' 1924: 3)

Working with the Indigenous-historical Aztecs with the idea that they were the ancestors of Pueblo peoples, Shawn's ballets envisioned Indigenous antiquity and expressed a transtemporal vision common to 'pagan dance' themes.³³ If Shawn's concert dance was in part publicly

legitimised as American because it transformed Indigenous rituals from the so-called 'New World' into ballets, Shawn further worked to legitimise his art through eugenicist ideas. As dance scholar Paul Scolieri describes it in his recent biography, Shawn 'reasoned that his idealized white male body had the capacity to perfect the non-European, non-Christian dances he performed' (2020: 25). Consequently, neither Shawn's vision of an American high-art dance nor his approach to Indigenous dance can be isolated from his supremacist ideas.³⁴

Working toward an American dance ideal, Shawn created 'Indian dances' that derived from a mix of Pueblo and Indigenous-historical sources. One of these mixtures, *Zuni Ghost Dance*, appears in newspapers reporting on Shawn's tour of 1931. The work included Shawn dressed in a rendition of the traditional headdress that women wore in the *Tablita* or *corn dance*. As the Denishawn dancer Jane Sherman describes it, *Zuni Ghost Dance* 'was a distillation of the exhausting, trancelike dances that were an integral part of the Ghost Dance religion' (1989: 376). Yet, the Southwestern Zuni were never involved in the *Ghost Dance*. Shawn drew the title from the musical score *Ghost Dance of the Zunis* by the professor and composer Carlos Troyer. Newspapers show that Troyer billed his Indianist music as true transmissions of Indigenous song to western staff notation ('Weird Melodies of a Strange New Mexican People' 1896: 18).³⁵ Such public claims to authenticity were common among the composers Shawn chose for his 'Indian dances'.³⁶ However,

³¹. Scolieri further attributes Shawn's statement to the Pueblo interdiction of photography, and that he 'meant to circumvent a possible backlash for his clear violation of the spirit of prohibition' of reproductions (2020: 182).

³². Shawn was by no means the first dancer to rely on outsider authority among white men. The Grand Order of the Iroquois, for example, was a group of non-Indian hobbyists who also performed Indigenous rituals. They treated their dancing of these rituals as a scholarly, research-oriented activity, inviting Indigenous lectures and enthusiastically attempting to undertake ethnographic studies of Indigenous groups (Deloria 1998: 136).

← ³³. For further analysis of Shawn's Aztec ballets and their comparability to his more Orientalist work, see Snow 2019.

³⁴. It is striking that, apparently due to his appropriations, a white-run newspaper circulated on the White Earth Reservation mistook Shawn for an Indigenous man: 'Ted Shawn is about the only male Indian dancer now on the stage, and his pay very near equals a movie star's salary'. The piece suggested 'character dancing' like that of Shawn as a viable career option for local Ojibwe tribal members ('Many Avenues of Opportunity for the Indian 1925: 1).

Conclusion: The Language of 'Pagan Dance'

Troyer's description of the Zuni 'Ghost Dance' instrumentation in a text accompanying his score did not match reality: whereas he cited the use of trumpets and gongs, these instruments, known to Troyer from their use in European classical music, were not used in any ceremony among Zuni or other Pueblo groups. Instead, the firebrands, bonfires, and procession mentioned in Troyer's text rather seem to refer to the well-known Shalako. Moreover, when Troyer described the Ghost Dance as 'calling into view and into presence the spirits of the departed', he too was distinctly drawing upon popular white accounts of the intertribal Ghost Dance Religion of 1889-1890, which I described in the first section of this article (Troyer 1904: 79).

Shawn's *Zuni Ghost Dance* ultimately reinforced Troyer's confused provenance of the dance. This confusion was continued through the writings of Denishawn dancer Jane Sherman. Shawn's own confused *Zuni Ghost Dance* not only reflected the universalist approaches of early modern dancers in their mining of 'pagan' danced spiritual forms, but reflected, as well, the participation of white artists in a wider US settler-colonial project. Fifty years of oppression since Wounded Knee — from massacre, to religious suppression, to assimilation policies, to capitalisation from Indigenous ritual through tourism — had been carried out through the self-claimed authority of white, Christian-American nationalism widely espoused in newspapers. That nationalism was also what Shawn hoped to uplift with dance art.

← 35. The same article recounts that, when Troyer 'declared that he could adapt them [Zuni melodies] to our system of music', the archaeologist Frank Cushing responded that it would be impossible. 'Nonetheless', continues the article, 'the musician persevered, and succeeded in transcribing and harmonizing' Zuni songs ('Weird Melodies of a Strange New Mexican People 1896: 18).

← 36. These include John Philip Sousa and Charles Wakefield Cadman. As *The Evening Star* put it, in the *Feather of the Dawn*, 'Cadman's authentically correct Indian music echoed the action of the dances' ('Amusements' 1923: 27).

In this article, I have endeavoured to show that American newspaper writings that termed Indigenous dance as 'pagan' may be seen to have contributed to the conditioning of the public reception of concert dance as 'pagan'. I turned to archives of historical newspapers, investigating how their white-centric settler-colonial language shaped the wider reception of dance in the US. I further investigated how mass-media use of the Christian historical connotations of 'pagan dance' built a vocabulary of dance's social, political, and spiritual meaning. The vocabulary of 'pagan dance' in newspapers was relatively consistent, but its consequences were contradictory: the language of 'pagan dance' facilitated white justification of the interdiction, belittlement, and otherisation of Indigenous dances even while it lent spiritual value and historical depth to the rise of modern dance.

In *How to Do Things with Words* (1955), J.L. Austin wrote of contractual performative utterances and famously articulated that performative statements are ‘not to *describe* my doing [...] it is to do it’ (1955: 6). Certainly, ‘pagan dance’ was in that sense performative: as a moniker, ‘pagan dance’ spurred specific vocabularies in newspaper writings that had the real-life effect of criminalising Indigenous dance in the US. However, Austin’s theory of language did not extend to a settler-colonial context wherein even contractual language, as inflicted by a colonial government, has continually subjected Indigenous peoples to unequal treatment and has failed to respect or address Indigenous epistemologies. The performativity of language, in other words, always demands the question: *whose language?* Turn-of-the-century newspapers meanwhile reflect the historical malleability of the colonial vocabularies of ‘pagan dance’ and show the performativity of language as formulated to inequitably apply to coloniser and colonised.

Even through anti-Indigenous language, historical newspapers speak of a US dance history shaped by Indigenous presence. Newspapers critiqued, ruminated, disparaged, and at times celebrated Indigenous dance while weaving Indigenous practices into narratives that envisioned the ‘pagan’ foundations of white American culture itself. Indigenous dance had already been vastly subjected to popular ‘pagan dance’ discourse when early modern dancers began to claim vocabularies of ‘pagan dance’ to situate their works in the American context. American dance history has, due to a long track record of extracting concert dancers of interest from social landscapes, treated the strong presence of Indigenous dance in the US as overwhelmingly irrelevant. As Jacqueline Shea Murphy wrote, ‘perhaps this absence itself speaks volumes’, arguing that ‘the recognition of Indian dance’s absence from modern dance history... [is] central to the story modern dance has told’ (2007: 147). I take a slightly more critical perspective, as absence is never a way of telling.

Through this small history of dance and language, I therefore propose that the privileged status of white American modern dance depends in part upon a long-term discursive double standard. The language of ‘pagan dance’ has been used to suppress Indigenous dance forms while it also provided cultural capital to early modern dancers. This double-standard has thus enabled a particular form of misappropriation — not only of actual dances or rituals, but also of historical value. Early modern dancers took up the ‘pagan dance’ moniker used in their own time against Indigenous dance, claimed through it a history of Christian interdiction and suppression as their specific burden, and envisioned themselves as pioneering proponents of the dance. Here, in this time, their pursuits remain an inheritance and a navigational device. Meanwhile, the duplicitous languages of ‘pagan dance’ continue to circulate, manifesting as a colonial inheritance and centring Christian historical narratives of dance and spiritual value.

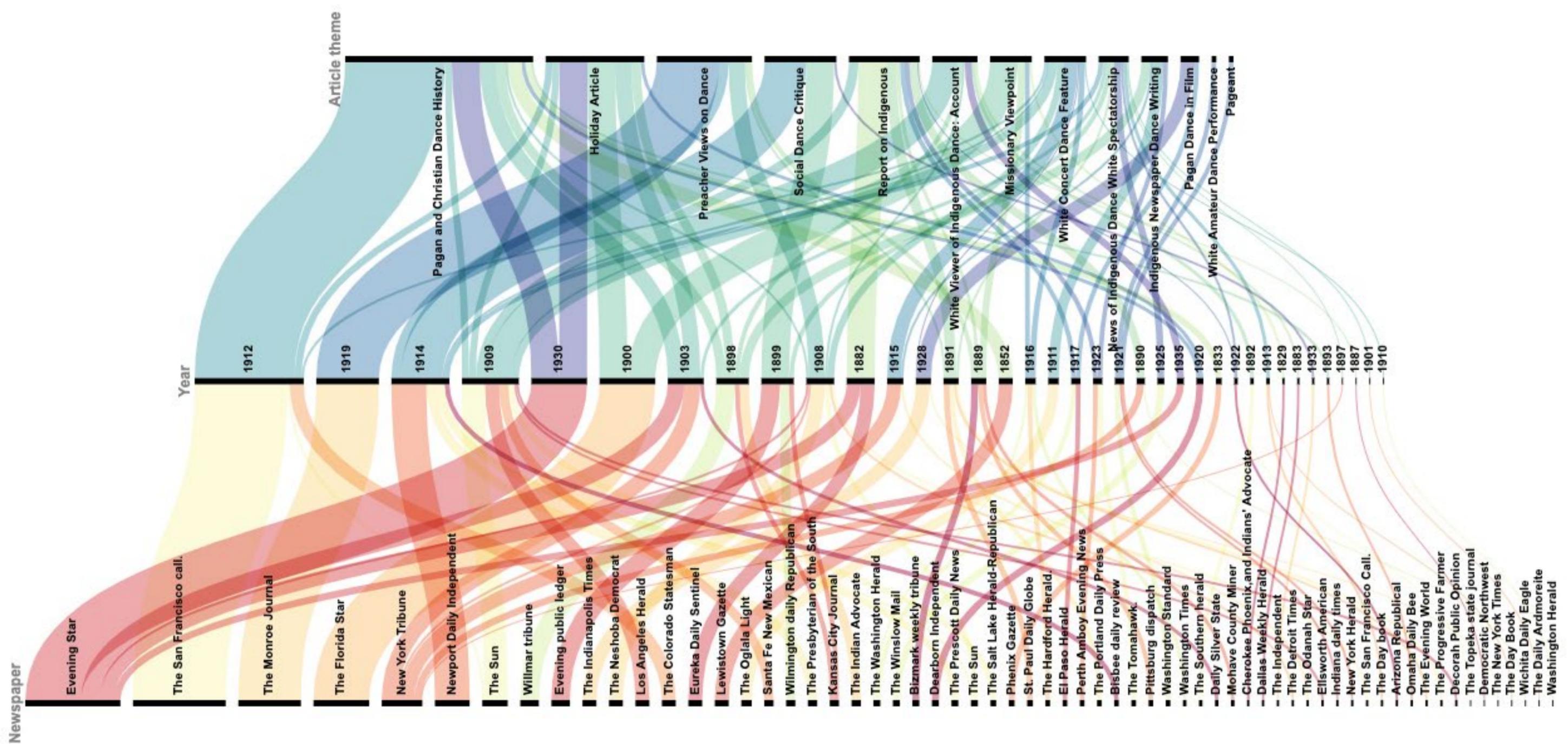


Figure 8: Alluvial Graph of 'pagan dance' articles by newspaper, year, and theme. This graph provides a more detailed look at what newspapers were consulted from the digital archive, from what years, as well as which 'pagan dance' article themes/types. The aim of this research has been to be as exhaustive as possible and the dataset includes all 'pagan dance' articles discovered in the archive that address 'pagan dance' in the time frame studied. To explore the visualisation in depth, see: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.5512409> Developed in collaboration with Jan-Erik Stange and Franziska Diehr by use of Open Refine and RawGraphs.

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Beyond Language

Knowing with Abiota
in Contemporary Installation Art

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Summary

This article scrutinises contemporary installation art that foregrounds non-linguistic ways of knowing with abiotic entities. The main focus is put on affective modes of sense-making which stage non-anthropocentric relationalities between humans and nonhumans in order to examine how those modes relate to more articulate forms of knowing. The article adopts a perspective of situated knowing (Bal and Chaberski 2020) either focusing on the author's own or other's spectatorial experiences. Specifically, three artistic projects mobilising different abiota are discussed to elucidate their implications with respect to affective and discursive knowing as well as the different aspects of abiotic ways of being that they account for.

Streszczenie

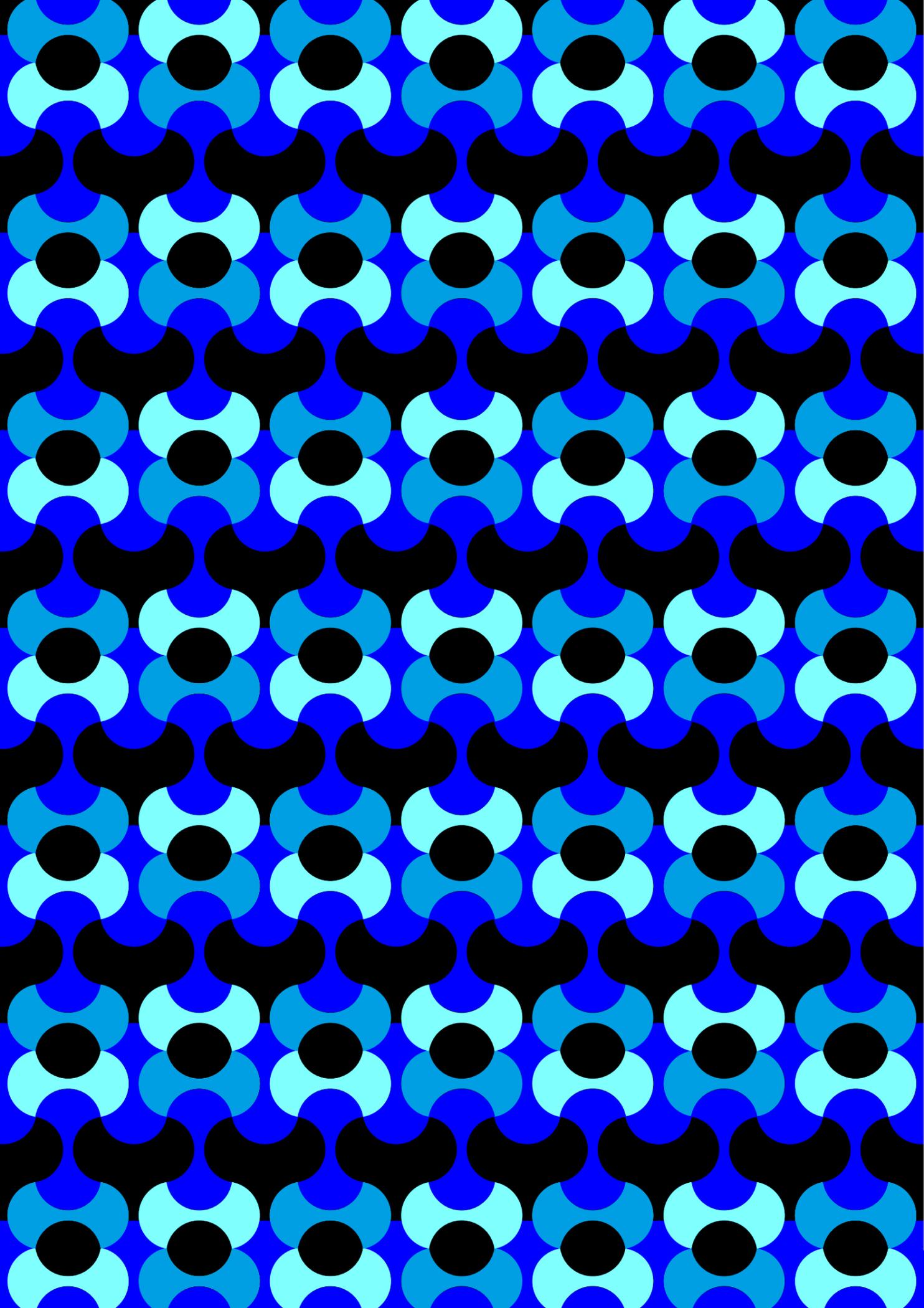
Celem niniejszego artykułu jest analiza najnowszych instalacji artystycznych, które wytwarzają pozajęzykowe sposoby poznania w relacji z abiotycznymi nie-ludźmi. Chodzi przede wszystkim o strategie afektywne, które stwarzają warunki do nawiązania się różnego typu interakcje między ludźmi i nie-ludźmi i wchodzi w rozmaite relacje z artykułowanymi formami poznania. Artykuł wykorzystuje perspektywę usytuowanego wytwarzania wiedzy (Bal, Chaberski), skupiając uwagę bądź to na własnych doświadczeniach odbiorczych autora bądź innych zapisach doświadczeń. W szczególności omówiono trzy projekty artystyczne angażujące istnienia abiotyczne, by pokazać różne aspekty ich sprawczości oraz relacje między afektywnym i dyskursywnym poznaniem.

KEYWORDS

Nonhumans, abiota, installation art, affect

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE

Nieludzie, abiotyczny, sztuki performatywne, afekt



Redefining Knowledge-Making at the Time of the Anthropocene

Let me begin with an example from *Into Eternity* (2010), a documentary by the Danish director Michael Madsen. The documentary recounts the story of Onkalo, a nuclear waste repository currently under construction in the municipality of Eurajoki on the west coast of Finland. Planned to be completed in the early 2100s, the repository is supposed to become the safest means for radioactive waste storage ever created. It comprises a network of tunnels drilled 700 metres into the local granite bedrock where conditions are more predictable than, for instance, in water-based storage pools and other overground nuclear repositories. Purpose-built copper capsules where the radioactive material will be held are designed to be self-contained so that Onkalo can be forgotten and persist without human maintenance at least for the next 100,000 years. This more-than-human timescale, delineated by the half-life of radioactive cesium and strontium isotopes, escapes human imagination and complicates how generations to come may know about the radioactive waste. This problem is expressed by the designers of Onkalo that Madsen interviews in *Into Eternity*. During the planning stage of the project, it occurred to the designers that warning signs and full documentation of the project, including multidisciplinary studies to have informed the design, to be

placed under and over the ground, may not be sufficient. Those who will need to be warned against the dangers of the deposit most probably will not speak any known language or use symbols we now claim to be universal. In fact, they might not even be human. In evolutionary terms, the planned duration of Onkalo is enough for a new form of hominids to emerge. The engineers are thus experimenting with ways of marking the site on the ground beyond language. One of the scenarios seriously under consideration is a landscape of thorns, originally designed by the architect Michael Brill and artist Safdar Abidi in 1999 for a Waste Isolation Pilot Plant in the United States but which was never realised. The forest of thorns made of concrete, 15 metres high each, is not supposed to *inform* about the nuclear waste and its potential consequences. As the engineers in Madsen's documentary contend, the landscape aims to evoke both the great scale of the project and the ensuing sense of menace and bodily harm. They hope that the 'forest' might deter those in the future who might not use any known human language-based symbolic systems from encroaching on the radioactive site.

The dilemma faced by the designers of Onkalo puts into sharp relief a larger problem of knowing in the time of the Anthropocene, the new epoch in Earth's history in which human activity has become the dominant *geological* and *meteorological* force on the planet (Crutzen and Stoermer 2000). Nuclear waste epitomises the long-lasting detrimental impact of humans on the environment. The radioactive isotopes it contains — which in minuscule doses permeate virtually all bodies on the Earth, both human and nonhuman (Caulfield 1989) — also show that in this new epoch, human activity and nonhuman ways of being are deeply entangled. In this respect, the Anthropocene subverts the modern binary opposition of culture, defined as the sole activity of humans, and nature, understood as the domain of inert matter independent from the human. Moreover, it questions the modern Western episteme predicated upon this binary whereby knowing, especially in

the sciences, is necessarily about a (human) subject gaining knowledge about a (nonhuman) object. This epistemic paradigm privileges language-based modes of sense-making to objectively describe the world from a detached distance. The Anthropocene, which foregrounds deep entanglements between the human and the nonhuman, entails a more relational approach to knowing, since knowledge always emerges from dynamic more-than-human assemblages. In this essay, I will therefore deliberately use the term 'knowing with' to suggest that knowing is virtually impossible outside close, often intimate relations between humans and nonhumans. Yet, as the need to build an evocative landscape of thorns at Onkalo alongside traditional forms of knowledge exemplifies, such an approach also requires language-based modes of knowledge-making to be supplemented by affective ways of knowing in order to account for nonhuman agency at the time of the Anthropocene. This, in turn, necessitates a critical look at existing attempts to theorise knowing with nonhumans in the new epoch.

In his article *Agency at the Time of the Anthropocene*, Bruno Latour (2015) posits a specific way of knowing with nonhumans by re-cycling the term 'performance' he introduced in his earlier work. In a collection of essays called *Pandora's Hope* (1999), Latour defined performance as actions of humans and nonhumans in laboratory experiments. In this context, the term served as a critical tool against essentialism in science studies. According to Latour, performance is not a mere outcome of what happens in the laboratory, but rather always depends upon the actions of the experimenter who, drawing on their sensory experiences and previous knowledge, registers only certain performances of an actant and names them accordingly. Thus, the attributes of an actant may change dramatically, depending on the particular experimental strategies an experimenter employs. In *Agency at the Time of the Anthropocene*, Latour expands his use of the term beyond the laboratory, arguing that artists too can register and account for performances of human

and nonhuman actants. Unlike scientists, however, artists aim less to establish objective matters of fact than to explore ‘contradictory morphisms’ (Latour 2015: 13) whereby humans and nonhumans constantly shape one another, undermining predefined notions of the nature of the world, its relations, and dominant paradigms of knowledge. Thus, Latour concludes that performances of the arts become an important epistemic tool for capturing dynamic environmental processes within the Anthropocene and their multiple effects that often escape objectivising scientific discourses and practices. In this sense, artistic performances become a perfect site for knowing with nonhumans.

However, when writing about performances of the arts, Latour focuses solely on literature, both fiction and nonfiction. His choice of a language-based medium not only neglects affective modes of knowing, crucial for the designers of Onkalo, but also impedes registering the very agency of entities such as radiation. Analysing examples of literature, Latour still understands nonhuman agency in terms of an active subject (be it human or nonhuman) actively doing something. Although such language-based discourses might well capture performances of biota, mostly animals and plants, which are easily materialised as individual entities, they can hardly account for the agency of abiota. Abiotic entities, such as radiation, rocks, fogs, and ice are those that do not conform to the biological carbon-based definition of life which entails solely biochemical organic processes such as metabolism allowing for growth and reproduction. Moreover, abiota are predominantly what eco-philosopher Timothy Morton terms ‘hyperobjects’, which he defines as ‘things that are massively distributed in time and space relative to humans’ (2011: 1). As they do not materialise in one particular space and time, their agency escapes traditional Western epistemologies that still regard them as inert matter. As contemporary new materialist theorists suggest, this way of thinking about abiota only maintains discourses and practices of settler colonialism. Not only does

such thinking contribute to the unrestrained exploitation of the planet’s resources and the ensuing dispossession of indigenous peoples who often consider the abiota as members of their collectives (Povinelli 2016), it also, as cultural geographer Kathryn Yusoff contends (2018: 66-67), fosters dehumanising forms of subjection of black bodies that have been traditionally understood as inert matter. Thus acknowledging abiotic agency may have great socio-political and ethical implications. In order to notice them, however, literature and other language-based forms of knowing like those advanced by Latour may not be sufficient. Thus I would argue that affective ways of knowing are in order.

Affective Ways of Knowing

This article aims to foreground affective ways of knowing with nonhumans in the Anthropocene and think productively through some entailing paradoxes. In this new epoch, however, and as suggested by the landscape of thorns, affect cannot be merely understood as human emotions or conventional classifications of experiences that make sense of what is felt in a given moment. Following the Canadian philosopher Brian Massumi (1995), I understand affect as a nonmental, unintentional, and impersonal bodily force which operates between human and nonhuman bodies. It flaunts the traditional essentialist concept of the human body as a self-contained entity separated from nonhumans. In his essay *The Autonomy of Affect*, Massumi claims that ‘the body is radically open’ (1995: 90). In other words, a body — not only that of a human being — becomes a site of incessant more-than-human impulses and potentialities. These impulses and potentialities are all possible states that a body can be in within a given moment, only one of which is actualised. Affect, then, is an indeterminate intensity that a body —

again in the broad sense of the term — acquires in contact with other human and nonhuman bodies. This contact, however, is not limited to proximity engendered by touch. Massumi compares affect to sea waves rippling across swathes of ocean, inducing movement in bodies across large distances. As such, affect undermines the traditional binaries of cause and effect, action and reaction, activity and passivity. As affect is a vibratory force proceeding in all directions, its effects may be attributed only retroactively, which challenges the traditional order of linear causality. Moreover, even though affect is filled with resonating motion, it is not active in the sense that it can be directed to any practical ends. As Massumi concludes drawing on Spinoza's *Ethics*, the affective potential of a body consists in its capacity to affect and to be affected. From this perspective, affective ways of knowing with abiota may become an apt way of describing this particular mode of knowledge and to account for the agency of abiota that escapes the active/passive binary.

It is important to stress that foregrounding the role of affect in knowing with abiota at the time of the Anthropocene does not mean that language-based and affective ways of knowing are mutually exclusive. For Massumi, language and affect simply belong to different, yet resonating levels of reality (1995: 86). Sometimes they amplify, sometimes they dampen one another. The present article is also caught up in this dynamic as it seeks affective ways of knowing with nonhumans whilst simultaneously facing the necessity to convey them through language. This paradoxical situation only confirms Donna Haraway's famous dictum that 'it matters what matters we use to think other matters with' (2016: 12). Writing about ways of knowing, indeed, puts great responsibility on the scholar whose choice of metaphors, terms, ways of writing, and even examples actively co-constitutes what they address. Thus, in contrast to Latour, I will not focus on literature but on contemporary installation art, precisely because it often fuses language-based and affective ways of knowing to subvert traditional Western epistemologies.

Various critical Anthropocene scholars (Davis and Turpin 2015; Zylinska 2018) suggest that contemporary installation art has become a potent site for gauging affective ways of knowing with nonhumans. Telling examples can be found in the diverse projects initiated by artists, technoscientists, and designers, generally gathered under the unsatisfactory umbrella term 'installation art' (Rebentisch 2012). The initiators of such projects not only fuse various materials, practices, and discourses from the arts and technosciences in order to mobilise flows between nature, culture, and technology, they also disrupt modern ways of thinking and being-in-the-world which arbitrarily separate these latter domains. As the Turkish eco-critic Serpil Opperman suggests, 'installations generate hope for a more emotional relationship with the planet, creating strong sensory and affective experiences' (2018: 341). Installations indeed aim less at creating meanings to be assigned to particular phenomena than to staging human experiences as assemblages of the sensory, the intellectual, and the affective in order to unsettle modern ways of thinking about abiota as inert matter. Thus, unlike Latour's literary authors, contemporary installation artists may better grasp the performances of nonhumans. As more and more artistic projects engage with various abiota in the context of the Anthropocene, looking into contemporary installation art may open up new ways of knowing with abiotic nonhumans, alternative both to traditional Western epistemologies and new materialist and critical Anthropocene studies.

By scrutinising some of the ways in which contemporary artists are positing affective modes of knowing with abiota, this article extends my recent research on 'situated knowing' (Bal and Chaberski 2020). This concept works transversally with Donna Haraway's 'situated knowledges' (1988), which in the wake of the 1990s science wars offered a feminist critique of the paradigm of scientific objectivity predicated on the dominance of the patriarchal male gaze disguised as the scientific view from nowhere. Instead, Haraway not only foregrounded the cultural situatedness of scholars (class, race, gender) as a key factor in knowledge-making,

but also posited this situatedness as the foundation of a new epistemic paradigm in which ‘objective’ knowledge emerges from different, often conflicting situated knowledges. However, while questioning the objectivity of knowledge, Haraway left the very ontology of knowledge intact. For her concept is still about ‘the know-what’ of knowledge-making — that is the concrete objects of knowledge produced by scholars. Instead, situated knowing draws on Latour’s understanding of performance as an epistemic tool to challenge ‘the know-how’ of knowing — that is the protocols and situations where knowledge is made that are inherently unstable, emergent, and in constant flux. In this context, situated knowing is about scholars ‘register[ing] sensory, cognitive and affective processes generated by art, in order to account for dynamic changes in processes of knowing’ (Bal and Chaberski 2020: 6). In other words, situated knowing is less about producing knowledge than about constantly unsettling and renegotiating hitherto accepted categories in the Western sciences and humanities, such as agency, identity, and relationality. This might be an especially potent methodology to grasp the dynamic Anthropocenic landscapes of ever-shifting human-and-non-human assemblages often staged by contemporary installation art.

In line with situated knowing, the point of departure for my following analyses is always a situated experience of visiting the installations, be it myself or other visitors. This enables me to instantly foreground the affects they generate and register their possible effects by attending to my lived/mediated experiences. Moreover, it puts into spotlight the dynamic relations between affective ways of knowing and more traditional language-driven modes of knowing as they are posited by the installations. I will be guided by three actants mobilised by three installations in which articulate knowledge is crucial for gauging affective ways of knowing. Probing this dynamic will show how affective knowing incites language-driven ways of knowing whilst linguistic knowledge is enlivened by affect and inflected with deep ethical and ecological meanings.

In 2017, I visited the Fluid Matter exhibition at the MU Gallery in Eindhoven. Part of the exhibition was *Haem* (2016), an installation by the Swedish artist Cecilia Jonsson in collaboration with the Portuguese medical biologist Rodrigo Leite de Oliveira and the Dutch metallurgist Thijs Van Der Manakker. As soon as I entered the darkened room, my attention was drawn to a glass bowl filled with water, illuminated from above by a spotlight, set on a profiled concrete pedestal that slowly rotated clockwise. A wooden compass was floating in the bowl, with its magnetic needle slightly rotating and indicating the North. From time to time, the compass gently bounced off the walls of the bowl. Curiously, even though the bowl-compass assemblage was in constant motion, I had the impression that time was standing still. This effect was amplified by the accompanying soundscape by Italian composer Marcello Sodan, reminiscent of music used for meditation. It consisted not so much of melodic lines developing in time, but of ambient sounds and the sounds of flowing water. My visual and auditory sensations gradually fusing, I entered into a hypnotic state of sorts. I simply could not take my eyes off of the unhurriedly moving bowl which threw around enchanting light effects. I carefully followed even the smallest movements of the iron magnetic needle and compass. However, my affective experience triggered by the installation did not put me into hypnosis. It left me perplexed. The significance of its affective potential only came to me later. Through my readings in contemporary philosophy and molecular biology, I understood that *Haem* gestures towards a particular materialisation of abiotic agency that not only diverges from hitherto received concepts of agency, but which also challenges what it means to be human.

In *Humankind: Solidarity with Nonhuman People* (2017), eco-philosopher Timothy Morton argues that the deepening environmental crisis calls for



Haem (2016) by Cecilia Jonsson, detail
© 2016 Cecilia Jonsson, Rodrigo Leite de Oliveira, Photo: Signe Tørå Karsrud

a new concept of agency that takes account of nonhumans and their specific ways of being. Traditional concepts of agency have been deeply anthropocentric as they attributed agency solely to an active human subject exerting its force on other humans and nonhumans, with the latter being relegated to the domain of inert matter. In order to challenge this anthropocentrism, Morton dismantles the active/inert binary by rematerialising agency as ‘rocking’, a term that ‘gathers a whole set of resonances to do with moving in place, oscillation, moving while standing still’ (Morton 2017: 179). Morton clearly departs from conventional understandings of agency as a force attributed to bodies intentionally moving from point A to point B exerting certain effects. Although rocking nonhumans do not go anywhere, they do perform specific effects. This might be exemplified by the performance of a particular abiota on which Morton’s term is predicated.

Morton’s definition of rocking deliberately explores the homophonic similarity between the English verb ‘to rock’ and the noun ‘rock’. Since supposedly immobile rocks literally guaranteed the safety of modern people, they became an instance of inert nature. As Morton argues, this way of thinking makes it possible to turn rocks into a ‘reassuringly static reserve of geo-stuff [that] waits to be cut and exploded and melted and smelted and turned into pleasant slabs of kitchen counter-top’ (2017: 180). As such, Western modernity erased all manifestations of the rock’s agency. This is visible, Morton explains, in the experience of a driver on a mountain road who is not paying attention to the warning signs of falling stones, and then is surprised that a rock splinter broke his windshield. Nonetheless, one only needs to change the scale of events to see that rocks are in constant motion. On a molecular level, for example, rock molecules vibrate on their own, taking quanta of energy from the environment. On a macro scale, determined by geological time in which an era or period is counted in hundreds of millions of years, rock masses move like liquids, spilling over the surface of the Earth, demolishing and smashing against each other.

Morton’s idea of rocking as a new concept of agency questions the active/inert binary in which abiota are usually caught. It attunes us to various scales that escape anthropocentric ways of thinking about the world in which abiotic agency manifests itself. From this perspective, the various types of oscillatory movements I experienced while visiting *Haem* might be interpreted as materialisations of this new concept of agency. However, *Haem* accounts for nonhuman agency as rocking not only as it mobilises the bowl and the compass; it also undermines the traditional way of thinking about human life, dominant in Western culture, as the result of solely biological processes such as fertilisation, cell division, and metabolism. For *Haem* shows that the creation and maintenance of human life is virtually impossible without another rocking inorganic entity: iron.

In order to understand how Cecilia Jonsson questions the traditional understanding of human life, one has to take a closer look at the compass needle. Unlike in traditional compasses, the needle in *Haem* is not made from magnetite, nickel, cobalt, or other magnetic metal extracted from the Earth. Instead, it is made out of the iron found in human blood. This is already indicated by the very title of the installation, *Haem*, which clearly refers to the group of iron that is part of haemoglobin, the protein contained in erythrocytes responsible for the transport of oxygen throughout the human body. Interestingly, Jonsson did not use venous or arterial blood, but placental blood which is much easier to obtain: whereas the former is stored in blood donation stations that make it available only to save patients’ lives, placental blood is considered medical waste and is disposed of immediately after birth. Nonetheless, placental blood actually contains the most haemoglobin of all blood types because it is responsible for the intensive oxygen exchange between mother and foetus. The film accompanying the installation documents how the artist approached women in the maternity ward of the Antoni van Leeuwenhoek Hospital in Amsterdam, asking them to donate their placenta



Haem (2016) by Cecilia Jonsson, detail
© 2016 Cecilia Jonsson, Rodrigo Leite de Oliveira, Photo: Signe Tørå Karsrud

for use in the project. As a result, Jonsson received sixty-nine placentas with a total weight of about thirty-five kilograms. She then cut them into pieces in de Oliveira's laboratory and charred them in a special furnace at 300°C to produce six kilograms of iron ore. The iron ore was sent to Van Der Manakker's workshop, where it was melted in a metallurgical furnace, adding the same amount of charcoal. He forged a small magnetic needle from a part of the steel alloy obtained in this way, which was used to construct the compass floating in a rotating bowl with water.

Haem's aim is to expose how the otherwise tacit agency of iron is in fact of crucial importance for the emergence of human life. At first glance, iron molecules contained in haemoglobin are passive: they simply circulate in the human body, carried by blood flowing under pressure, until they reach the lungs and bind to oxygen. In contrast to this apparent passivity, however, *Haem*'s oscillating compass gently bouncing off the sides of the bowl draws attention to the fact that the workings of iron are also a perfect example of Morton's theory of agency as rocking. Similar to the rocks discussed in *Humankind*, the molecules of iron contained in haemoglobin vibrate. As proven by the British biochemist Max Perutz (1997), the energy generated by electron vibrations in the iron atom cloud is a key factor in the formation of bonds between iron and oxygen. Therefore, the life-sustaining transportation of blood would not be possible if the iron atoms in the haemoglobin were not vibrating. The transport itself also takes place through the principle of rocking: as blood continually circulates between the lungs and other organs of the human body, the haemoglobin molecules carried by the blood perform a movement similar to that of the compass bumping against the bowl walls. Moreover, as Jonsson's project suggests, the work of rocking is also revealed when the placental blood circulates between the organs of the mother and the foetus in order to sustain its vital functions. Not only does the veined glass from which the bowl was made resemble the structure of the placenta, consisting of scions of different sizes that are

separated by furrows; the compass bouncing off its walls also evokes the moment when the blood of the mother and the foetus meet through the placenta, exchanging oxygen and other life-supporting nutrients.

In spite of its clear engagement with the molecular dynamics sustaining vital processes, the aim of Jonsson's project is not merely to convey articulated knowledge about the agency of iron as a rocking force generating human life. Rather, by using the moving bowl and a hypnotic soundtrack, *Haem* allows visitors to gain what Morton terms 'ecological awareness' (2017: 186). The way in which Morton understands ecological awareness has nothing to do with knowledge about the progressive deterioration of the environment, which traditional eco-activists consider insufficient for effective environmental protection. In his view, ecological awareness is an affective experience. Similar to Massumi, affect in Morton's perspective points to a situation in which the active/passive binary is subverted. In this context, ecological awareness arises when humans experience and acknowledge myriad rocking nonhumans flowing through their body, whose agency is key to their existence. However, as my analysis indicates, to grasp the importance of iron as a rocking abiotic entity crucial for human life, language-based forms of knowledge are indispensable to grasp how the iron in haemoglobin actually works. Only then can audiences realise not only that they are not the crown of existence at all but also that what they used to call 'themselves' in fact depends on the actions of other humans and nonhumans, including seemingly inert abiota. Nonetheless, although *Haem* stages affective conditions of knowing with abiota which problematise the traditional concept of a human life, it hardly touches upon the environmental relations between humans and abiota. In order to register those, let me move from affective knowing with iron to affective knowing with fog, another abiotic entity. This kind of knowing does not necessitate articulate forms of knowledge but rather exemplifies a situation where affects may incite language-based modes of knowing which in turn may deepen the experience.

Naturalculturaltechnological Environments

In *Weather as Medium: Toward Meteorological Art* (2018), New Zealand performance scholar and artist Janine Randerson recounts her experience of visiting *Fog Sculpture #94925: Foggy Wake in a Desert: An Ecosphere* (1976), an installation by the Japanese artist Fujiko Nakaya, permanently exhibited in the gardens of the Australian National Gallery in Canberra. In 1970, the artist developed in collaboration with engineer Thomas Mee a special technology to produce artificial fog by dispersing water droplets. As a result of two years of experiments, Nakaya and Mee constructed a complex system of minuscule spray nozzles fitted with microscopic needles. Passing through the nozzles under high pressure, the water breaks down into billions of particles with a diameter of less than 10 micrometres, which immediately condense in the air. Since the 1970s, the system has been used by Nakaya in collaboration with other engineers and scientists to create various installations, both in galleries and public spaces, all of which consist in dispersing artificial fog. According to Randerson, the artificial fog designed by Nakaya and Mee generates a specific affective multisensory experience for specific epistemological purposes. The fog blurs the visitor's vision, overturning the dominance of sight as a tool of orientation that in Western modernity has typically been seen as guaranteeing the most certain knowledge about the world. As Randerson was walking around the garden visiting the installation, she suddenly felt a surprising gentle touch of moisture left on her skin by the artificial fog. It was only this affective fusion of tactile and kinaesthetic experiences that made her think about the site-specific character of *Fog Sculpture #94925*. Drawing on other language-based forms of knowledge, Randerson eventually reconstructed the ecological implications of the installation. It was intended to

address the water shortage problems in Canberra's desert region, which have been aggravated by climate change ever since the installation was first shown in the 1970s. The installation was also designed by the artist as a permanent irrigation system for garden plants, saving valuable water from the nearby Canberra Cotter Dam. Today, however, *Fog Sculpture #94925* can only be watched for an hour and a half at night to prevent the tank from drying out completely due to ever more frequent draughts and the overuse of water by individual households.

Nakaya's installations trigger affective multisensory experiences to posit new ways of thinking about and relating to environments. The artist shows that knowing with artificial fog complicates dominant understandings of environments, especially those prevailing in contemporary critical Anthropocene studies. Although Anthropocene scholars convincingly argue that the environment is not a pre-existing set of ecological relations detached from human activity but rather a dynamic naturalcultural assemblage, they largely neglect technologies as important actants co-creating what is usually referred to as 'the natural environment'. Exemplary in this case is American anthropologist Anna Tsing's essay *Earth Stalked by Man* (2016). In this text, Tsing puts forward the concept of 'patchy Anthropocene' (2016: 4) in order to focus attention on specific sites where anthropogenic changes take place at different speeds and in different rhythms. The term 'patchy' is borrowed from geo-ecology, an interdisciplinary science studying the environment as a multidimensional system composed of many interconnected and interacting components. Patchy landscapes include diverse forms of terrain, fauna, and flora, which are the traditional subject of life and earth sciences, as well as historically situated human practices of inhabiting those landscapes, which are usually dealt with by forestry or agricultural sciences. Although the notion of patchy landscapes successfully serves Tsing to seek out places where cooperation brings considerable mutual benefits to humans and nonhumans, it completely disregards

the performative potential of new technologies such as carbon sequestration that — in the wake of geoengineering projects — are increasingly becoming important actants in creating environments. Nakaya's installations complicate such naturalcultural aspects of environments as the different technologies she embraces condition the very existence of the art works.

As Japanese art theorist Yuji Morioka contends, Nakaya's installations should be understood as 'environments of interactive relationality' (n.d.: para. 6 of 6). Morioka employs the term 'interactive' to point to how visitors engage with the fog as well as to the actual workings of the installation. The artificial fog is not only created through the system of nozzles described above, it is also contingent upon networks of environmental sensors and other largely automated technologies of measuring ecological parameters. For each of her installations, Nakaya scrupulously examines the topography of a given place, its fauna and flora, while she also analyses microclimatic data from the last ten years, especially those concerning the direction and strength of the wind and the average amount of rain per square metre a year. To acknowledge her sources, she includes in some installation titles the code of a particular meteorological station that she visited whilst preparing the work in question. This highlights the extremely important role of scientific research in Nakaya's artistic process, without which her work could not even be created. In her installations, the fog will only appear at the right temperature and humidity and will only last if the wind does not disperse it. What is more, Nakaya adapts the way the nozzles are arranged to the specific terrain and adjusts the frequency of fog spraying to the predicted weather conditions. However, even if she manages to cover a given place with artificial fog, she is not able to predict its behaviour as it depends on even the smallest changes in the environment. This is not just about changes in temperature or humidity, which can make a dense, heavy fog turn into strips of fine mist falling to the ground in

a matter of seconds, or disappear completely, despite the proper functioning of the nozzles. The fog also reacts to movements of human and non-human bodies, either spreading or thickening unexpectedly in front of them, depending on the speed and direction in which the bodies are moving. This aspect of Nakaya's artificial fog is best illustrated by the work *Opal Loop / Cloud Installation #72503* (1980), which the artist designed in collaboration with American choreographer Trisha Brown.¹ The four dancers perform a repetitive choreography, dancing not so much with each other as with the constantly and unpredictably changing artificial fog. This example clearly demonstrates that Nakaya's installations also posit a particular way of relating to naturalcultural-technological environments through attending to their indeterminate effects. In order to understand this indeterminacy, another look at the findings of Anna Tsing is helpful.

In *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins* (2015), published a year prior to *The End of Man*, Tsing foregrounds indeterminacy as the profiling characteristic of relations between humans and nonhumans at the present time of disrupted ecologies and environmental catastrophes. In her approach, indeterminacy is neither about phenomena which are hard to describe with precision, nor about the indeterminacy principle in quantum physics that defines the limits of the accuracy with which certain physical qualities can be described. For Tsing, indeterminacy is a pointer to unexpected, often contingent events that bring about affective experiences and unpredictable effects. In *The Mushroom at the End of the World*, she analyses numerous instances of such indeterminate events. Paradigmatic in this context is a situation in which a group of matsutake mushroom

1. An excerpt of *Opal Loop / Cloud Installation #72503* (1980) by Trisha Brown and Fujiko Nakaya can be seen at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_b6zJl8Wp9k [Accessed 27 December 2020].

pickers, whom she accompanied in the forests of Oregon, unexpectedly found a beautiful specimen after hours of foraging. These experiences of foragers not only made her patient but also extremely attuned to the minutiae of the environment. What is of utmost importance to Tsing is that such indeterminate events entail contingent encounters between humans and nonhumans that always lead to a concrete and often unpredictable change in their life practices or modes of existence. Fungi are prototypical in this respect as they do not have a determinate body but change shape, often radically and unexpectedly, in response to their encounters with other environmental actors and even the slightest modifications in their substrate. However, even though indeterminacy allows Tsing to capture the transformative potential of indeterminate aspects in human-nonhuman environmental relations, her findings are restricted predominantly to the relations between humans and the biotic, matsutake mushrooms that she follows across naturalcultural worlds in her book. Moreover, indeterminacy becomes an epistemic tool limited to her own expert practices of knowing. Nakaya's installations push this further not only by staging contingent relations in naturalculturaltechnological environments, but also by extending this indeterminacy to non-expert ways of knowledge-making. This may be illustrated by the installation *Veil* (2014), where particularly indeterminate performances of artificial fog completely transformed the status of the piece for visitors.

In *Veil*, Nakaya generated her artificial fog to cover The Glass House, a modernist house made of glass designed by the American architect Philip Johnson and built in 1949 in New Canaan, Connecticut. The indeterminate effects brought about by the installation might be seen in one of the movies documenting the piece.² The status of the work changes dramatically depending on the affective experiences of visitors

encountering the unpredictable fog and meteorological conditions. As the film documents, in windless weather the building literally melts into an artificial fog and visitors close to it had to be careful not to fall on the glass walls. Extending Johnson's idea of invisible architecture, Nakaya's work contributed to the architect's aim to fully integrate the buildings into their surroundings. The work, however, had a completely different effect when the wind broke — then The Glass House became perfectly visible and its foggy walls seemed to be made of white, opaque material. This could radically change the status of *Veil* which resembled more a so-called 'emballage', an artistic genre which consists in wrapping, packaging, or covering up objects, architecture, or nature. Whereas Johnson tried to hide architecture, the creators of emballages, such as Tadeusz Kantor, packaged objects to emphasise the material presence of what was hidden. Such trajectory of experiences of those visiting *Veil*, as recorded by the movie, clearly shows that knowing with abiotica foregrounds indeterminacy as an inherent characteristic of naturalculturaltechnological environments that change dramatically depending on the affective experiences of those relating to them. Unlike in Cecilia Jonsson's *Haem*, in Nakaya's installations articulate forms of knowing are not necessary for the audience to embrace aspects of the abiotic agency in naturalculturaltechnological environments. They may only deepen the audience's awareness of indeterminacy as our common experience at the time of the Anthropocene. However, language-based ways of knowing may often block our ability to grasp the political and ethical dimensions of abiotic agency, especially in the face of the ongoing ecological crisis. The function of affective ways of knowing in this regard may be exemplified by an installation which mobilises the abiotic entity perhaps most pressurised by anthropogenic climate change: ice.

2. Opening of *Veil* (2014) installation by Fujiko Nakaya, <https://vimeo.com/96056770> [Accessed 27 December 2020].



Overview of *Ice Watch* (2015) by Olafur Eliasson and Minik Rosing
© Studio Olafur Eliasson. Photo: Martin Argyroglo

Abiotic Matters of Care

In December 2015, the installation *Ice Watch* (2014) by the Icelandic artist Olafur Eliasson and the Danish geologist Minik Rosing was presented at the square in front of the Pantheon in Paris. It comprised twelve blocks of ice with a total weight of 112 tons arranged in a circle resembling the megalithic structure from Stonehenge. The ice was transported by hired cargo ships from the Arctic Sea where it was floating after one of Greenland's glaciers had calved as a result of climate change. It is no coincidence that the title of the installation refers to clocks and the arrangement of twelve blocks in the square alluded to the face of an ancient sundial. The installation acted indeed as a symbolic clock measuring the time that separates mankind from inevitable ecological disaster. Eliasson and Rosing's aim was to bring the problem of global warming literally closer to people. The issue was at the heart of the United Nations COP21 summit on climate change, which continuously took place in Le Bourget, just outside the city, and ended with the signing of an agreement to phase out Western countries from coal-based economies. In this context, the installation's aim was clearly ecopolitical. Touching the ice from a glacier, which has a much lower temperature than the ice from our refrigerators, and observing its rapid melting served to convince visitors of the validity of the pro-ecological solutions discussed at COP21. As Eliasson and Rosing declared on the project's website,³ *Ice Watch* was intended to contribute to increasing environmental awareness and even to provoke society to take urgent

action to improve the state of the climate. Shortly after its presentation, however, the installation began to trigger different, often vehement reactions. On the one hand, critics of Eliasson and Rosing, mainly eco-activist groups, argued that rather than prompting anyone to take action, the artwork became another tourist attraction. *Ice Watch* also left a significant carbon footprint given the amount of carbon dioxide that went into the atmosphere during the shipping of the ice. On the other hand, the Internet was flooded by the images that testify to the enormous affective potential of this work. They usually depict people gently stroking, cuddling up, and even crying in front of the ice. Those reactions not only demonstrate how the installation prompted strong emotional responses, but also point to a particular ecopolitical awareness engendered by knowing with abiotic nonhumans in contemporary installation art that foregrounds the affective.

The reactions to *Ice Watch* show that the ecopolitical potential of knowing with abiotic nonhumans does not conform to the discourses and practices of traditional eco-activists, developed in the 1970s and 1980s. The installation does not aim, for example, to initiate the protests that Greenpeace has been encouraging since 1971 in the spirit of civil disobedience and direct action. Such protests are intended to force various institutions and organisations to take environmentally friendly measures or to reduce environmentally harmful practices. As Christel Stalpaert convincingly argues (2018: 215-219), this type of activist strategy, although necessary for strategic reasons, reinforces the idealised image of unspoiled Nature as an independent sphere of life rooted in the European Romantic tradition. Above all, such activist strategies are based on the anthropocentric assumption that by protecting nature, we protect human life in the first place. Moreover, in justifying their actions, activists invoke instances of factual knowledge, mostly the results of scientific research and analyses of the damaging role of the technologies employed by companies, industries, and other businesses. In contrast,

3. As the Paris installation website has been discontinued see the website for the most recent exhibition in London. Olafur Eliasson, Minik Rosing, *Ice Watch*, <https://icewatchlondon.com> [Accessed 25 May 2021]



Visitor's reactions to *Ice Watch* (2015)
© Studio Olafur Eliasson. Photo: Martin Argyroglo

the intense tactile impressions designed by Eliasson and Rosing primarily served to provoke experiential interactions between human bodies and blocks of ice. When visitors touched them, a rapid heat exchange took place, which staged an intimate interaction between the human and the nonhuman. Thus, unlike traditional eco-activist discourses and practices, *Ice Watch* gestures towards a rather post-humanist approach to ecopolitics where human-nonhuman interaction is central. Such ecopolitics also fosters a particular way of knowing with abiota.

Eliasson and Rosing's installation shows that the ecopolitical potential of contemporary installation art mobilising abiota consists in their ability to transform the knowledge about global warming into what the American philosopher of science and technology Maria Puig de la Bellacasa (2017) terms 'matters of care'. This concept aims to critically revisit existing views regarding the production of knowledge in science and technology studies. The point of reference here is clearly Bruno Latour's 'matter of concern' (2004), a term he introduced to replace his own notion of 'matter of fact', which he had developed ten years earlier. While the latter denotes material-discursive practices that aim to produce the so-called 'objective knowledge' deconstructed by science and technology studies scholars, the former aims to show that the work of deconstruction is not enough. Noting that, from the beginning of the twenty-first century onward, the critique of the sciences has often been used reactionarily to question climate change, Latour argues that scientists should transform matters of facts into matters of concern, by which he means they should pay attention to knowledge after they have produced it in order to be able to defend their findings against others. As Puig de la Bellacasa points out, since concern and care have the same Latin etymology tracing back to *cura* (care, responsibility), they denote related but slightly different affective states. Concern means, above all, the anxiety that arises as a result of thinking about a problem. Although it can cause very strong affective sensations, it does not

involve an intimate sense of belonging to the collective of humans and nonhumans affected by the problem. This intimacy, pertinent to caring, is what Puig de la Bellacasa recognises as crucial especially at a time of ever-deepening eco-crisis.

According to Puig de la Bellacasa, producing matters of care 'is about finding ways to re-affect an objectified world' (2017: 64). The objectified world here means, of course, the effect of knowledge-making practices in modern sciences based on the paradigm of scientific objectivity — or what Latour calls the 'matters of fact.' Observing the world from a cool distance, scientists create the impression that nonhumans are only the object of their research and do not actively contribute to it. From this perspective, re-affecting is tantamount to the need to restore the affective potential of scientific research in order to expose the agency of nonhumans that we need to care about. It should be noted, however, that Puig de la Bellacasa does not understand care as an unspecified feeling of anxiety caused by a difficult situation, such as — in this case — the climate crisis. Drawing on the findings of American feminist political philosophers Joan C. Tronto and Bernice Fischer, she adopts a generic definition of care. As she writes, caring

includes *everything that we do* to maintain, continue and repair 'our world' so that we can live in it as well as possible. That world includes our bodies, our selves, and our environment, *all of which we seek to interweave in a complex, life-sustaining web* (2017: 3).

This passage succinctly indicates that caring in Puig de la Bellacasa's sense goes far beyond human emotional responses. Care is understood here as a concrete material practice with great potential to question the status quo and undermine scientific objectivism. However, Puig de la Bellacasa does not advocate a normative ethics that *a priori* defines what to 'live as well as possible' in 'our world' should mean. Instead,

she foregrounds how matters of care emerge from specific material-discursive entanglements where affective knowing with nonhumans takes place. For Puig de la Bellacasa, situations of knowing through touch are prototypical in this respect.

Unlike sight, which is central to Western epistemological systems, touch entails embodied practices of exploring the world. It involves not so much the cool, objective distance from which researchers traditionally observe the phenomena that are of interest to them, but close contact with the subject of research. It should be emphasised, however, that Puig de la Bellacasa does not promulgate a romantic understanding of touch as the most proximate of the senses offering direct access to the world. She is rather interested in different kinds of technologically mediated tactile experiences triggered by contemporary technoscience: from haptic technologies of artificial leather used in robots, through augmented reality technologies that allow computer players to touch objects in the game, to medical interfaces used by surgeons who perform operations at a distance. According to Puig de la Bellacasa, these technologies not only serve to produce often speculative ways of knowing the world through touch, challenging the traditional binary opposition between direct and mediated experience; they can also become an apt cognitive tool in a world where people increasingly use digital media to get into contact with each other at a distance. Moreover, due to their interactive nature, haptic technologies allow us to see an extremely important aspect of so-called ‘matters of care’: reciprocity. One cannot touch a human or nonhuman body without being touched by it. From this perspective, touch becomes a materialisation of practices of knowledge-making based on the embodied and situated nature of experience, at the same time indicating that there is always a close, though not necessarily direct, mutual relationship with the subject of one’s research.

Ice Watch clearly stages climate change as a matter of care by inviting visitors to touch the ice, yet it also shows that knowing with abiotic nonhumans may also enact caring through the sense of hearing. At the press conference opening *Ice Watch*, the second initiator of the project, Minik Rosing, stressed that one of the purposes of the installation was to evoke specific auditory experiences:

Put your ear to the ice and he will tell you a story that goes back to ancient times. After all, the glaciers were made of snowflakes that fell 10,000 years ago. So they still remember the times before man introduced carbon dioxide into the atmosphere
(2015; transcript by the author).

In encouraging visitors to put their ear to the ice, the geologist further referred to a characteristic sound, reminiscent of the crackling sound of a burning log, which emerges as air is released from the melting ice. This affective acoustic experience too served to transform the knowledge of global warming into a matter of care. It turned the ice into a nonhuman witness of history, which seemed to whisper into the visitors’ ear the story of past times, in which man has not yet polluted the environment. Even though it may seem that *Ice Watch* aimed to create a matter of care primarily by evoking an uninterrupted sensory aural impression, a closer look shows that such an experience can only arise under very specific conditions. Visitors to the installation could only ‘hear the ice’ if they got as closely as possible to the ice and when the sounds of the city did not interfere with the subtle crackles. This is shown by the video that one of the *Ice Watch* visitors recorded on her cell phone when she strolled through the square in front of the Pantheon at night.⁴ Unlike other audio-visual materials available on the Internet documenting the

4. *Ice Watch Paris* during COP21, Keri Coles Photography, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1CEP_eg8WKY&t=6s

installation, only this one registered the sound intended by Rosing. This example shows that it was not enough to just put an ear to the ice to learn the history of ice. The matters of care performed by *Ice Watch* relied to a great extent on other abiota, including recording technologies, which importantly contributed to their emergence. Once they did, they circulated on the Internet where they could potentially affect even larger groups of people than those physically present at the Pantheon square. Due to the nexus of abiotic entities mobilised by Eliasson and Rosing, the affective ways of knowing could not only transform language-based knowledge about the ecological catastrophe into matters of care for the melting ice, but also reach audiences wider than those to which artistic events or scientific articles alone could ever appeal.

The examples discussed here clearly demonstrate that contemporary installation art is a fertile ground for positing affective ways of knowing with abiota at the time of the Anthropocene. These works stage different dynamic relations between affective and articulate, language-based modes of sense-making that may necessitate, deepen, and enliven one another. Without attending to these often radically different dynamics, it is virtually impossible to understand the potential of installation art to register and account for a specific type of abiotic agency that flaunts the active/passive binary, foregrounds the indeterminate character of contemporary naturalculturaltechnological landscapes, and demonstrates how matters of care for abiota are undergoing dramatic changes due to the ongoing ecological crisis. What is of utmost importance here is the political and ethical dimension inherent to affective knowing which often goes unnoticed once we focus solely on language-based modes of knowledge-making. In this respect, the inquiry offered in this article serves as an invitation to broaden the scope of our corpora to be analysed at the time of the Anthropocene. By delving deeper into the performances of abiota, we may explore other affective ways of knowing with a view to understand even better the ecological and epistemological problems we are facing today.



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Moving Words Move Bodies

Kinetic Textuality in *new skin*

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KEYWORDS

Kinetic textuality, *new skin*, Hannah De Meyer, text-performance debate, text and movement

MOTS-CLÉS

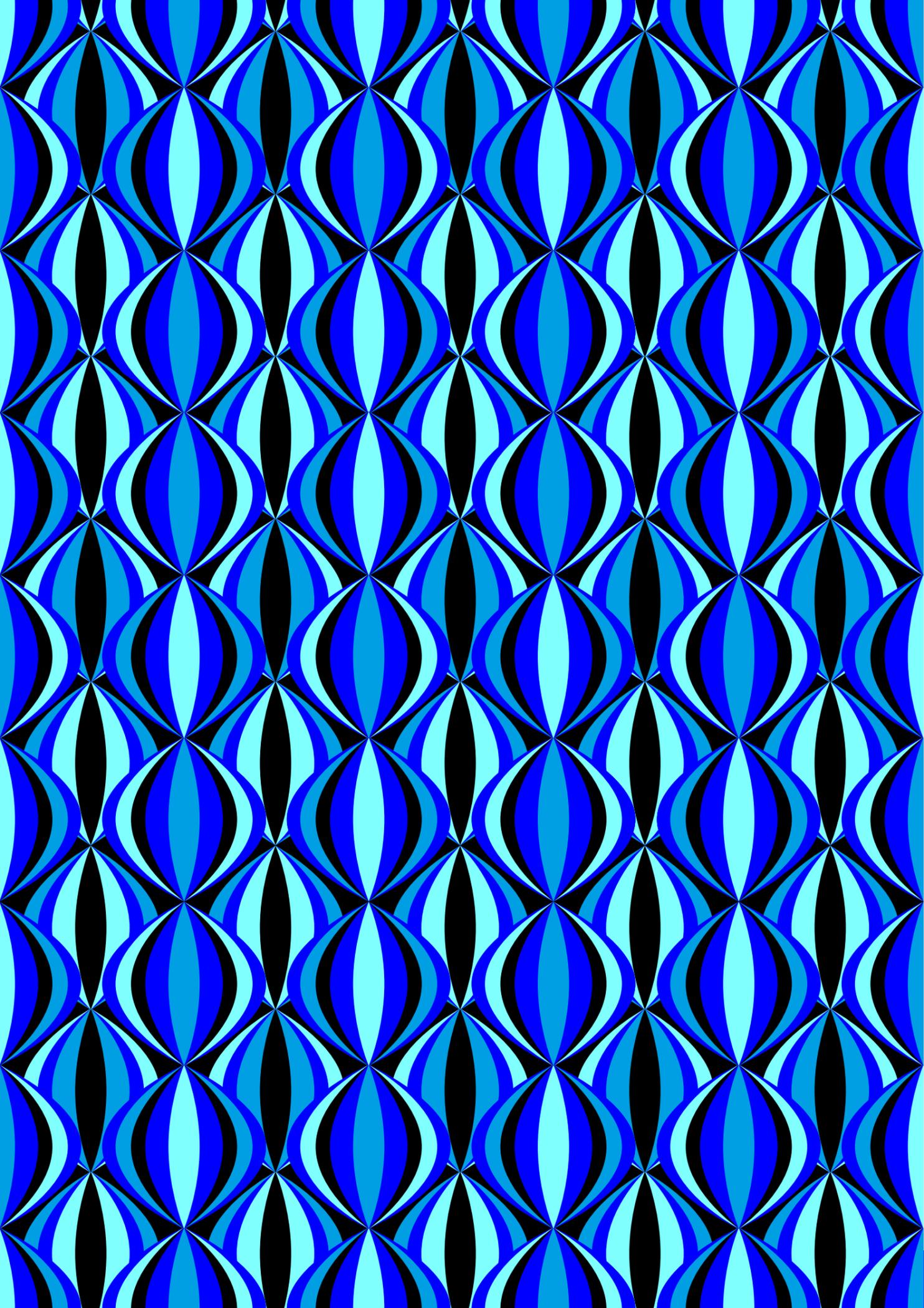
Textualité cinétique, *new skin*, Hannah De Meyer, débat texte-performance, texte et mouvement

Summary

This article is structured around an in-depth analysis of the interplay between text and movement in Hannah De Meyer's *new skin* (2018). The use of language in this performance is approached as an example of what this article calls 'kinetic textuality', which refers to the contemporary tendency to use text in relation to — and as a locus of — movement. Kinetic textuality in general, and *new skin* specifically, allow for the reassessment of the text-performance debate in Theatre and Performance Studies. Whilst many contemporary scholars have switched the focus from the irreconcilable differences between text and performance to their productive interaction, less attention has been devoted to text's physical or kinetic dimension in theatre. This analysis of *new skin* sets off from a close examination of the network between text, movement, rhythm, body, and sound. Not only does this article look into how these formal elements interact, it also approaches this interaction as a narrative strategy.

Résumé

Cet article est structuré autour d'une analyse approfondie de l'interaction entre le texte et le mouvement dans la pièce de théâtre *new skin* (De Meyer 2018). L'utilisation du langage dans cette pièce est abordée comme un exemple de ce que cet article appelle la 'textualité cinétique', notion qui fait référence à la tendance contemporaine à utiliser le texte en relation avec et comme lieu de mouvement. La textualité cinétique en général, et la pièce *new skin* en particulier, permettent de réévaluer le débat texte-performance. Alors que de nombreux experts contemporains ont délaissé les différences irréconciliables entre le texte et la performance pour leur interaction productive, moins d'attention est accordée à la dimension physique ou cinétique du texte au théâtre. L'analyse de *new skin* repose sur un examen approfondi du lien entre le texte, le mouvement, le rythme, le corps, et le son. L'article examine non seulement la manière dont ces éléments formels interagissent, mais il les aborde également comme une stratégie de narration.



Metre has another mode of action not hitherto mentioned. There can be little doubt that historically it has been closely associated with dancing, and that the connections of the two still hold.

(Richards [1924] 2004: 131)

The process of expression (...) brings the meaning into existence as a thing at the very heart of the text, it brings it to life in an organism of words, establishing it in the writer or the reader as a new sense organ, opening a new field or a new dimension to our experience.

(Merleau-Ponty [1945] 2002: 212)

Introduction

It might seem odd for a New Critics scholar such as I.A. Richards to trace textual metre back to *dance*, as he does in the first epigraph above. While Richards' literary criticism was primarily concerned with the text and nothing but the text as a self-contained and self-referential object, in his comparison it is suggested that a performative, even kinetic, energy can reside within texts. Recent theatrical and choreographic experiments seem to affirm Richard's speculations. The connection between dance and textual rhythm often resurfaces in performances where text is used as a form of and a means towards *movement*. As the analysis that follows will argue, these experiments take place on both the level of the text and of the performance. On the level of the text, artists 'choreograph' words by creating rhythmic compositions. Meanwhile, on the level of performance their 'moving' words interact with specific (spatial) movements of their body. Artists such as Mette Edvardsen, Hannah De Meyer, Abke Haring, Daniel Linehan, and Alma Söderberg, amongst many others, frequently use compositional strategies that blossom in diction and trigger a sense of movement in text: they emphasise inner rhymes, musicality, rhythm, harmony, and dissonance. Simultaneously, by integrating bodily movements into the wording of their texts, their

→ 1. In his article 'Kinetic Texts: From Performance to Poetry', Matt Cornish coins the notion 'kinetic text' to refer to the non-representational identity of experimental theatrical writing in the contemporary German performing arts scene, whereby he points to the difficulties of printing these pieces of writing into a play-text. The term 'kinetic text' allows Cornish 'to capture how they [kinetic texts] abjure mimesis' (2015: 305). Even though I will, in a similar move, try to move beyond (yet not fully abandon) the mimetic impulse of theatrical writing and focus on the 'unique literary qualities of poetry from performance' (*ibid*: 304), my use of the term *kinetic textuality*, differs slightly from Cornish. Kinetic textuality does not refer to a specific genre of plays and more specifically emphasises the mutual relation between text and *motion*.

words behave like triggers for movement, similar to music that instigates a body to dance. For that reason, these performances, not unlike Richards' quote, blur the dichotomy between text and performance — their dynamics take place at the very intersection of the two.

I use the term 'kinetic textuality' to characterise the vivid and intriguing interaction between the movements of written text and bodily movements within performance.¹ The adjective 'kinetic', which derives from the root word *kinetikos* in Greek, itself formed on the word *kinetos* to mean 'move', is used in this context with the aim to draw attention to the heightened affinity between language and movement as portrayed within these artistic experiments. In my use of the term, 'textuality' covers both speech and writing, so 'kinetic textuality' permits us to describe the kinetic quality discernible on both the stage (through its interaction with voice and the moving body) and the page (by emphasising compositional qualities, such as rhythm). As a whole, the term 'kinetic textuality' allows us to grasp both the kinetic dimension of theatrical speech and to unveil and emphasise the bodily and spatial aspects of staged writing.²

An intriguing example of kinetic textuality can be found in the performance *new skin* (2018), written, created, and performed by Belgian theatre artist Hannah De Meyer. In this performance, De Meyer's specific bodily movements continuously reverberate with the rhythmic text she utters. The use of kinetic textuality is her central artistic strategy to make a gentle but powerful political statement: fuelled by her reading of critical race theory and (eco)feminist theory, *new skin* is rooted in De Meyer's outspoken indignation towards racial, sexual, and

2. The notion of 'kinetic text' is developed and studied in Film Studies as well. See for instance Kim Knowles' 2015 article 'Performing Language, Animating Poetry: Kinetic Text in Experimental Cinema' where the author unravels the aesthetics of kinetic texts in experimental film and traces them back to their genealogical roots in modernist and futurist poetry and art.

environmental abuse. ‘This indignation can be a transformative power. I’m fascinated by how life-threatening situations provoke resilience and imagination’ (De Meyer n.d.: para. 3 of 3; my translation). *new skin* is presented by De Meyer as an invitation to pursue a way of thinking that differs profoundly from the predominantly Western, rational, and neo-liberal paradigm — the paradigm in which abuse and terror have been conducted and legitimised on a massive scale. Offering a sharply contrasting alternative to this Western narrative, De Meyer’s performance seeks to provoke an imaginary world in which a far-reaching sense of interdependency prevails. At the same time, kinetic textuality works as the central artistic strategy to give her ‘eco-feminist statement’ (Cousens 2019: para. 9 of 10) an energetic, gentle, and spirited dimension.³

This article will not so much focus on the way in which De Meyer incorporates the aforementioned critical voices into her performance (text), it will rather be centred around the formal strategies that underlie her use of theatrical writing as a way to appeal to the imagination of (the body of) the spectator. By using the two primary theatrical vehicles of kinetic textuality — language and movement — she composes and performs a meandering and associative monologue, in which we only see De Meyer talking and moving. There are no images, no décor, and no objects in the space. In her other performances as well, De Meyer has an enthralling way of performing: her smooth, elegant, and eerie way of speaking continuously intersects with quirky, alien-like movements. In *new skin*, this performance style is employed to invite the audience on an imaginary journey through various landscapes and memories. For example, with a joyous undertone, De Meyer asks her audience to imagine ‘fires [that] run through dry forests so fast they look like

torches burning down’ (*new skin*, 37) or tells them to ‘look around, where have you landed? You are in a land where everything points down, down to the earth’ (*new skin*, 17). She also tells the audience a few personal stories, for example about the death of her grandmother or about her own birth. She infuses her personal memory with earthly memories and creates an entangled web of connections between herself and her surroundings. The imaginative world that unfolds during the piece hinges primarily on words and movements, supported by music and light effects. The empty stage contrasts heavily with the dense story-world that is created in the audience’s minds: *new skin* makes tangible how theatrical writing can ‘transform the nowhere of the stage into a specific location’ (Worthen 2010: 205).

Since the interlacing of words and movements in *new skin* is predicated on text’s twofold condition as both an embodied and written sign, the following reading of the performance will be structured with this ambiguous status in mind, which will eventually unveil the dynamics of kinetic textuality as it figures in this specific performance. First, I will examine the features of kinetic textuality in light of the debate on text and language in Theatre and Performance Studies. Since kinetic textuality requires giving more serious attention to the role of embodiment in theatrical writing, I will then specify how my understanding of kinetic textuality is profoundly shaped by a Merleau-Pontian framework on language and speech. This theoretical examination offers the necessary background to consider the different formal characteristics that underlie kinetic textuality in *new skin* as text and as performance. An analysis of how rhythm is established in the text will be followed by a consideration of the various connections between textual and bodily movements in performance. Further, I will demonstrate how the interactions between textual and bodily movement as exposed in *new skin* draw attention to the centrality of sound within this phenomenological interaction. Once *new skin*’s artistic interventions in terms of the

3. For an insightful elaboration on how *new skin* engages with (eco-)feminist thinking, see Roels, Lieze. 2019. ‘De weerbarstige kracht van het ding: materiële agency in de podiumkunsten’, *Etcetera: tijdschrift voor podiumkunsten*, 156: 54-63.

composition and the staging of writing are clarified, I further aim to elucidate its effect on the audience. As the second epigraph suggests above, in the act of expression words can become a shared organism between artist and audience. Towards the end of the article, I will unravel this shared organism and argue that kinetic textuality in *new skin* can be interpreted as a narrative strategy that both draws the audience into the story-world of the performance and simultaneously activates their imagination. To do this I will discuss the effects of perceiving movement on stage (in body and in text) and focus on the specificity of *new skin*'s compositional strategies such as the stylistic features of rhythm and the monologic genre. These textual characteristics, as I will argue with reference to North-American theatre scholar Julia Jarcho's insights on the theatricality of writing, emphasise the 'writtenness' of the text and thereby stimulate the engagement of the audience.

Kinetic Textuality and the Text-Performance Split

Before delving into kinetic textuality in *new skin*, it may be useful to contextualise kinetic textuality within the broader discourse on the relationship between textuality and performativity in Theatre and Performance Studies. The story often goes that the unease around this relationship originated during the foundation of Theatre Studies as a discipline at North-American and European universities. This new discipline primarily wanted to dispose of the textual bias that characterised the literary studies from which it sought to emancipate itself (Philipsen 2017: 100). The discomfort with text and language resurfaces later in Performance Studies, whose founding scholars reinforced an antithetical relation between text on the one hand and performance on the other (Worthen 2004: 18). An overall anxiety around the 'faithfulness'

of a performance in relation to the text (which dominates performance because it contains the blueprint for performance) continues to distort the relation of text vis-à-vis performance (Worthen 2010: 17). At the turn of the previous century, along with Lehmann's publication of *Post-dramatic Theatre* ([1999] 2006), the suspicion towards textuality was reinforced. In the first place, this had to do with a large misunderstanding of Lehmann's project — postdrama was often misconceived as a theatre without text (Itler 2015: 247). However, although Lehmann includes textuality in his account on postdrama, his argument does remain structured along a salient binary between text-based and non-text-based theatre (Tomlin 2008: 58) where he 'defines the theatrical against the literary' (Jarcho 2014: 297). These developments have contributed to the notion that text is something stable, permanent, and bodiless, and that it cannot be fitted into the attractive, fleeting, and corporeal logic of the performative, let alone the kinetic.⁴

4. See Worthen's first chapter 'From Poetry to Performance' in *Drama, between Poetry and Performance* (2010) for an extensive overview of the approaches towards theatrical writing in both New Criticism and Performance Studies.

To some extent, the contemporary debate is still largely dominated by Lehmann's framework. His typology is for instance often used to analyse how playwriting can expose a postdramatic aesthetics (Barnett 2008; Jürs-Munby 2009; Itler 2015). This explains why many accounts concerning text and language in theatre are primarily preoccupied with a metaphysics of presence and representation. The view of Jarcho, whose work I will discuss in more depth towards the end of this article, is a good example of how the limiting dichotomy of presence and representation can be abandoned (2017: 8). She also conducts close analyses of plays, yet focuses on how their compositional strategies create friction within performance because they complicate performance's logic of the here-and-now. Overall, among contemporary scholars dealing with text and language, there seems to be an agreement that the very friction between text and performance is a productive site for experiment and analysis

Kinetic Textuality and Merleau-Ponty

(Jürs-Munby 2010; Meisner and Mounsef 2011; Vanhoutte and Swyzen 2011; Worthen 2012; Cull 2013; Rodríguez 2016; Sugiera 2016). However, with notable exceptions in the work of North-American theatre scholars W.B. Worthen (*Drama: Between Poetry and Performance* 2010) and Stanton B. Garner (*Bodied Spaces* 1994), few scholars explicitly address the relation between text and body within the interaction between text and performance, or only mention embodiment in passing. In the context of kinetic textuality, however, a central focus on embodiment is necessary since kinetic textuality evolves around the interplay between textual and bodily movement.

It is because the interconnection of textual and bodily movements leads us beyond predominant thinking on theatrical writing that kinetic textuality is a suitable avenue to assess the relationship between text and performance from the perspective of embodiment. By introducing the term ‘kinetic textuality’, I not only wish to draw attention to a contemporary tendency in the performing arts, I also aspire to respond to the reduced attention for embodiment in contemporary scholarship on textuality. The affinity between language and movement in *new skin* is portrayed by means of a careful composition of the interaction between the performative elements of text, movement, rhythm, body, and sound. For that reason, this performance requires an analysis in which embodiment functions as a *sine qua non* condition of theatrical writing and in which the reciprocal and dynamic assemblage between text, movement, rhythm, body, and sound is foregrounded. This implies that we cannot consider text without movement, sound without rhythm, or body without text, etc. To phrase it differently: a thoughtful assessment of kinetic textuality in *new skin* compels a mode of textual and performance analysis that moves beyond the aforementioned scholarly tendencies in the study of staged writing.

My analysis of kinetic textuality as a performative feature that portrays the interaction between text, movement, rhythm, body, and sound is highly influenced by the phenomenological work of French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty. His thinking allows us to take the simple observation that theatrical writing is always already ‘an encounter with embodiment’ (Worthen 2010: 76) seriously.⁵ Since the intricate intertwinement of body, language, and the material world is a fundamental concern within Merleau-Ponty’s philosophy, his work offers the tools to navigate between text, movement, rhythm, body, and sound as they interact in *new skin*. For that reason, I will first briefly consider his reflections on speech and language, in order to explicate the main theoretical groundwork that underlies my conceptualisation of kinetic textuality.

Merleau-Ponty’s writings are situated within the phenomenological tradition, the first seeds of which having been planted by German philosopher Edmund Husserl. Merleau-Ponty — drawn to Husserl’s work and aspirations to move beyond a Cartesian worldview — further developed a mode of thinking that countered the prevailing philosophical assumption at the time that the mind can be separated from the materiality and

5. In my understanding of the network that constitutes kinetic textuality, I also linger on what Belgian dance scholar Rudi Laermans has called ‘dance in general’, a notion he uses to account for contemporary dance’s interest in the assemblage of human and non-human movement. ‘In such a performance’, Laermans explains, ‘not only the human body but also sound, imagery or light are treated as media of dance, as having the potential to produce a variety of movements and poses’ (2008: 10). Similar to my conception of kinetic textuality, Laermans’ ‘dance in general’ does not place the performing body as the central focus of the performance but rather emphasises the mutual cooperation of different performative elements.



new skin, by Hannah De Meyer, performed by Hannah De Meyer
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lived experience of the body (Coole 2008: 85; Murray and Holmes 2013: 345; Dreon 2016: 54). Even though their central line of inquiry was a careful and precise observation on the interaction between the embodied subject and the world, a considerable amount of Merleau-Ponty's writings were also devoted to language and speech. His phenomenological analysis of language and speech substantially contributed to an understanding of the world and the body outside the Cartesian paradigm and to a more dynamic conception of the interaction between the (moving) body and its environment (Lewis 1966: 35; Adams 2008: 160; Apostolopoulos 2018: 355). Merleau-Ponty's interest in language only increased throughout his career. Towards the end of his life, language was no longer simply an element that provided access to the experience of the world, it now functioned as a model upon which he mirrored his understandings of perception, being, and consciousness.

Influenced to a great extent by linguist and semiotician Ferdinand de Saussure, Merleau-Ponty's reflections on language depend largely on the structuralist notion of signifying networks (Adams 2008: 157; Silverman 2008: 104; Hayden 2018: 423). As Merleau-Ponty explains himself — 'meaning appears only at the intersection of and as it were in the interval between words' (1964: 42). Thus here meaning is dependent on and constituted within a *network*. A crucial difference between Saussure and Merleau-Ponty is the latter's emphasis on embodiment: the continuous interaction between language and body is foregrounded in his attempt 'to restore to the act of speaking its true physiognomy' ([1945] 2002: 211). This interaction takes place on two levels: language, on the one hand, structures and fundamentally impacts our bodily experience of being-in-the-world (Merleau-Ponty [1945] 2002: 210), while the body, on the other hand, plays a crucial role in the communication of meaning in speech. Merleau-Ponty 'insists that bodies are not mere vessels of minds or vehicles of intellectual messages, but also actively evoke, interpret and transform meaning' (Adams 2008: 153).

In speech, the meaning of a word is not communicated merely through the word itself, rather 'the meaning of words must be finally induced by (...) a kind of deduction from a gestural meaning, which is immanent in speech' (Merleau-Ponty [1945] 2002: 208).

The common ground between speech and gesture to which Merleau-Ponty points here is crucial for my understanding of kinetic textuality. His reflections elucidate that speech cannot be thought of in isolation from embodiment and movement and that speech fundamentally structures our way of being (and moving) (Merleau-Ponty 1964: 43). Merleau-Ponty positions the speaking body right in the middle of Saussure's network and gives a phenomenological (and primarily embodiment-oriented) twist to it. His reflections on language mark the contours of a network not only between signs but also between the body and the world. For this reason Merleau-Ponty's work ties in with the intersection of language and the (moving) body in kinetic textuality and offers valuable insights to reassess the stakes of the text-performance debate in Theatre and Performance Studies.

Theatrical Writing in and as a Network of Movement(s)

Now let us return to *new skin* and imagine that we are gathered together in the theatre space where De Meyer's monologue is about to begin. *new skin* does not communicate the inner thoughts of a character, the text is rather a poetic and associative piece of writing. Instead of offering a clear-cut storyline, *new skin* meanders freely. By explicitly addressing us through the recurrent personal pronoun 'you', De Meyer actively encourages

us to use our imagination. For example, in the beginning of the piece, De Meyer asks us to picture absence, ‘absence with no face, absence with no name’ (*new skin*, 9). This absence becomes filled with a ‘tiny crumble of light’ that ‘grows bigger and bigger’ until ‘you can see water, land, fires burning the land, and waves rising and crashing and tumbling across each other’. After a ‘bang’, De Meyer tells us that ‘you’re in a body now’ (*new skin*, 10-11). Now that we are (imaginatively) reborn and that we have an (imagined) world in which to live, she takes us on a journey through various (imaginary) landscapes. Together with De Meyer, we walk through forests, valleys, museums, and caves, until we are offered a place to rest in a hole in the ground. While we are sleeping, De Meyer tells us two stories: one about an astronaut that is connected to the earth through an umbilical cord and one about her own birth. Her text is written in a diegetic — rather than a dramatic or dialogic — mode of narration. De Meyer’s invitation to imagine various sensations and images in our minds and bodies is reminiscent of meditative practices, where an appeal to our imagination works to activate sensations in our bodies and to restore corporeal awareness. Importantly, *unlike* in most meditative practices, we do not close our eyes: while imagining the various scenes that De Meyer describes, we simultaneously notice how De Meyer moves on stage. Sometimes she fluidly follows the cadence of the text by slowly shaking her upper body from left to right; sometimes she vividly and brusquely reacts to the words by moving her torso in a strange bend. Through both the text and the movements, a fictive (although not dramatic since the text does not function as the speech of a dramatic character) universe is created.

new skin’s use of kinetic textuality makes tangible how language can accommodate and portray a sense of movement *in* text. In De Meyer’s writing, this movement is primarily evoked through the stylistic feature of **rhythm**. In the following excerpt, the movement described in the text of digging is evoked through and further enhanced by the movement of the textual rhythm.

you start digging
you dig into the ground
and digging into the earth is like
digging through time
layers and layers of rocks
layers and layers of time
and you
you dig for hours
you dig for days
for weeks
for months
for years
you keep on digging back in time
(*new skin*, 31-32)

In this excerpt, the repetition of the words ‘dig’, ‘digging’, ‘layers’, and ‘for’ establishes a certain repetitive cadence. Rhythm, then, is provoked by the rupture between ‘you dig for hours, you dig for days’, followed by a new set of repeated constructions, ‘for weeks, for months, for years’, then again followed by ‘you keep on digging back in time’. Richards explains that ‘rhythm and its specialised form, metre, depend upon repetition, and expectancy’ ([1924] 2004: 122). After reading or listening to repetitive patterns, readers or listeners come to anticipate that repetition and rhythm emerge out of the text’s *failure* to meet these expectations (*ibid*: 128). The reason could be, again according to Richards, that ‘the mind after reading a line or two of verse, or half a sentence of prose, prepares itself ahead for any one of a number of possible sequences, at the same time negatively incapacitating itself for others’ (*ibid*: 122). Thus the ‘departures from and returns to the pattern has come to be regarded as the secret of poetic rhythm’ (Richards 1930: 227).⁶ Interestingly, in this excerpt, the ‘fixed point of orientation’ (*ibid*: 231) that structures the repetition and establishes an anticipation, switches

frequently. This increases the pace, the rhythmicity, and also, I would argue, the *motility* of the excerpt: audible rhythm produces or enhances the perception of movement (Merleau-Ponty [1945] 2002: 265). As a result, the meticulous composition of rhythm in *new skin* establishes the first dimension of movement in the performance, one that is located *within* the text.⁷

The effect of rhythm on the audience will be further discussed in the next section. For the moment, it is important to emphasise that the rhythmicity of the text interacts with the (moving) body of De Meyer. As such rhythmic movement operates on the visual as well as auditory level of the performance. As the next step in drawing the network of the interacting performative elements in *new skin*, I will now turn to the various **bodily movements** that De Meyer performs while delivering her text and discern the different ways in which verbal movement triggers physical movement in her performance.⁸ To begin with most of De Meyer's movements directly correspond to the rhythmicity of the text.

← 6. Although Richards primarily outlines how rhythm emerges through repetition and expectancy, he also admits that the analysis of rhythm is highly dependent on the reader's individual experience: it is something not found in the verse, but as an effect of verse. Rhythm, he writes, 'is not due to our perceiving a pattern in something outside us, but to our becoming patterned ourselves' (Richards [1924] 2004: 127; my emphasis).

7. The use of rhythm differs here from rhythm in postdramatic theatre, which was theorised by Hans-Thies Lehmann as an important quality of text in postdrama. According to Lehmann, rhythm in postdrama is 'used for the destructuring and deconstructing of story, meaning, and totality of form' ([1999] 2006: 156). It is one of postdrama's primary means to present 'signifiers that have been drained of their communicative character and can no longer be grasped as a part of a poetic, scenic or musical totality of a work' (Lehmann [1999] 2006: 156). This runs counter to *new skin's* effort to activate the junction between meaning and rhythm.

8. De Meyer's movements are not neatly choreographed or pinned down. Her gestures slightly differ in each performance, depending on the impulses that De Meyer receives from the text while performing. There are however some basic bodily reactions and basic movement patterns that were established beforehand and that re-appear in each performance.

For example, when she asks the audience to imagine a painting of 'two men holding sticks, hitting each other with sticks, giving blow, dodging blow, giving blow, dodging blow' (*new skin*, 12-13), her head alternately moves to the right and then to the front. She does not literally mimic the movements of the two men but in following the rhythm of the text her movements do evoke the scenery that she is describing. Here the connection between De Meyer's movements and her words is similar to the connection between movements and music: the movements react to the rhythm of the text.

A small amount of movements, on the contrary, relate mimetically to her text. For example, when De Meyer asks us to imagine that we are in a body with no legs, she looks at her own body and legs, or while stating that 'you're in a body now' (*new skin*, 11), she breathes heavily, seems to break out of her body, and looks at her arms and hands that are spread before her. While the majority of the movements mirror the rhythmicity of the text, these mimetic movements directly mirror the content of the text. In these brief mimetic flashes, a connection is made between what her text activates in our (imagined) body and what De Meyer's own body performs on stage. Being immersed in the imaginative world that her words *and movements* evoke, De Meyer on stage suddenly becomes a representation of ourselves as if she is wandering in a world similar to the world in which we are wandering in our minds. These movements add a very precise interpretation to the text, which contrasts with the more open and associative nature of the rhythmic movements.

One specific movement sequence of De Meyer stands out and reappears on a regular basis throughout the performance: she shuffles restlessly with her feet, her upper body moves from left to right, while her head crawls upward and downward. This recurrent (yet each time slightly adapted) movement holds a specific emotional quality, and does not, at first sight, seem to correspond to the text in a straightforward way.

To grasp the specific quality of this movement, and how it relates to the text she utters, it is necessary to remind the reader of the fact that De Meyer is both the author and the performer of *new skin*. In a personal interview with me, De Meyer explained how particular sentences in the performance text still hold the echoes of the emotions — predominantly pain, anger, and indignation — that she experienced whilst reading the (eco)feminist and anti-racist literature that have inspired her to write and create this piece. The pronunciation of certain words allows De Meyer to activate these emotional and physical memories in her body. These in turn produce *new skin*'s characteristic movements, which are, in other words, essentially provoked by the act of embodying (and digesting) her written text. When De Meyer stumbles around on stage to abruptly and intensely straighten her back and look up to the ceiling, her movements function as bodily and visceral reactions to the texts that inspired her to write *new skin*. These visceral reactions to the uttered words correspond to British-Australian feminist scholar Sara Ahmed's view upon emotions: 'emotions', she states, 'can work in practice by circulating through words and figures and by sticking to bodies' (2014: 217). In *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, Ahmed outlines how certain emotions can settle upon words, and how these words, infused by an emotional value, have a specific effect on the body that pronounces them. This dynamic explains how emotions (and the critical literature that evoked them in the first place) become incorporated in the entanglement of words and movements in *new skin*. In fact, these movements contain the intertextual traces of her writing and activate the echoes of the critical voices that have inspired her to write this piece.

De Meyer's bodily movements that always seem to emerge *out of* the text — rhythmically, mimetically or emotionally — emphasise the intricate intertwinement of text and body in kinetic textuality. As such, *new skin* illustrates that speech and gestures become part of one continuum. When De Meyer talks about 'whistles like waves, soundwaves, like

messages, messengers coming up from the ground' (*new skin*, 24-25), she slowly moves around without lifting her feet, while bending and moving her upper body around. This section resonates with Merleau-Ponty's reflections on the relation between speech and gestures: 'the spoken word is a genuine gesture, and it contains its meaning in the same way as the gesture contains its [meaning]' ([1945] 2002: 213). The whistles and waves coming from the ground are evoked through movements, which, without the words, would not immediately remind us of whistles or waves and vice versa. The quality of De Meyer's slow yet eager movements contributes to the expression of the quality of the waves. The text's interaction with embodiment is not only limited to the text on stage, we can observe it on the pages of *new skin* as well. The use of the deictic word 'this', for example, in sentences such as 'a video of a man standing in a forest holding a long wooden cane like this' (*new skin*, 13-14) or 'when they lift me out of the womb, I come out like this' (*new skin*, 31), not only triggers the reader's imagination but also reveals that *new skin* is written with an expected and/or previous embodied performance in mind. The entanglement between words and body in performance *and* in writing illustrates that it is impossible to analyse text without paying attention to the body that delivers the text.

Finally, the embodiment of language on stage also relates to specific choices of pronunciation and intonation. A careful observation on the use of kinetic textuality in *new skin* draws attention to the central role of the sounds that carry the words through space.⁹ This adds an important layer to the language-body interaction as outlined by Merleau-Ponty. For instance, the excerpt 'branches (...) flung into the sky like weightless, like pieces of paper and then flung down in the lake below'

9. For this section, I invite the reader to read my descriptions as instructions for how to pronounce the quotes from *new skin* (either out loud or by activating an inner voice). As such, the specific sonorous quality of the words may become more tangible (and audible).

(*new skin*, 24) demonstrates how sound contributes to the communication of the meaning evoked by the sentence: the way in which De Meyer pronounces the words contributes to the imagery that is evoked through them. The first part of the sentence is pronounced at a higher pitch, which provokes the flying image of the weightless branches. In the last part — when the branches fall down — her pitch falls down as well. *new skin*'s use of sound differs considerably from natural speech that is 'primarily a matter of communication, of a "transparency" toward something that is not itself speech' (Ihde 2007: 156). In De Meyer's performance the sounds do not function as seemingly transparent vehicles that contain semantic meanings but rather they more explicitly draw attention to themselves. De Meyer's conscious use of the power of the sounds of words occurs also in a less literal manner. In the beginning of the performance, when she asks us to imagine a museum, her voice is rather low-pitched, she speaks at a low pace, and her way of speaking is close to singing. These sounds enrich the words with a sacral quality so that the museum is imagined as a very mystical place. Sounds, pitch, tone, and intonation of words and sentences are less used as devices to transform De Meyer into a dramatic character, than as tools to assist us in imagining the scenery that she describes.

As the above paragraph aims to make clear, sound is an essential component of kinetic textuality in *new skin*. It highlights the text's rhythm and interacts with De Meyer's (moving) body. Throughout the entire performance we are enmeshed in the dynamics of words whose meanings are coloured by sounds, movements, and our own imagination. During the pronunciation of the sentence 'interrupted by flashes of light, white flashes, flashes of white light, white lights flashing' (*new skin*, 11), De Meyer slowly moves back and forth with blinking eyes. The phenomenon of white flashing lights corresponds with the rhythm established in the text of a rapid acceleration of repetition and revision of the words 'flash', 'white', and 'lights'. The meaning of the sentence

is communicated through the relations between the words, rather than through the separate words. The sounds evoked by this sentence, which are pronounced at a slow pace while pronouncing the 'f' 'l', and 'i' letter sounds for slightly longer than the other sounds, contribute to the image and pace of the white flashing lights. De Meyer's movements further contribute to both the rhythm and the meaning of the sentence, which in turn influence the movements. Importantly, and this is what De Meyer's unconventional performance style helps us to recognise, the interactions between text, movement, rhythm, body, and sound are pre-existent to the separate elements — they are fundamentally and intricately intertwined. By foregrounding the central role of sound in the interaction between text, movement, rhythm, and body, *new skin* offers an important extension to Merleau-Ponty's reflections on the relation between gesture, speech, and embodiment in the creation of meaning.¹⁰

10. For a phenomenological analysis of sound, see also: Ihde, Don. 2007. *Listening and Voice: Phenomenologies of Sound*, 2nd edn (Albany: State University of New York Press). Ihde's post-phenomenological studies of sound and voice are influenced by a Merleau-Pontian framework concerning speech and language. Where Merleau-Ponty primarily looks at language from the perspective of embodiment and signification, Ihde more explicitly emphasises the auditory quality inherent to the interaction between language and body, arguing that sounds actively contribute to the meanings and connotations of words.



new skin, by Hannah De Meyer, performed by Hannah De Meyer
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new skin as a Collective Song: Between Immersion and Critical Distance

Now that I have established the network of interacting performative elements, it is time to consider how kinetic textuality functions as a narrative strategy in *new skin*. As Merleau-Ponty writes, ‘words, even in the art of prose, carry the speaker and the hearer into a common universe by drawing both toward a new signification’ (1964: 75). It is against the background of the entire network of text, movement, rhythm, body, and sound that we can consider how this ‘common universe’ is created in De Meyer’s performance. To do so, let us turn to another excerpt:

inside you is the echo of a hundred million people
moving inside of you
moving your body
moving their arms
shaking their heads
people that move
move restlessly
move in and out of schools
move in and out of houses
move in and out of work
in and out of cars
in and out of trains
getting up
getting up in the middle of the night
in and out of bed
(*new skin*, 21)

During the enactment of this excerpt, we are drawn into the performance by listening to the oscillation between the text’s rhythm and by watching the effect of rhythm on De Meyer’s body. By voicing this neatly composed rhythmic piece of writing, De Meyer not only communicates its content but also transmits the movement portrayed within the writing towards *our* bodies, the bodies of the audience members. When we digest poetic rhythm, as Richards explains, we experience ‘a vast cyclic agitation spreading all over the body, a tide of excitement pouring through the channels of the mind’ ([1924] 2004: 127). North-American literary scholar Tenney Nathanson terms this phenomenon ‘kinetic identification’, which primarily refers to the sensation of movement within the reader’s body, resulting from the reader’s interaction with a poem that exposes movement in terms of content and/or in terms of composition (2016: 397). As such, by listening to De Meyer’s rhythmic piece of writing, we experience the movement that her text portrays.

This transmission of movement is further enforced through her (physical) movements. Although De Meyer does not mimic the movements described in the previous excerpt (she does not perform the action of getting up out of bed, for example), her movements do evoke the scenery of people hurriedly and energetically moving. The pace of her movements slightly increases throughout the fragment: her upper body quietly bounces to the rhythm of her text while her head shakes — first slowly, then heavily — to follow the text’s rhythm. The sensation of movement portrayed by De Meyer’s bodily movements reaches the audience’s bodies by means of what dance scholars call ‘kinaesthetic empathy’ (Fabius 2009; Reason and Reynolds 2010; Hansen et al. 2017; Garner 2018). Kinaesthesia refers to the ‘the proprioceptive sense of movement within our own bodies’ (Sklar 2008: 87). Through kinaesthetic empathy, the spectators can register the movements made by performers in their own bodies. This explains ‘how dance communicates upon the assertion that viewers actively partake in the same kinaesthetic

experience as the dancers they are watching onstage' (Foster 2011: 7). So when spectators perceive movement on stage, they do not only grasp it visually, through their eyes, but also kinaesthetically, through their own muscular and sensorial system. As a result, the audience's bodies become entangled with De Meyer's moving body. Although they remain seated, the audience's sense of kinaesthesia enables them to move together with De Meyer. It is fascinating how in *new skin* this transmission of movement from the performer to the audience also happens through the text, through the 'kinetic identification' which is pursued by means of the rhythmicity of the text. As a result, *new skin* triggers a kinaesthetic sensation that is simultaneously textual and corporeal, simultaneously lingering on auditory and visual senses, while the spectator's body functions as the mediator in which all these experiences take place.

Even though a hypnotic effect is established through the perception of bodily and textual rhythm and movement, at the same time *new skin* actively engages us to use our imagination. This is primarily accomplished through the use of the recurrent pronoun 'you' as discussed above but is further enhanced by the text's miscellaneous narrative structure that is primarily built around rhythmicity and musicality. These interventions in terms of diction and composition draw explicit attention to the words' materiality and often somewhat less to their content. They thus challenge us in our attempt to keep track of what is being communicated. This extensive use of rhythm and sound in *new skin* affirms what Jarcho would call the text's "writtenness" (Jarcho 2014; Jarcho 2017). By being explicitly portrayed as writing rather than natural speech, *new skin*'s text remains an enigmatic entity 'whose verbal density [will not] dissolve into the immediacy of the performance, because its logic [is] somewhere else, somewhere beyond us' (Jarcho 2017: 206).¹¹ According to Jarcho, repetition and revision, as the means to anchor rhythm, are central vehicles to establish this sense of writtenness in theatrical texts (2017: 131-171). Through this, she explains, we 'find ourselves watching

a writer — or watching writing — work' (Jarcho 2017: 148). The genre of the monologue, then, following Jarcho, reinforces this quality of writtenness (2017: 181). By adopting certain compositional strategies, monologues can be portrayed as pieces of writing that 'elude our attempts to make meaning. In so doing, they enter the dimension of a content ungrasped and unrealized, a referent that disparages our co-presence by refusing to materialize here and now' (Jarcho 2014: 298). Jarcho's argument indicates how *new skin*'s formal features of rhythm, sound, and monologue profoundly impact the extent to which we, as an audience, have access to the text. Here the inaccessibility and sense of eeriness that results from the rhythmicity and associative character of the text occasionally complicate our immediate access to the text's content and meaning.

Within these moments, where we experience a certain distance between ourselves and De Meyer's performance, we become activated. By not being fully graspable within the here-and-now, the writing leaves room for individual reflection. As such, through the sense of elusiveness that these formal strategies activate, De Meyer's performance further mobilises our imagination. In this way, her compositional strategies tie in with and contribute to the dramaturgical intent of the performance of inviting us to participate in an imaginary journey through various landscapes and memories. In doing this, *new skin* activates rhythmicity and movement to draw us into De Meyer's story-world, yet not in a trance-inducing manner since the elusiveness resulting from the rhythmic and kinetic text counters the hypnotic effect and enhances the text's potential to address our imagination.

11. Jarcho's insistence on the friction between the inaccessibility of writing and the immediacy of performance should not be understood as a disguised form of the dichotomous view on text and performance, to which I referred at the outset of this article. Rather, she stresses that theatrical writing is primarily 'writing that demands enactment' (Jarcho 2014: 306). The friction between writing and the here-and-now of performance exists by virtue of their mutual involvement.

Concluding Remarks

The two thinkers with whose words I opened this article — I.A. Richards and Maurice Merleau-Ponty — stem from two divergent epistemic traditions, yet both have profoundly shaped the contours of my argument. In her critical and historical analysis of the relationship between text and performance as theorised within theatre and performance scholarship, North-American theatre and literary scholar Julia A. Walker convincingly traces the split between text and performance back to the opposition between the analytic and continental philosophical traditions, arguing that the ‘opposition upon which they are founded is essentially the same as that of the text/performance split’ (2006: 20). In the analytic tradition, Walker includes New Critic approaches to literature that ‘bore within...[them] a bias against explicitly performative genres’ (2006: 25). Phenomenologist Edmund Husserl’s work epitomises the other position of continental philosophy wherein the focus on subjectivity functions as a crucial methodological strategy. In order to think and move beyond this split between two seemingly irreconcilable stances, Walker explains, it is useful to merge the objective analytical viewpoint with ‘an experience of the world as registered within our body’ (2006: 39). According to her, this dialectical approach is especially useful for theatre and performance scholars. Not only does it help them to move beyond the text-performance split, they are also dealing with ‘an art form devoted to just this kind of oscillation’ (Walker 2006: 38). I have sought to adopt this oscillation as a methodological framework through which I looked at *new skin*. It has offered me a way to approach the folds in between text, movement, rhythm, body, and sound, that is the fascinating junction where theatrical (and even choreographic) experiment takes place.

In *new skin* I found an exemplary case of what I call ‘kinetic textuality’. This is the tendency to use text in relation to or as a means for movement.

Since speech presents itself as writing on stage and performative traces reside within text, this two-fold approach was crucial to analyse the network of text, movement, rhythm, body, and sound in *new skin*. De Meyer, by being both the playwright and the performer of *new skin*, personifies the now commonly accepted intertwinement of text and performance. Her extensive use of bodily movements in relation to a ‘moving’ text, however, urged me to place more emphasis on embodiment as the locus of this interrelation. By analysing De Meyer’s performing style in relation to her specific style of writing, I have demonstrated how text and movement relate to each other in different ways and emphasised the intricate intertwinement of body and language. I have outlined how rhythm operates in the performance and how sound plays a central role in the verbal delivery of writing. In the last part of the article, I approached kinetic textuality as a narrative strategy. Even though rhythm and monologue sometimes establish the hypnotic effect of the performance, they just as much undo this effect by refusing to become fully accessible in the here-and-now and by activating the spectator’s individual thoughts. In the ambivalent space between these two divergent effects, De Meyer’s performance simultaneously establishes embodied immersion and critical distance. Consequently, by using kinetic textuality in the genre of the monologue, *new skin* moulds, kneads, and weaves an entangled web of images that nourishes the audience’s imagination.

The close analysis of *new skin* outlined here has frequently emphasised that the act of speaking is not simply done ‘by a mind to a mind, but by a being who has body and language to a being who has body and language, each drawing the other by invisible threads like those who hold the marionettes — *making* the other speak, *think*, and become what he is but never would have been by himself’ (Merleau-Ponty 1964: 19). Above all, in this article, it has been my intention to indicate that any analysis of theatrical language eventually has to take the body seriously — both the body that produces the text through voice and gesture and the bodies of the spectators perceiving the text. •

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Returning to Lacanian

Psychoanalytic Theory and the Uses of Language
in Rehearsal Processes of
European Contemporary Dance

DAVID RITTERSHAUS

Zusammenfassung

In diesem Artikel setzte ich mich mit der Rolle und den unterschiedlichen Gebrauchsweisen von Sprache innerhalb kreativer Prozesse des europäischen zeitgenössischen Tanzes auseinander. Indem ich mich hauptsächlich auf die Entstehung von William Forsythes Performance *Sider* (2011) konzentriere, aber auch einige andere Beispiele wie Taneli Törmäs *Effect* (2019) berücksichtige, gehe ich einer Sprache nach, die versucht, Bewegungskonzepte greifbar zu machen. Dabei stützte ich mich auf ein Verständnis von Sprache, das auf die Psychoanalyse Lacans und seiner Theorie des Signifikanten zurückgeht und entwickle eine Lesart seines Werkes, die die vorherrschende Ansicht in Frage stellt, dass innerhalb eines Lacanschen Rahmens der (tanzende) Körper zwangsläufig in seinen Möglichkeiten eingeschränkt ist, weil er in einem kulturellen und ideologischen Raster gefangen bleibt oder sozialer Normativität unterliegt. In dem Versuch einer Revitalisierung Lacans diskutiere ich die einflussreiche Kritik seiner psychoanalytischen Theorie durch Gilles Deleuze und Félix Guattari, deren eigenes philosophisches Werk in der aktuellen Tanzwissenschaft eine große Rolle spielt und in der die Psychoanalyse folglich ihre Anziehungskraft verloren hat. Indem ich nicht nur die Divergenzen, sondern auch die Gemeinsamkeiten zwischen Lacan und Deleuze/Guattari beleuchte, möchte ich zeigen, welchen Wert Lacans Sprachtheorie noch immer für die Untersuchung der komplexen Beziehung zwischen sprachlichem Ausdruck und körperlicher Bewegung im zeitgenössischen Tanz haben kann.

KEYWORDS

Language, dance, body, Lacan, Deleuze

SCHLÜSSELWÖRTER

Sprache, Tanz, Körper, Lacan, Deleuze

Summary

In this article, I examine the role and different uses of language within the creative processes of European contemporary dance. Focusing mainly on the creation of William Forsythe's performance *Sider* (2011), but also considering a few other examples such as Taneli Törmä's *Effect* (2019), I trace a search for language that helps to make movement concepts tangible. In doing so, I draw on a concept of language that follows from Lacan's psychoanalysis and his theory of the signifier. By returning to Lacan, I develop a reading of his work that challenges the predominant view that, within a Lacanian framework, the entry into the symbolic order means the (dancing) body is inevitably limited in its possibilities because it is either caught in a cultural and ideological grid, or subject to social normativity. In this attempt to revitalise Lacan, I discuss the influential critique of his psychoanalysis by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, whose own philosophical work has been particularly prominent in recent dance studies where psychoanalysis consequently lost its interpretative appeal. By shedding light on not only the divergences but also the commonalities between Lacan and Deleuze/Guattari, I intend to show what value Lacan's theorisation of language still might have for probing the complex relationship between linguistic expressions and bodily enactment within contemporary dance.

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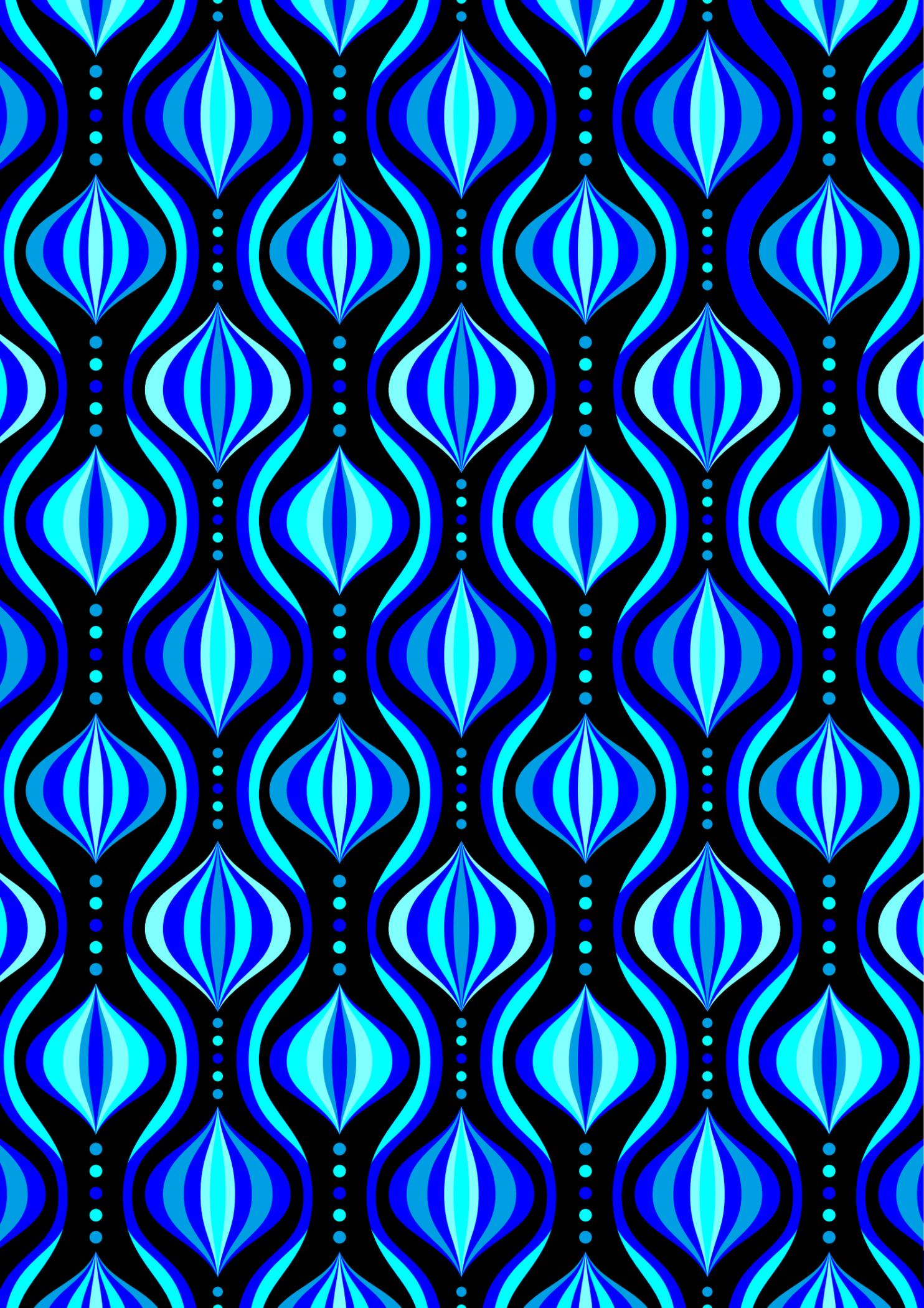
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Starting Point: The Rehearsals of William Forsythe's *Sider*

Seven dancers move in a large rehearsal studio with a white floor and white walls, located in an old industrial hall. Each of the dancers carries a door-sized piece of brown cardboard, pushing it in front of them and covering their own or other dancers' bodies with it — sometimes completely, sometimes only partially. Some put the cardboard vertically, others hold it horizontally. How they use it seems to change all the time. One moment they are moving it in a directed way, the next they are dragging it along or deliberately hindering their own movement with it. Although the dancers sometimes move fast and get close, they never bump into each other. Neither their bodies, nor the large cardboards ever touch. Instead, sudden turns can be observed at the very moment when two dancers face each other. They all seem to have their own way of moving in space: some stick to their path rigorously, while others react more strongly. However, they always remain a group that never breaks apart. Whilst each individual always seeks contact and confrontation with the others, no one separates or forms a second grouping. All together, these ways of interacting result in a complex activity, even when the movement of each individual may be rather simple. The scene, however, does not reveal a clear principle. There is no apparent image, no straightforward metaphor that could be 'read', no obvious meaning to be recognised in the actions. Instead, there is a compelling formation of bodies and pieces of cardboard that is continuously changing according to its own inner logic that catches and holds the attention of the observer.



William Forsythe's *Sider* performed on the stage of Festspielhaus Hellerau Dresden in 2011
© Dominik Mentzos

These impressions are derived from a rehearsal of The Forsythe Company in the midst of the creation process of *Sider*, which premiered in June 2011 at the Festspielhaus Hellerau in Dresden. During this rehearsal on 11 May 2011, about a month before the premiere, choreographer William Forsythe interrupted the activity of the dancers to describe to them why the sequence was working so well in his opinion: ‘You are in the situation that you created by making the rules. This gives it a different form of awareness. [...] There’s a complexity that no one could have choreographed.’¹ To understand what kind of rules William Forsythe is referring to, the documentation of the rehearsal process is revealing. Some of the rules, for instance, are mentioned explicitly in the video annotation — such as: ‘Esther: If Josh [is] in her vision she turns 45 degrees’.² But it also becomes perfectly clear from the documentation that these rules are not simply being imposed

by the choreographer on the dancers. Instead, they are developed by the team in a way that creates a system enabling the dancers to move together without the movement being precisely prescribed by one choreographer-as-author.

1. Annotation within the *Piecemaker* rehearsal archive. Annotation ID: 18784, 11.05.2011; Author: Freya.

2. Ibid.

This inside look into the creation of *Sider* is possible thanks to having access to the recordings that The Forsythe Company made of their rehearsals, which include not only digital video but also notes and annotations. Through my own work for Motion Bank, a project that was originally initiated by William Forsythe as part of The Forsythe Company between 2010 and 2014,³ I have had the opportunity to view excerpts

3. Motion Bank is currently located at Mainz University of Applied Sciences and co-directed by Florian Jenett and Scott deLahunta. The project is dedicated to the development of methods, practices, and tools for the documentation, analysis, and transmission of dance knowledge, choreographic processes, and movement practices using digital media and technologies. For more information on the current work of Motion Bank, see: <https://medium.com/motion-bank> [accessed 14 January 2021].

from the extensive rehearsal documentation, which is otherwise not accessible. There is something unique about these recordings that is directly related to the issues that I want to address in this article. Dance rehearsals recorded on video usually show a selection of moments in which people actually dance because the main purpose of these recordings is to support movement recall, either during the creation of a piece or for later restagings. The recording and retrieval of video material has indeed become an integral part of rehearsal work. As Mark Franko observes, the increasing availability of technology has made it possible for video recording to ‘become a rehearsal methodology’ and for dancers to ‘become adept at reversing the video image to reproduce movement in their own bodies’ (2011: 330). What is rarely recorded, however, are the conversations between the dancers themselves or with the choreographer; the discussions in which experiences, observations, thoughts, and impressions are verbalised. Similarly, even though rules for improvisations, like those described in the example above, are certainly noted down somewhere, they typically remain scattered in the notebooks of dancers, dramaturges, and choreographers. The Forsythe Company tried to overcome such a fragmentary accumulation of unstructured traces by experimenting for six years (2008–2014) with a documentation practice in which almost every rehearsal was not only entirely captured on video, but also supplemented with textual commentaries at the same time as it was recorded using a software program called *Piecemaker*.

Several scholars have already discussed the specificities of the fairly innovative approach developed by The Forsythe Company, mainly addressing the use of new technologies in dance documentation (deLahunta 2015; deLahunta & Jenett 2016; Rittershaus 2020). In this article, I want to shift the general focus of this discourse from technology towards language by asking what role language might play in dance rehearsal.⁴ Even though dance is typically considered a non-verbal art-form that takes the moving body as its primary medium, the spoken

← 4. A similar kind of shift from technology to language has recently been pursued by Scott deLahunta (2020), who as a dance scholar has been involved in many projects aimed at the transmission of choreographic knowledge through digital technology.

and written word does serve pivotal functions in creating dance work. Shedding light on these functions, which are often eclipsed by a focus on either the body or technology, is one of the primary aims of this article. To this end, the work of William Forsythe and particularly his

piece *Sider* provide an exemplary case, precisely because of the centrality of language both in the rehearsal studio and on stage. Nonetheless, throughout this article, I will also refer to a few other choreographers, such as Taneli Törmä or Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker, and consider how they use specific terms or verbal descriptions to communicate about their artistic intentions or choreographic principles.

A screenshot of the *Piecemaker* recording and annotation software used by the Forsythe Company to document rehearsals. This moment shows the common work of dancers and choreographer concerning the rules for moving in a group together with the cardboards. Annotations by Freya Vass-Rhee.

The screenshot shows the PIECEMAKER software interface. At the top, there is a navigation menu with 'About Piecemaker', 'Pieces', and 'Admin'. Below the menu, the video title is 'Sider' and the video file is '20110511_004_Sider.mp4'. The video player shows a rehearsal scene with dancers and large cardboard pieces. To the right of the video player is a list of annotations with timestamps and descriptions. The annotations are:

- 02m18s** [set in](#) [set out](#) [MENU...](#)
Discussion of April 22 material (from start of video)
- 03m32s** [set in](#) [set out](#) [MENU...](#)
Group with rules and slowing down before goal
- 06m43s** [set in](#) [MENU...](#)
Going again. Includes rule of reversing to avoid bumping. Esther: If Josh in her vision she turns 45 degrees Josh Fabrice: Ander
- 09m27s** [set in](#) [MENU...](#)
Again with change of rule person and changing back.

 It's only interested if we can see that you are thinking and strategizing; then you are interesting and obscured, and interesting again and obscured. Occasionally you can break the rule e.g. of slowing down before goal; we will notice the shift in dynamics.
- 20m28s** [set in](#) [MENU...](#)
Again
Jone stays with same two people; others alternate between person A and anyone else; We get hypnotized by the idea of producing but there's a lot of production going on in the scene; we have to find a level where it is still discursive.
- 24m11s** [set in](#) [MENU...](#)
Again focusing on feel of the board (VERY GOOD RUN)
The mood changed in the last couple of minutes as you got deeper into it. In the non-connected one it looks like the order came from above; this one looks like the decision came from you and you are in the situation created by the rules; gives a different form of attention, and there's a complexity that no one could have choreographed. If it stays that focused it can sustain itself because you see both the people and the boards, but otherwise it does not work.

Going Against the Tide: Revitalising Lacan

To illuminate the role and uses of language in dance rehearsal processes, I want to return to the psychoanalytic theory of Jacques Lacan, primarily because he provides a specific account of language that might be valuable for my endeavour here. As Slavoj Žižek explains, language within a Lacanian framework does not correspond to ‘a Habermasian ideal form of argumentation and communication’, but rather refers to ‘language in all its inconsistent materiality, full of overlapping, holes, and lateral links’ (2017: 41).⁵ In this regard, an important aspect of Lacan’s approach — one that is also crucial for my purposes — is how he strives to undermine the dualism between ‘body’ (material) and ‘language’ (immaterial). The potential for overcoming such dualisms is not exclusive to a Lacanian approach and, as I will demonstrate, there are intriguing crossovers with some of his fiercest critics in this respect as well.

Yet why do I propose ‘returning to Lacan’? This question needs to be raised since, within the field of dance and performance studies, making reference to Lacan might seem like an outdated, even obsolete, move. Dance scholar Stefan Apostolou-Hölscher provides some of the theoretical background for this rather devalued status of Lacanian psychoanalysis. He observes how, from the 2000s onwards, dance studies has increasingly shifted away from ‘rather text-centred performative

5. Even though throughout this article I will draw on Slavoj Žižek to clarify certain Lacanian concepts, I want to point out that I do not necessarily affirm his reading of Lacan beyond the discussed aspects. Especially with regard to feminist and queer theory, Žižek’s stance can be quite infuriating. The same applies to his attacks on so-called particularism or the attempt of certain minorities to (re-)claim their identity as a group. A critical discussion of Žižek’s universalism is offered by Mari Ruti (2018).

theories, such as that [*sic*] advanced by Judith Butler’ (2014: 79). While the 1990s are marked by the discursivisation of the body that helped ‘dance become more intellectual and self-reflexive’, Apostolou-Hölscher notes how this perspective hardly allows one to imagine bodies outside of a cultural and ideological grid (*ibid.*). A ‘body being understood in terms of language’ can parody the grid and subvert discourse, but it can hardly create ‘new concepts of what it can do’ (*ibid.*). What is known as the ‘linguistic turn’ was thus followed by the so-called ‘affective turn’, which in dance studies served to foreground ‘affective bodies’ (*ibid.*: 81) with ‘their capacity to affect and to *be affected*’ (*ibid.*: 82).

While it is not my intention to contradict the importance of ‘affect’ for dance or other fields of research, the heightened focus on the body’s sensations and innate potentialities does seem to have led to a lack of attention upon the role of language and discursive knowledge in embodied practices like dance.⁶ Close observation of creative processes in dance, however, clearly reveals the continued importance of spoken and also written language, which prompts the Lacanian perspective that I will be adopting here. According to philosopher Mari Ruti, Lacanian theory and affect theory ‘are frequently pitted against each other as wholly discordant’ (2018: 4). Indeed, in terms of theoretical paradigms, my proposal for a Lacanian approach seems to conflict with the philosophical foundations of the ‘affective turn’, as developed most notably by Brian Massumi (2015) and Erin Manning (2013), who both draw extensively on the philosophy of Gilles Deleuze and his work in collaboration with Félix Guattari. Even beyond the ‘affective turn’, the philosophy of Deleuze and Guattari seems to have a predominant role in dance and performance studies today. Whilst Laura Cull in her volume *Deleuze and Performance* could still posit that ‘Deleuze remains strangely

6. For a similar critique on how the affective turn has deflected attention away from the interaction between sensory experience and discursive kinds of knowledges, particularly in relation to re-enactment as a form of affective historiography, see De Laet (2017).

neglected' (2009: 4) within performance studies — particularly when compared to the influence of deconstruction — only half a decade later, and especially in dance studies, many works refer to the philosophy of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (Lepecki 2006; Sabisch 2011; Cvejić 2015; Lepecki 2016; Burt 2017).⁷

Given my aim to offer a Lacanian counter-proposal to this predominance, it will be necessary to address the infamous 'rupture' between Deleuze/Guattari and Lacan while also taking a closer look at their commonalities. Nonetheless, my primary aim in this article is to elucidate the specific value of Lacan's 'negative' ontology and his theory of the subject of the unconscious for probing the complex relationship between dance and language. Lacan's thinking, I will argue, is particularly pertinent for any reinforced engagement with 'language' that wants to circumvent the equation of language with the construction of meaning as well as with the subordination of the body to discourse or normative ideologies.

The Impossibility of the Law

To get a better idea of how language can be used as a devising strategy in dance creation beyond the development of a system of rules, I want to return to the rehearsals for *Sider*. The prominent function of language in the creation of this piece is poignantly described by former Forsythe Company dramaturg Freya Vass-Rhee. In her 2019 text *Haunted by Hamlet: Devising William Forsythe's Sider*, Vass-Rhee recounts how various linguistic means — including spoken language, written words, and signs

⁷ It should be noted that differentiating between Deleuze and Guattari and their respective influence can be difficult. Even when scholars primarily identify with Deleuze's thinking, the volumes he co-authored with Guattari are frequently referenced as well.

— were used throughout the choreographic process. At the beginning of the rehearsal period, for example, Forsythe conducted a humorous mock interview with the dancers, pretending the premiere had already taken place and interviewing them about it. Vass-Rhee explains how this interview was subsequently incorporated into the rehearsal process:

From this dialogue [...] emerged a list of over 100 neologisms like *bohemian girl opera*, *grounded Luft*, *Fabricabun*, and *victory legumes*. Returning to a mapping process he had used during the making of *ALIE/N A(C)TION* in 1992, Forsythe [...] told the dancers to map the terms onto paper in any way that made sense to them. The dancers would then choreographically translate their maps into the full space of the room however they individually chose (2019: 460-461).

The resulting maps were further transformed and eventually provided the dancers with individual scores that were combined in various ways, not only during the rehearsal process but also when the piece was performed on stage. As Vass-Rhee mentions, the method of creating maps that were translated choreographically was not first introduced for *Sider* but already used in Forsythe's earlier piece *ALIE/N A(C)TION* (1992). In his discussion of this latter work, dance and theatre scholar Gerald Siegmund usefully considers the challenges the mapping method poses to the dancers:

First, bodies and their movements here are always linked to, hooked up with, and engendered by specific chains of signifiers. [...] Second, the maps created provide a surplus of potential information that is impossible to realize in its totality. The bodies of the dancers are constantly confronted by an impossibility that positions them in a specific relation to the document (Siegmund 2012: 208).



A moment from William Forsythe's *Sider*, performed at Festspielhaus Hellerau Dresden in 2011
© Dominik Mentzos

The impossibilities Siegmund hints at essentially consist of two components that are also at work in Forsythe's *Sider*. On the one hand, some of the information relayed to the dancers may confront them with impossible tasks. When performing *Sider*, for example, the dancers may receive live instructions asking them to count the lace holes of the shoes of all the other dancers while they need to continue dancing and fulfilling other tasks.⁸ On the other hand, it is impossible for the dancers to pay attention to every layer of information they receive, which in the case of *Sider* includes live directions, rules systems, maps and their choreographic translations. While performing, they can only respond selectively to these prompts and make their own spontaneous decisions about what to include and how to perform it. Ultimately, Siegmund claims, Forsythe's approach results in a dance that is seen with a choreography underlying it:

The impossibility of the tasks leads to a choreography that cannot be realized in total. What the audience sees during a performance is always only a version of that spurious abstract totality encoded in signs, letters, and graphemes that can appear nowhere in its totality. (Siegmund 2012: 209)

What interests me in Siegmund's perspective on Forsythe's choreographic practice is the larger theoretical framework informing his view, which is in fact a Lacanian understanding of the relation between the dancing body and choreography. Referring to the origins of choreography in Thoinot Arbeau's 1589 treatise *Orchésographie* and to André Lepecki's use of this text to define choreography 'as an answer to a call from and for the law' (2006: 26), Siegmund likewise aligns choreography with the law. The difference is that Siegmund conceives of the 'law'

8. This is an example of a live instruction from the documentation of the premiere of *Sider* (video '20110616_003_Sider.mp4' within the *Piecemaker* rehearsal archive, 0:42:20).

in a thoroughly Lacanian sense. According to Dylan Evans' *Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis* (1996), the law for Lacan denotes a legal-linguistic structure that is 'in fact no more and no less than the symbolic order itself' (1996: 101). Consequently, insofar as the aforementioned maps, graphemes, rules, and instructions belong to the symbolic order, Siegmund conceives of them as the Other⁹ of dance and defines their relationship to the body as one of alterity. Thus he claims that 'in the absence between the body and its manifold possibilities of moving and choreography, a negotiation of the relation between body and law takes place' (2012: 212).

When choreography is conceptualised in this particular way, it seems indeed questionable to speak only of a one-directionally imposed set of rules and norms, as Lepecki's understanding of choreography as law suggests. Whereas Siegmund asserts that this configuration opens up a space for the subject to appear, from another (non-Lacanian) perspective the body might appear limited in 'what it can do'. The body seems to be deprived of the possibility to free itself from or to overturn the norms inscribed in the symbolic order. To put it bluntly, what is at stake here is the creative potential of the dancing body to be aesthetically as well as politically productive.

9. For Lacan, the big Other denotes radical alterity, which he equates with language and the law, and as such it is inscribed in the order of the symbolic. The big Other is actually the symbolic order insofar as it stands for the other subject (in a secondary sense) and at the same time for the symbolic order that mediates the relationship to the other subject (Evans 1996: 136).

Lacan vs. Deleuze vs. Guattari

The question of how much agency the body can have within a Lacanian framework is one of the most contested issues in the critique of Lacanian psychoanalysis and his theory of the signifier in particular. This critique is probably articulated most influentially in the collaborative work of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. Their philosophy centres on the topic of the autonomous, unlimited capacity of the body, its productive force, and its independence from a symbolic layer. This is why, as I will discuss more in depth below, their thinking is particularly intriguing for dance practitioners and dance scholars alike. ‘What matters in a Deleuzian universe’, philosopher Peter Hallward notes, ‘is the creation or production of something, not its representation or signification’ (2010: 45-46). In contrast, as Alenka Zupančič observes, it is quite commonly and frequently asserted that ‘psychoanalysis only disintegrates, dismantles, separates, it is obsessed with negativity and lack, it never amounts to any affirmative, positive project (be it political or simply “human”)’ (2008: 38). These assumptions are sometimes coupled with accusations that Lacanian psychoanalysis sustains or even advocates heteronormativity, sexism, gender duality, and the traditional family model, as for example raised by Didier Eribon in his manifesto *Echapper à la psychanalyse* (2005).

Although these accusations have been rejected many times and shown to be weak (Zupančič 2017; Ruti 2017), their regular recurrence might convey the impression that there is a kind of compliance of Lacanian psychoanalytic theory with the prevailing normative (capitalist, heterosexual, androcentric) order. While it is true that Lacan is concerned with how subjects enter the symbolic order and cope with it (including

the norms it entails), he does not advocate normativity. He rather points out that the symbolic order — or what he calls ‘the big Other’ — is in itself inherently unstable because there is no position that could ensure its power. As Lacan explains, ‘I have absolutely no guarantee that this Other, owing to what he has in his system, can give me back, if I may express myself thus, what I gave him — namely, his being and his essence as truth. As I told you, there is no Other of the Other’ (Lacan 2019: 299). Lacan’s statement that ‘there is no Other of the Other’ can be understood to mean that there is no ‘objective’ point of view outside of the symbolic order that ultimately could justify and guarantee the prevailing symbolic (and normative) relations entailed by this order.

It is well known that, in their first co-authored volume *Anti-Oedipus* (1972), Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari strongly oppose some central concepts of psychoanalysis. For Slavoj Žižek, who polemically calls *Anti-Oedipus* ‘arguably Deleuze’s worst book’ (2004: 18), the cause for this purported ‘rupture’ with psychoanalysis is evident: Félix Guattari. Seconding this perception, Adrian Johnston states that the philosophy of the ‘non-Guattarianised Deleuze of 1967-9 [...] cross-resonate[s] strikingly with Lacanian psychoanalysis’ (2017: 194), specifically referring to Deleuze’s *Coldness and Cruelty* (1967), *Difference and Repetition* (1968), and *The Logic of Sense* (1969).¹⁰ Even within *Anti-Oedipus*, it seems worth recognising that Lacan himself ‘continues to appear as more of an ally than an opponent’ (Hallward 2010: 33). For instance,

¹⁰ It is striking that, at least at first glance, there is less literature dealing specifically with Guattari’s relationship to Lacan, which may be due to the fact that Guattari’s single-authored writings received less attention compared to Deleuze’s. However, there are some stronger biographical links since the psychiatrist Guattari attended Lacan’s earlier seminars. Moreover, as Janell Watson writes in *Guattari’s Diagrammatic Thought*, Guattari claimed ‘that he broke with the Lacanians, especially Miller, but never with Lacan himself’ (2009: 43). Watson emphasises that Guattari was ‘demonstrably inspired by Lacan’s formulas and topologies’ (*ibid.*: 16) and sheds light on some of the concepts that Guattari took from Lacan.

Deleuze and Guattari are definitely honouring Lacan's alternative take on Freud's Oedipus, as he refuses to 'enclose the unconscious in an Oedipal structure' but shows that Oedipus is 'nothing but an image' (Deleuze and Guattari 1972: 310; quoted in Hallward 2010: 33). Nonetheless, the noticeable proximity to Lacan clearly diminished in the course of the 1970s and, when Deleuze and Guattari publish *A Thousand Plateaus* in 1980, it is clear that 'nothing remains of their alliance with Lacan' (Hallward 2010: 34). This gradual distancing from Lacan, however, is certainly not only on account of Guattari's influence. Cross-resonances and intersections between Lacan and Deleuze should not obscure the fact that there are fundamental differences between the psychoanalytic theory of Lacan and the philosophy of Deleuze that make the two strands of thought difficult to reconcile. The Spinozist Deleuze, because of his insistence on the motif of the univocity of being, is hardly compatible with psychoanalysis. Whilst Lacan's theory is grounded in a fundamental lack that operates as a principle of negativity, Spinoza's rejection of negativity results, following Žižek, in the exclusion of 'the very symbolic order' and allows only for 'a purely positive network of causes and effects in which, by definition, an absence cannot play any positive role' (2004: 31).

Deleuzian Dance Studies

When compared to Lacan, there seem to be various aspects to Deleuze and Guattari's thinking that make their philosophy particularly appealing with regard to dance. To put it somewhat stereotypically, the differences between Deleuze and Guattari vis-à-vis Lacan can be seen as running between creativity and positivity versus negation and lack; multiple forms of expression versus the dominance of language; the capacity

to transform versus the restraining entanglement in a net of signifiers. Authors in dance studies rely on Deleuze and Guattari directly and indirectly in different ways and their positions sometimes openly contradict each other, yet they have a common ground in recognising a distinct potential in Deleuze's philosophy (including his joint work with Guattari). André Lepecki, for instance, explains Deleuze's value for dance studies through the shared interest in the specificity of bodily activity:

If there is one contribution I would like to propose to dance studies it is to consider in which ways choreography and philosophy share that same fundamental political, ontological, physiological, and ethical question that Deleuze recuperates from Spinoza and from Nietzsche: what can a body do? (Lepecki 2006: 6)

By drawing on Deleuze and his Spinozist leanings, Lepecki develops a view on dance according to which the body can only bear out its full capacity through the active encounter with affections, for which it must free itself from choreographic capture. Rather than developing a critique on choreography as a system of codification, dance scholar Bojana Cvejić relies on Deleuze for his critical stance toward representation and more specifically the tendency within philosophy to subordinate difference to identity or essences. Favouring Deleuze's contrasting 'expressionist' philosophy, Cvejić explains her interest as follows:

My approach is largely rooted in Deleuze's (and Spinoza's) philosophy, first and foremost regarding their understanding of expression and difference as ontological principles, and secondarily, regarding several ideas and concepts found therein that relate to expression, such as the agency of assembling (agencement), becoming affect, and sensation (Cvejić 2015: 16-17).

When foregrounding the influence of Deleuze and Spinoza on her approach to dance, Cvejić additionally avows that her ‘reading of Deleuze remains purposefully partial’ and that ‘we won’t be seeking yet another Deleuzian ally in dance’ (3). However, even if Deleuze’s theory is not entirely and fundamentally affirmed, there are definitely aspects to his thinking that seem to make it particularly interesting for grasping those kinds of performances that, as Cvejić claims, ‘cannot be accounted for by representational notions of thought’ and which defy straightforward interpretations that rely on ‘drawing a correspondence between certain forms of movement or bodies and a meaning’ (2015: 30).

Although Jacques Lacan develops a new conception of representation that arguably does not function in the sense criticised by Cvejić, it is true — as Peter Hallward notes — that Lacan does away with ‘any immediately expressive or productive conception of desire, being, or reality’ (2010: 44). The ‘positive’ or ‘affirmative’ perspective of Deleuzian-informed theory can thus be conceived in apparent contradiction with the ‘negative’ assumptions of Lacanian psychoanalysis. As such, scholarly discourse on dance seems to implicitly perpetuate Deleuze and Guattari’s criticism of Lacan’s theory of the signifier. This criticism is primarily targeted at the primacy Lacan attributes to signification and the symbolic (in the sense that the symbol constitutes the human subject and not vice versa) as well as at the assertion of an ontological negativity. Both aspects thus deserve further scrutiny if we want to assess the value of Lacan’s thinking for theorising the role of the body and language in dance.

The Role of the Signifier and the Impasses of Symbolic Logic

A closer look at one of Lacan’s fundamental assumptions with regard to the role of signifiers indeed reveals an understanding that seems hard to reconcile with the advocacy of an indefinite potential of the body. Rather, ‘creativity’ is ascribed to signifiers and their organising effects:

Before any experience, before any individual deduction, [...] [b]efore strictly human relations are established, certain relations have already been determined. They are taken from whatever nature may offer as supports, supports that are arranged in themes of opposition. Nature provides — I must use the word — signifiers, and these signifiers organize human relations in a creative way, providing them with structures and shaping them (Lacan 2004: 20).

According to Lacan, the subject is exposed to the autonomous operations of signifiers rather than being in control of them. Since the subject is subject *to* a system of symbolic creation that it does not have in its own hands, it must orient itself according to relations that have already been determined. It is not difficult to see how an assumption like this easily slips into the idea that the subject, and by analogy the body, is caught in a web of signifiers and gets stuck in a ‘cultural and ideological grid’ from which there is no way out.

However, even though Lacan places a strong emphasis on the laws of the symbolic, he is also fundamentally concerned with theorising the limits and dysfunctions of the law or the impasses of symbolic logic.

Common examples, like slips of the tongue, reveal such dysfunctions and indicate that there are discontinuities and disruptions in the chain of signifiers. The Lacanian subject may be exposed to the autonomous operations of the chain of signifiers, but it is not engulfed by this chain and rather marks the point of non-integration or malfunction (Shepherdson 2008: 12). It is also important to remember that in addition to the dimension of the symbolic, the imaginary and the real are of equal importance for Lacan. In fact, Lacan increasingly emphasised the inseparability of these three registers in his later seminars (see Collett 2017: 118). It is when we speak of the limits of the symbolic order that we encounter the dimension of the real, which according to Lacan is linked to the body and sexuality. Nevertheless, the Lacanian real does not denote a pre-linguistic reality, nor does it refer to a ‘natural’ or ‘biological’ body; rather, the real is related to a lack that arises within the symbolic order.¹¹ This brings us to the ontological negativity that, as we will see, also informs Lacan’s view on language but which first needs some further unpacking.

Zupančič explains how for Lacan a missing signifier is constitutive of the signifying order to the extent that the symbolic always appears with a built-in lack. She also points out that ‘it is *in the place of this gap* or negativity *that appears the surplus-enjoyment*’ (2017: 42; original italics). Enjoyment, as conceptualised by Lacan, is thus linked to the signifying order in a very specific way. Instead of being directly connected to the signifying order, enjoyment only comes to play its role through the lack or constitutive negativity of the signifying order:

11. This particular conception of the body is for Charles Shepherdson one of the key reasons why psychoanalysis is still relevant. ‘If psychoanalysis has taken on an increasing urgency today’, he claims in *Lacan and the Limits of Language*, it is because ‘psychoanalysis has perhaps the clearest conception of the real of the body as a material dimension of the flesh that exceeds representation, yet does not automatically refer us to a “natural” domain of “preexisting reality”’ (2008: 40).

This negativity is the the Real of the junction between the (missing) signifier and enjoyment; and the conceptual name for this configuration in psychoanalysis is sexuality (or the sexual). Sexuality is coextensive with the effect of the signifying gap, at the place of which surplus-enjoyment emerges, on the rest of the signifying chain (ibid.).

Zupančič treats sexuality as a logical or ontological problem, emphasising the ‘negative ontology’ of Lacanian psychoanalysis for which it is decisive that something is not there, missing. In her view, this is the only way to approach the dimension of the real. If we instead would consider sexuality as a matter of the body and its sensations, we would always end up in the imaginary realm. In Zupančič’s reading of Lacan, however, sexuality is neither to be located outside the signifying order (discourse) nor is it represented by a signifier, but it rather serves as the placeholder for the missing signifier. It emerges through the lack and at the same time it is ‘the *messy sewing up* of this gap’ (2017: 43).

The Lacanian conception of ‘language’ follows the same configuration. Lacan’s ‘logic of the signifier’ is predicated on a missing signifier because it is only then that signifiers start to ‘run’ across this gap and can relate to each other. ‘In this sense’, Zupančič claims, ‘speech itself is already a response to the missing signifier, which *is not* (there)’ (2017: 47). In Žižek’s words, the gap of the missing signifier is ‘the gap of an impossibility [that] language tries to cope with’ (2017: 41). Once again it becomes clear that the symbolic order cannot constitute itself as a consistent one, nor can language function without gaps, inconsistencies, and disruptions. In this respect, the absent signifier points to the ontological lack but only to reveal that this gap is ‘productive’ insofar as it has to be permanently bridged. We might further want to note that the same logic applies to the body, given that ‘the constitution of the body also depends on [...] the symbolic containment of lack’ (Shepherdson 2008: 5).

Lacan himself must have realised that the notion of ‘language’ does not necessarily convey what it should within psychoanalysis.¹² He therefore introduced the term *lalangue*:

Choreographing Language

And what we know how to do with llanguage [notation for *lalangue* by translator Bruce Fink; author’s note] goes well beyond what we can account for under the heading of language. Language affects us first of all by everything it brings with it by way of effects that are affects. If we can say that the unconscious is structured like a language, it is in the sense that the effects of llanguage, already there qua knowledge, go well beyond anything the being who speaks is capable of enunciating (Lacan 1999: 139).

Lacan’s notion of *lalangue* thus exceeds our common understanding of language as a *system* for relaying information through verbal or written communication. It rather points to the affective aspect of language, yielding a sort of enjoyment through the interplay of ambiguities. Moreover, *lalangue* can be understood as something ‘prior to language’, in the sense that language as a system (*langage*) is composed of *lalangue*. Interestingly, when Lacan states that the effects of *lalangue* manifest themselves by means of affects, he resorts to a term that will come to stand central in the overtly Deleuzian-inspired ‘affect theory’. This again raises the question whether Lacanian and Deleuzian strands of thought are really that incommensurable as generally perceived.

Returning to the creative process of William Forsythe’s *Sider*, we now might be able to identify a use of language that resembles more Lacan’s notion of *lalangue*. The mock interview that formed the starting point for the maps, for example, was specifically used as a game to escape from a language that produces meaning, and at the same time to generate absurd word combinations (e.g. ‘bohemian girl opera, grounded Luft, Fabricabun, and victory legumes’) through our ability to make contingent associations. During rehearsals, other forms of improvisation emerged that, to a certain extent, aimed to avoid a communication-oriented and controlled use of language, counting instead on its autonomous effects. Dramaturg Freya Vass-Rhee describes how, more or less by chance, Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* came to the fore from a larger corpus of literary and discursive texts that accompanied the process, yet without *Sider* becoming a Hamlet adaptation. She interestingly positions the treatment of the text within the artistic development of Forsythe’s oeuvre since the 2000s, when he ‘increasingly focused on the choreographic affordances of the sounds of speech itself’ (2019: 457). Whilst the content of the text becomes more or less irrelevant, the rhythmic structure is taken up and transferred to physical action. Sometimes the text is reproduced through the use of polyglossia or through the incomprehensible imitation of the words and then turned into the vocal part of the piece’s soundtrack. In the case of *Sider*, for example, there were moments during rehearsal when the dancers only looked at the *Hamlet* text for a very short time and then repeated it immediately afterwards, partly in their various mother tongues instead of English. What they could not remember, they were supposed to fill with babble, vocal sounds, or associated voice modulations. The rhythm and dynamics of

12. Notably, the English word ‘language’ stands for two different French words, namely ‘langue’ and ‘langage’: ‘langue usually refers to a specific language, such as French or English, whereas langage refers to the system of language in general, abstracted from all particular languages. It is fundamentally the general structure of language (*langage*), rather than the differences between particular languages (*langues*) that interests Lacan’ (Evans 1996: 99).

this idiosyncratic language was at the same time translated into physical movement, which influenced the babbling in reciprocal action.¹³

In order to slightly broaden my scope beyond Forsythe's devising strategies and the role of language therein, I want to turn to another choreographer whose work in the rehearsal studio illuminates the role of communication, verbal descriptions, and specific namings during the process of creating dance. The following excerpt is taken from my own documentation of the rehearsal process of *Effect* (2019), a choreography developed in close collaboration between Finnish choreographer Taneli Törmä and five dancers of the *tanzmainz* dance company at the Staatstheater Mainz:

Taneli Törmä [*choreographer*]: One thing about the focus. It's when you are in the 'Breakdancing'. You are there. I'm going to be— I'm sitting there [*indicating where the dancers are moving and from where he is watching*]. Normally it's somehow that when...when you are you stopping here... My— or I'm stopping— This is the circle [*showing where the dancers were moving in a circle before*]. And it's something— that there is something [*turning in spirals*]— Whoom. My eyes are going to there [*stopping and looking in a clear direction outside the stage area*]. And then I'm again in here [*moving in spirals again*], I don't— I can not see nothing before I— Yes. And I would like to have *Whoom* always outside.

Amber Pansters [*dancer*]: And are you, do you also move... for the Spirals back again? Or is it like the steps here? Keeps going in the same direction?

TT: I think when it's going like this, it's not— you don't do it. It's only... it's— If I'm doing it like this [*again turning in spirals*]: *Whoom... Whoom*. I'm just— And then when I'm going— yes!¹⁴

¹³. Of course, such unconventional uses of language cannot be accounted for exclusively by a Lacanian theoretical framework. In light of the rather ambiguous relationship between Deleuze and Lacan, it may be particularly interesting to consider Deleuze's notion of 'esoteric words', which he puts forward in *The Logic of Sense* (1969).



A video-still from the documentation of the rehearsals for Taneli Törmä's *Effect* in 2018 at Staatstheater Mainz, showing the dancers' and Törmä's work on what they called 'Breakdancing' or 'Breakdancer' at that time. Video: David Rittershaus.

The passage indicates how choreographer Taneli Törmä is searching for the 'right' words to describe a certain quality to the dancers that is related to the orientation of the gaze and which he would like to develop further. In doing so, he is responding to how he just perceived the dancers carrying out a specific choreographic phrase called 'Breakdancing'. However, language does seem to show its limitations — whilst Törmä makes clear that he wants to refine the dancers' focus, his sentences are fragmentary and interspersed with physical demonstrations of movements that he does not put into words. Moreover, for a quality for which he seems to have no concept, he uses the vocal gesture 'Whoom'.

← ¹⁴. <https://betweenus.motionbank.org/#/mosys/grids/3b99d756-aed4-4112-9fb5-e8362e349b6f>, video recording with subtitles, 25 September 2018, [accessed on 29 September 2020].

It must be acknowledged that in the particular example of Törmä and his dancers, few of them are speaking in their mother tongue. Even though this is very common in dance, it might put additional constraints on the attempt to find words for either specific movements or more general expressive qualities. However, apart from fluency in language, it can often be observed in dance rehearsals how those involved begin to search for wordings and descriptions for that ungraspable ‘something’ happening between bodies; for ‘something’ that is definitely there but not easy to verbalise. A linguistic gap is left where a physical gesture stands in for ‘something’ that cannot — or at least not easily — be verbally expressed. Instead, a non-linguistic vocal gesture takes the place of a term. My own phrasing here should give us pause, since it might suggest a distance between language and movement — if not a downright ‘failure of language’ — in the sense that words do not come close (enough) to the bodily dimension. But does this distance really exist? Or must we not assume that the inconsistencies in the wording of movement have more to do with the fundamental gap that language always already tries to cope with? Does it not rather have to do with the fact that language and the body find their common ground in trying to circumvent a constitutive lack, which is revealed when language cannot simply speak *for* the body but also *with* the body? The materiality of language, as put forward by Lacan, would support this conception. After all, Lacan avows that ‘speech is in fact a gift of language, and language is not immaterial. It is a subtle body, but body it is. Words are caught up in all the body images that captivate the subject’ (2006: 248).

While Lacan recognises close connections between words and bodies, at the same time he opposes the idea that language can enter into a transparent, neutral relationship with the objects it speaks about. The subject’s position is always already inscribed in it. This does not mean that the world and all the things out there do not exist without us or that we create them by means of language, but rather that we are

too much entangled with the world to be able to speak about it objectively from a detached point of view. Exactly this assumption leads to Lacan’s expression that ‘there is no metalanguage’ (Lacan 2006: 688). With this claim, Lacan aims to go against the scientific ideals of logical positivism, asserting that there is no language that could describe the world from the position of an ‘objective’ distance. For Lacan, terms, titles, or labels that can be mistaken for meta-linguistic designations actually serve a different function: they stand in for a missing idea that cannot be directly designated and which requires a substitute to be expressed. For such a stand-in, Lacan uses the term *Vorstellungsrepräsentanz*, which he translates as ‘representation’s representative’ but which literally would mean ‘ideational representative’. While Lacan adopts this term from Freud, in his own view it ‘is aimed at what, essentially, is not there, qua represented’ (Lacan 2004: 63). With his understanding of *Vorstellungsrepräsentanz*, Lacan does not simply refer to the mental representation of a thing, but to a placeholder for what is missing on the level of representation. It stands in for something which is not there; something absent or even repressed; something that cannot be located in any of the positive features of the object represented.

In the rehearsal excerpt quoted above, we can probably understand ‘Breakdancing’ as a name or title that takes on the function of a *Vorstellungsrepräsentanz*. As aforementioned, the term ‘Breakdancing’ refers to the section of the choreography that Törmä and his dancers are working on. In the way Törmä uses it, the name has nothing to do with breakdance as a dance style, but is related to the fairground carousel often called *Breakdancer*. The choreography of the five dancers in this section is indeed reminiscent of this type of carousel, as there is a circular movement of the group, while each dancer also spins around their own axis. Even though the title ‘Breakdancing’ tells us something about the formal composition of the movement, it neither really describes the phrase as it is, nor does it stand in for everything that comprises this

section. There is a lot more going on, including a specific way of using steps and differences in how the dancers relate to each other, which influences the spatial proximity and distance between them. The name, however, can be used in the context of rehearsals, in the communication within the team, and in written notes. As such, it refers to the movement with its specific qualities, functioning as a kind of index.

Similar examples of names functioning like indexes can be found in documents of other creative processes.¹⁵ In the mixed-media publication *En Attendant & Cesena: A Choreographer's Score* by choreographer Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker and performance theorist and musicologist Bojana Cvejić, one can discover in the textbook and DVDs a choreographic phrase called 'Parkinson Phrase', named after dancer Chrysa Parkinson. In this case, the title of the phrase does not reveal anything about the movement it aims to designate and rather functions like a personal name. In the textbook, however, the phrase is characterised as follows: 'abstract contours with refined details in extremities, in feet and how they touch the floor, how hands are articulated in the movement [...], proportioned mathematically, the phrase conveys a mysterious sense of narrative' (De Keersmaeker and Cvejić 2013: 47). On the DVD, De Keersmaeker talks further about the phrase, its role in the creative process, and how it was first developed by Chrysa Parkinson. Finally, the video shows Parkinson performing the phrase. The descriptions and characterisations and especially the demonstration give us an impression of what the phrase is about. The multimedial format of *A Choreographer's Score* thus reveals that the name 'Parkinson

¹⁵. In addition to the examples introduced here, one could also refer to the choreographic centre ICK Amsterdam, which conducted research on the so-called 'pre-choreographic elements' in the work of choreographer Emio Greco and dramaturge Pieter C. Scholten. Their aim was to identify specific names and terms, such as 'Abracadabra' or 'Around Ball', that might allow us to grasp particular moving concepts that inform the eventual choreographies. See <https://www.ickamsterdam.com/en/academy/dance-professionals/pre-choreographic-elements-9> [accessed 29 September 2020].



A moment from the rehearsals of *Effect* by choreographer Taneli Törmä and the dancers of the *tanzmainz* dance company at Staatstheater Mainz in 2018. Photo: De-Da-Productions.

Phrase' functions as a placeholder that not only makes it possible to refer to the phrase linguistically, but also stands for its physical enactment, its descriptions, and the movement qualities that can be attributed to it. This demonstrates how 'Parkinson Phrase' serves as a Lacanian *Vorstellungsrepräsentanz*: it not only comprises the sum of all the characteristics of the movement, but also includes what the verbal descriptions cannot grasp and thus remains missing on the level of representation.

De-interpreting Psychoanalysis

The idea that specific terms, labels, or names can function as placeholders can be linked to Lacan's theory of the signifier. In *Less than Nothing*, Slavoj Žižek describes the situation of someone wanting to explain a term X to someone who does not know it at all. Synonyms and paraphrases can help, but in the end we often have to say:

'In short, it is X!' Far from functioning as a simple admission of failure, however, this can effectively generate an insight – *if*, that is, through our failed paraphrases we have successfully circumscribed the *place* of the term to be explained. At this point, as Lacan would have put it, 'the signifier falls into the signified', the term becomes part of its own definition (Žižek 2012: 537).

But in what way can the signifier enter the signified? Lacan's answer to this question would be: 'in a form which, since it is not immaterial, raises the question of its place in reality' (Lacan 2006: 417). To understand this somewhat enigmatic statement, it is important to bear in mind that, according to Lacan, language is not something that subjects can simply use as a tool or 'organon'. In his view, subjects do not have sovereign control over the realm of speech. Instead, Lacan's theory of language grants autonomy to the chain of signifiers, which has specific repercussions for the production of meaning. As Alenka Zupančič explains, the chain of signifiers:

constantly produces, from within itself, quite unexpected effects of meaning, a meaning which is, strictly speaking, a surplus meaning that stains the signifiers from within. This is the locus of the

subject (of the unconscious). And it is precisely through this surplus meaning (bound up with surplus-enjoyment) that signifiers are irreducibly and intrinsically bound to the reality to which they refer; it is in this way that they 'enter the signified'. (Zupančič 2017: 61-62)

Following Zupančič, we can understand this surplus meaning as the reverse side of the constitutive negativity (or the missing signifier) that, as explained earlier, inscribes itself as absence in the signifying presence. The signifier enters the signified in the form of this surplus, that is, through the quasi-autonomous production of surplus meaning/enjoyment that ties the signifier to reality, creating as well as complicating the signifying relations.

The Lacanian complication with regard to signifying relations also challenges the assumption that psychoanalytic theory is linked to an 'over-emphasis on interpretation and the construction of meaning' (Cull 2009: 8). To the extent that the chain of signifiers produces meaning effects out of its autonomous movement, it is exactly this continuous movement that impedes full consistency in meaning. As Lacan points out, 'it is in the chain of the signifier that meaning *insists*, but [...] none of the chain's elements *consists* in the signification it can provide at that very moment' (2006: 419). William Forsythe's *Sider* is a telling example of how meaning effects, which may be unexpected but nonetheless hoped for, play a role in the creative process without effectively establishing a consistent level of meaning. As dramaturg Freya Vass-Rhee observes, the actual performance of *Sider* 'remains obscure, leaving its audience, like Hamlet, not knowing what to do in an interpretive sense' (2019: 471).

With respect to the question of interpretation, the specificity of psychoanalysis should not be disregarded either. According to Žižek, for Lacan 'psychoanalysis is not hermeneutics, especially not a deep form' (2012: 697). Rather, as Zupančič argues:

Psychoanalysis starts as an interpretation of symptoms. Yet, insofar as these symptoms are themselves already an interpretation, connection, synthesis of different elements, the work of analysis is actually the work of de-interpretation (Zupančič 2008: 36).

Looking at dance through the lens of psychoanalysis does not — or at least not necessarily — imply that one needs to go searching for meaning or interpretable symbols in the manifold activities of bodies, or neither to impose a rigid interpretative framework on them. If we follow Zupančič's claim that psychoanalysis is ultimately about 'de-interpretation' and the dissolution of a coherent narrative by means of free association, it might well invite us to embrace those situations in which we are at a loss for straightforward interpretation.

Conclusion: There's No Such Thing as a Knowing Subject

There is no doubt that language can be restrictive and that it sometimes does operate in the service of a hegemonic, normative order. However, equating what Lacan means by 'language' with the confinement of subjectivity would be short-sighted. Throughout this article it should have become clear that 'language' for Lacan is not a coherent system, neither does he use the word 'language' in the way we are used to. Indeed, one of the greatest challenges of Lacan's thinking is that he frequently uses terms in an unusual sense while also the meaning of certain key concepts keeps shifting as he never tired of revising them himself. In this respect, one sometimes needs to read Lacan against Lacan and trace the continual reconfiguration of his terminology (preferably with

an eye on the French original) in order to get a better grasp of the assumptions informing his writings and the transcripts of his seminars. My own endeavour in this article has consisted of offering a refined account of Lacan's understanding of language in order to foreground it as a potentially useful framework for examining the role of language in processes of dance making. Lacanian psychoanalysis offers a notion of 'language' that tries to cope with the gap of a signifier gone missing, which in turn is constitutive of the symbolic order. In this respect, I have pointed to the inscribed (and destabilising) inconsistencies in the realm of the symbolic, as well as to the gaps and malfunctions in what Lacan conceives of as language. For both, I have stressed their 'productive' functions, specifically with regard to the discussed examples from dance creation processes.

It is important to emphasise that 'returning' to Lacan and to a stronger focus on 'language' is not about restoring a sovereign, self-conscious subject and its knowledge paradigms. The subject of psychoanalysis is not a knowing, conscious, self-identical, sovereign, 'humanist' subject, accessing and mastering the world by means of 'language'. Lacan declares such an idea of the subject to be fiction:

It's only speaking bodies, as I said, that come up with an idea of the world as such. The world, the world of being, full of knowledge, is but a dream, a dream of the body insofar as it speaks, for there's no such thing as a knowing subject (*il n'y a pas de sujet connaissant*).
(Lacan 1999: 126).

I further suggest that looking at dance and the role of language in choreographic processes from the proposed perspective does not necessarily mean that the body remains out of sight or that it disregards the inherent potential of what a body can do. For Lacanian psychoanalysis, the body is not outside of language nor is language without body.

As the examples I have discussed demonstrate, the verbally defined rules that emerge during the creative process, the tasks, the terms for depicting concepts, the probing speech that searches for words — these can all be understood as the Other of the body. This is insofar as they are differential articulations that introduce an alterity and challenge any conceptions of the body as a self-contained entity. Conversely, insofar as these linguistic interventions depend on and inform the body, they show how the symbolic order is not merely the realm of speech and representation, but equally a matter of the body, embodiment, and affects. Based on these considerations, I suggest that a Lacanian perspective can provide an interesting counterweight to the influential prominence of Deleuzian philosophy in current dance and performance studies, precisely because it allows for a greater focus on the use and role of verbal as well as written language in dance making as well as its documentation. Perhaps contrary to common assumptions, returning to Lacan and paying close attention to the intricacies of his thinking provides us with a notion of language that does not fall prey to the construction of meaning and refuses to subordinate moving bodies to representational notions of thought.



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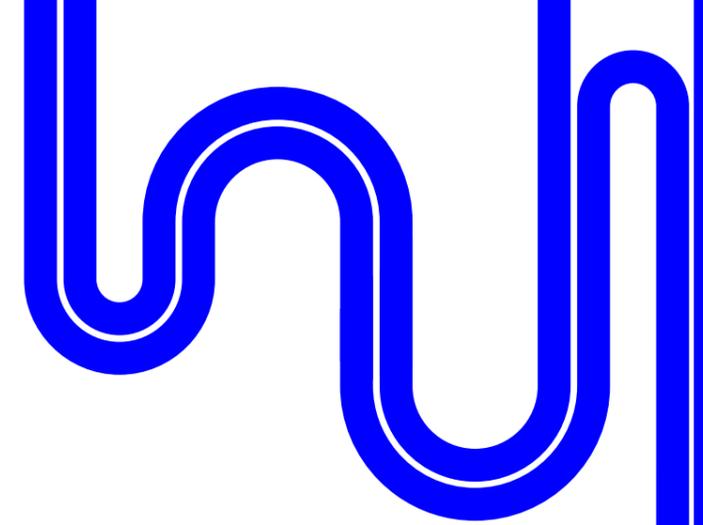
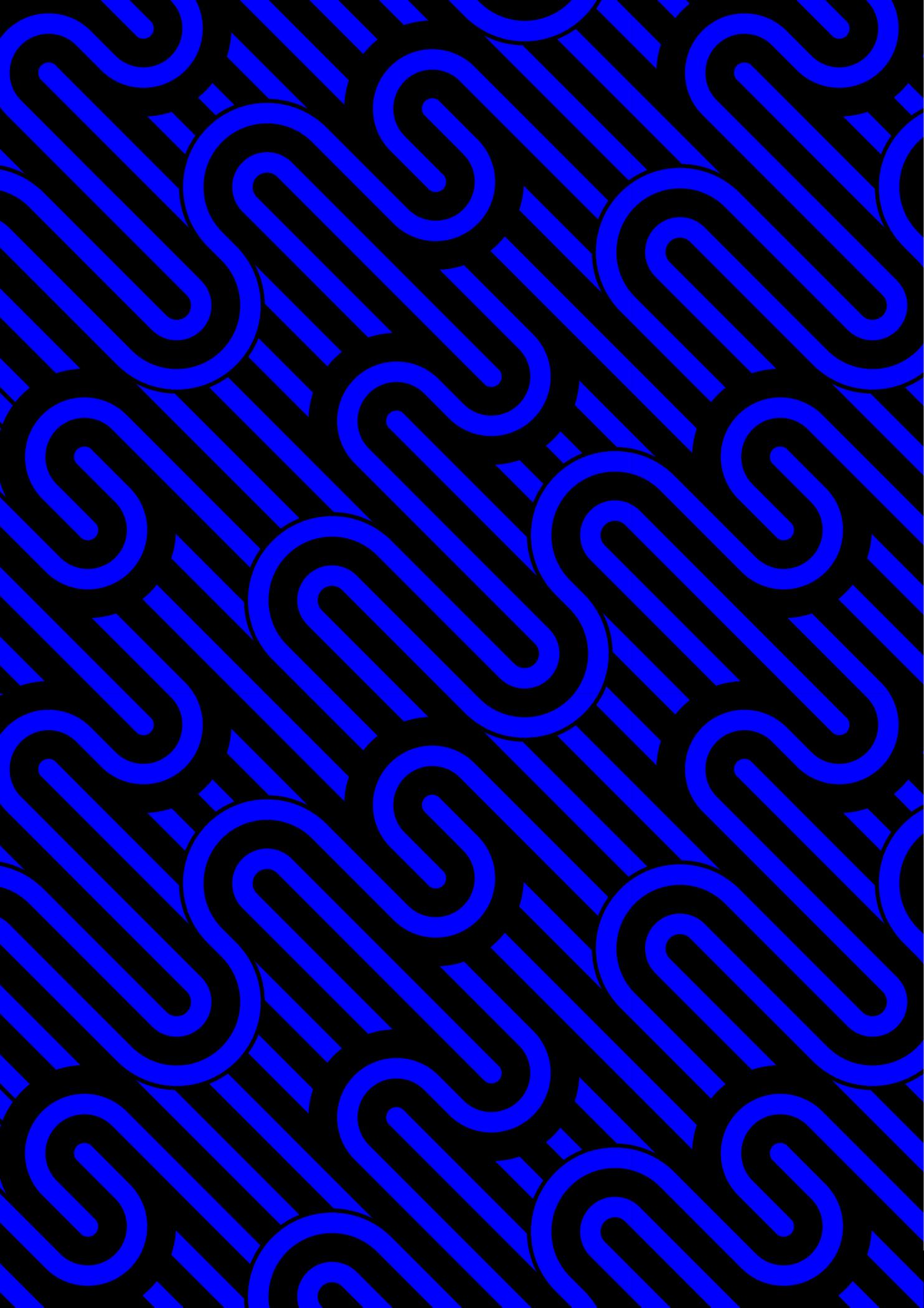
Artist in Focus

FC Bergman

GUEST EDITORS
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FC Bergman The Desire to Break Out

EVELYNE COUSSENS



FC Bergman was founded by the actors Stef Aerts, Bart Hollanders, Matteo Simoni, and Marie Vinck together with the artist Thomas Verstraeten, who all happen to have been born between 1982 and 1987. The group knew each other from their theatre studies at Artesis Hogeschool, which was previously known as the Herman Teirlinck Institute in Antwerp (Belgium). The first production they created as a company outside the institution walls was called *The Rock-Breaker* (*De Rotsebreker*, 2007). This play was an unusual fusion of scenes originating from Hugo Claus' work *The Life and Works of Leopold II* (*Het leven en de werken van Leopold II*) as well as scenes from Tom Lanoye's *Fort Europa*. Claus' text was grotesquely embellished with tacky scenes from musicals, an inflated elephant, and extras lathered in black makeup. This resulted in chaotic bursts of pleasure that were then countered with soberly recited excerpts from the *Fort Europa* text. After this first production, FC Bergman decided that they wanted to step away from their current reputation and manifest themselves as a legitimate theatre company. One year later, technical stage manager Joé Agemans joined 'Football Club' Bergman.

In 2008 a part of the group created *The Homecoming (De thuiskomst)*, a hard-hitting, anarchist adaptation of Harold Pinter's *The Homecoming*. On top of a huge pile of rubbish, dirt, and scraps of food, Pinter's cold family drama unfolds. In this rendition, the decor is ravaged, cars are driven onto the stage, and a dirty, dialectical use of language is unabashedly employed. Not only have FC Bergman succeed at blowing away their audiences with this adaptation, *The Homecoming* also managed to win the Jong Theaterprijs prize at the Theater Aan Zee festival in 2009. In that same year, the entire company was offered residence by Monty, a theatre in Antwerp. During 2009 FC Bergman put on several smaller performances. However, the production that would become of most importance for their future artistic direction would be *A preview on fragments of a new world (Voorproef op fragmenten van een nieuwe wereld)*, which stylistically resembles *The Rock-Breaker*. *Preview* is an installation consisting of a series of theatrical machines. FC Bergman put together the construction in one week, followed by a solemn inauguration of the performance by setting it into motion in the presence of an audience on the seventh day. With sheep flying through the sky and stars falling from the heavens, this wondrous creation initially promises an ideal world, until the machines fail... The surrealistic route of this performance created possibilities for further exploration.

That exploration magnificently results in the 2009 production with the unruly name *Walking down the Champs-Elysées with a tortoise to get a better view of the world, but it is hard to drink tea on an ice floe when everyone is drunk (Wandelen op de Champs-Elysées met een schildpad om de wereld beter te kunnen bekijken, maar het is moeilijk thee drinken op een ijsschots als iedereen dronken is)*. The performance, which was inspired by Dante's *Divina Commedia*, premiered in the neo-Gothic Oude Handelsbeurs located on the Meir in Antwerp and stunned the Flemish stage with its untamed passion, raw physical directness, baroque poetry, and bold range. Five characters exercise and train their immortality as they

wander on the enormous stage as puny people, each having their own strategy to exorcise death. Different mediums are employed in this associative sequence of tableaux: play, pyrotechnics, performance, and choreography are used alongside each other. The performance itself is also 'grand' in a literal sense as the viewers gaze is often lured skyward by the tall crane gracing the stage, the towering larger-than-life sized puppet and even by the occasional segments performed on the side balconies. However, it is the passion that lingers the longest: FC Bergman have a story to tell, with compelling urgency, even though their experience is limited and they are still in the early days of mastering their craft.

Enter Toneelhuis

Everything changed when the group was included in the pool of theatre artists active at Toneelhuis, the municipal theatre based in Antwerp, which also happens to be the largest production company in all of Flanders. Keeping in mind that the young collective has barely been active for five years, this seemingly overnight success is cause for slight concern. There is some apprehension that their temperament will be tamed by the large production company and that FC Bergman may be recuperated by the large Toneelhuis and become more 'salonfähig' (socially acceptable). At the same time however, there is a somewhat false-romantic desire to keep the group 'pure' and retain an element of 'punk', thereby also keeping them small and powerless, as if the authenticity of an artist were measured by the scope of their suffering. Toneelhuis promises the six artists an artistic support, but most importantly offers them the technical and logistic framework and support that they need in order to realise the grandest of their ideas, dreams, and visions. The 2010 production *300 el x 50 el x 30 el* turned out to be a test case for both parties. FC Bergman built an entire village on stage, complete

with a square and a pine forest in the backdrop. The village is consumed by the fear of an approaching deluge — the inhabitants start behaving more erratically, nearing a state of psychosis. What happens inside their houses is shown to the audience on a large screen as captured by a moving camera that pans along the entire village as well as the pine forest behind it. The camera peeks into the private spaces of the interior. FC Bergman proved with *300 el x 50 el x 30 el* that the large theatre structure does not tame them but serves them. Not so much because an entire village emerges onto the stage of the Bourla Theatre,¹ including the pine forest, but mainly because these six young artists are able to get the entire technical team and the theatre's set department to realise this nearly impossible task. Apparently, the urgency of their cause is contagious.

FC Bergman's message is inseparable from the way that they convey that message. Both the content and the form aim for 'greatness'. The company prefers to work in large locations (in a minority of cases in the theatre itself) with large groups (of extras) and large gestures (such as pyrotechnics and special effects). This is not solely because they are keen on sensationalism but because what they wish to convey requires this approach and demands it. FC Bergman's recurring message does not tolerate an intimate setting since the artists never concern themselves with individual dramas or petty human emotions. There is always more at stake. In the universe of FC Bergman, human existence consists of a series of tragic attempts to comprehend the incomprehensible. Human beings try to shape their lives with the courage of desperation. Despite their struggles, they are always confronted with the forces that transcend them. FC Bergman consider this struggle, which they showcase, with love, as the essence of life.

1. Bourla Theatre is the main venue of Toneelhuis, a neoclassical building designed for the city of Antwerp by the city architect Pierre Bourla in 1827.

The naïve belief that the world is changeable is doomed to fail, yet this failure is not the end point. It is, however, the starting point for new ventures and is beautiful to witness. Beauty is a necessary counterpoint of this seemingly pessimistic existentialist worldview concerning the struggles of humankind. The beauty of each powerless attempt to resist this fate in itself generates a sense of existence that pushes FC Bergman beyond an easily deterministic nihilism: this meaninglessness of existence is filled with belief in humankind's struggle to find meaning. By giving shape to this beauty, the company still manages to tenderly reach out and address the insignificance of humankind. This consequently has a cleansing effect. However, it does not need to go further than that: there is no way to appeal against the human condition and as such FC Bergman do not make any combative propositions to render this condition more bearable. FC Bergman chooses not to use any political statements as they do not want to slap their audience in the face but rather gently beat them to death with a story that can be understood around the world, in all countries and by every kind of audience. They present stories that can offer comfort without being moralistic. FC Bergman continuously explore this existential story in different forms that are permeated by their central premise: the realisation of the impossible and the beauty of the attempt. A choreography with dozens of extras in *Walking down the Champs-Élysées*, acting on top of a pile of dirt in *The Homecoming*, or the entire pine forest in the backdrop of the stage in *300 el* are all examples of the impossible constructions stubbornly set up by FC Bergman. By doing this, they constantly flirt with the boundaries of what is imaginable as well as feasible. It is essential that the performances are dangerous and that they keep their audience on the edge of their seat, not necessarily through the employment of physical stunts but rather by installing risky elements or by employing a considerable margin of unpredictability. Why, you might ask? The answer may be that the audience is understood as entitled to an event that is utterly unique and not repeatable. This idea of theatre as an event

is reminiscent of the performances that arose in the 1970s in which the body and its direct presence were central themes. However, FC Bergman does not consider these dangerous moments as a sole resource but incorporates them as small disruptive explosions within a well-defined aesthetic universe that references the seventies and eighties in their desire for beauty. These ‘moments of performance’ are the outbursts of life, the instinctive attempts to break free from the predetermined framework. The alienating *flou artistique* gets torn to shreds by direct authenticity, not in the sense of realism, but in the sense of truthfulness: whatever happens takes place in the present, with bodies present and it comes very close. In combination with and contrasted by the sublime world that was carefully constructed, these ‘breakthroughs’ hit hard, leaving the audience speechless.

What do these moments of true danger consist of then? What immediately catches the eye is FC Bergman’s bold style of acting. Although, dramaturgically speaking, *The Homecoming* might impose a seemingly tight and strict framework, within this structure there is an abundance of smoking and drinking, which does not only result in a looser manner of acting but even renders it sloppy or *edgy*. The laconic stage direction prescribed for the fights between the characters in *Walking down the Champs-Élysées* — ‘beat the hell out of each other’ — resulted in the yielding of several bruises and wounded limbs. In addition to this raw, physical approach to acting, the innate desire to break free is revealed in the other stylistic choices made, such as working with animals, children, and amateurs. The bestial scenes in *Walking down the Champs-Élysées* caused outrage amongst the audience but the unpredictability of the animal ‘actors’ did bring forth the desired factor of risk. The mass choreography from this same production shows dozens of extras attempting to collectively complete a dance phrase, with seven-year-old children dancing alongside seventy-year-old men. Although synchrony is hard to find, what is of importance here is the attempt

itself. This desire to seek out danger is perhaps most clear in the fact that FC Bergman consistently opt for theatre on location. The location selected for the performance then proves to function not only as a co-actor but also as a co-creator. For example, a production that takes place on a deserted beach in Terschelling tells a different story than the exact same performance located in an industrial zone in Amsterdam. No matter how thorough the concept of the performance has been worked out in advance, until FC Bergman arrive on location nothing is set in stone and everything can and must be re-examined. In their case this is usually only four weeks or so before the actual premiere. Therefore, touring with the company is synonymous recreating their productions. At the end of a tour, the result of this approach is a broad range of variations on the same performance. However, the classic theatre building could perhaps be considered as the ultimate location for their performances as it inherently possesses an abundance of conventions that possess the potential to be broken. Therefore, FC Bergman also use the theatre as a location and employ it in a fashion that might provoke the audience to change the way they think.

From pornography to the Bible

Although the seventies and eighties have served as inspirational decades for this collective group of young artists, they are undoubtedly influenced by contemporary culture as well. This is reflected not only in the collage-like structure of their performances but also in the eclectic array of their sources of inspiration from Albert Camus to Walt Disney, from Lars von Trier to Pina Bausch, from pornography to the Bible and everything in between. FC Bergman display the excessive flow characteristic

of generation Y who appear to have it all with their ‘anything goes’ mentality. It is no surprise that a world map decorates the wall of their studio. The composition of the group gives this away as well: a diverse range of six different artists with different personalities who come together to create one collective performance each year. Aside from the work they do as a group, they all have their own personal ongoing projects ranging from film and visual arts to theatre and television. At first glance, this multitude of impulses can only be considered as a fruitful contribution to their work. However, this combination of different personalities and careers can at times be explosive. FC Bergman snatch up every opportunity that presents itself to them, not in a deliberate or careful way, but rather an eager and insatiable one.

With their *Terminator Trilogy* (*Terminator Trilogie*, 2012), FC Bergman take their audience on a journey with a dynamic and unique event that boasts a scale of nearly unrealistic magnitude. This is caused by their choice to work with non-professionals as well as their decision to repeatedly perform on location. Buses transport the spectators to a vast and desolate grey field that stretches as far as the eye can see, deep in the port of Antwerp. Once they have arrived, the audience witnesses container ships towering as high as skyscrapers seemingly walking by and majestically gliding hundreds of metres away from the dock. Futuristic-looking cranes rise up against the evening twilight, resembling the set of James Cameron’s *Terminator* film series after which this performance was named. In several respects, this performance concerns itself with the notion of the future. It is against this backdrop of industry and world trade, of capitalism and commerce, unstoppable growth and progress, that FC Bergman choose to place the hedonistic culture that is derived from it. Reaching out across this asphalt desert, the viewer finds an artificial bourgeois salon that stages about fifty extras of all ages dressed up in evening wear.

After twenty minutes or so, they make their way on to the stage for an apocalypse; a crumbling and destruction of civilian life that has become sterilised. The enormous billboard, from which iconic hero Arnold Schwarzenegger had been looking down upon the salon, falls down, signifying the end of an era. The new world is as empty as the previous world was crowded. It is left bare and washed clean by the industrial machine that now forms a protective circle made of soap bubbles around the new order of things. Humankind must start anew. There is one remaining survivor (Stef Aerts) who in his now seemingly ridiculous costume has seen all the achievements that he believed in disappear. What now? Is humankind free to determine their own future? Or does the past force them to repeat themselves? These are the questions that form the common thread throughout FC Bergman’s oeuvre.

In 2013 FC Bergman collaborated with Liesa van der Aa from Muziektheater Transparant and Solistenensemble Kaleidsokop (DE) to produce the impressive music-theatre project named *About Reynard the Fox* (*Van den Vos*).² This production is a magnificent allegory about the evil that is inherent within every human being and the sneaky fox that lives within each well-behaved civilian. It is no surprise that the symbolic gathering place of the bourgeois must therefore be changed: the company had the parterre of the theatre transformed completely and turned it into a marble swimming pool, around which the actors performed. The audience were seated in the balconies looking down at this spectacle of self-revelation. *About Reynard the Fox* is ‘total theatre’ in which text, performing arts, video art, and music seamlessly blend.

² *Van den Vos* is based on the well know Dutch Middle Age epic *Van den Vos Reynaerde* (*About Reynard the Fox*).

Christ between the two malefactors

For their 2015 production *The Land of Nod* (*Het land Nod*), FC Bergman replicated the Rubens room of the Royal Museum of Fine Arts in Antwerp: an exact copy, true to scale. The prestigious museum has been closed for restoration since 2011 and *The Land of Nod* begins its story when the throne room is almost completely stripped of its impressive works of art. The technicians dressed in blue overalls carry the second to last remaining painting out of the room as the audience walks in. The only painting left now is Rubens' *Christ between the two malefactors*, a painting that is of such a Herculean nature and has such a monumental symbolic radiance, it is a copy. Opposed to this masterpiece in an enormous space, human beings can only appear to be meaningless and humble creatures. Furthermore, it is noticeable that over time that the six artists continuously obliterate themselves from their own work. In *Terminator Trilogy*, a naked man lies on a vast concrete surface (during the premiere of the show this occurred under terrible weather conditions) whilst the indifferent container ships continue their course in the background of the scenery. In the same way, the six performers in *The Land of Nod* walk by and disappear in front of the giant painting as if they were merely accidental passers-by. They do not embody any 'characters' but simply emphasise the grandeur of their surroundings via the presence of their fragile bodies. It is in itself a paradox of pride and humility: what group of (young) artists would dare ask such high productional demands from their theatre production company, only to allow themselves to disappear in front of their self-absorbed set?

In *The Land of Nod* art transforms, in both a literal and metaphorical sense, into a safe haven for humankind and its inherent frailness. Once again, just like in *About Reynard the Fox*, it is remarkable how meticulously the content and style concur, how the grand existential struggle for survival is embodied in even grander gestures and dimensions. The impact of spatiality in this performance cannot be underestimated and demands to be discussed. The dominant thirty-year reign of the small theatre hall has not only caused theatre artists but the audience as well to forget what it can actually mean to be led into a grand space that is able to embody another universe before even a single dramatic gesture is performed. The contrast between the smallness of the actor (or that of the spectator themselves) and the dimensions of such a lofty location speaks volumes: it measures humankind against the world, not the other way around.

Humankind's struggle with the forces surrounding them is embodied by the somewhat unlucky restorer (Stef Aerts) who in *The Land of Nod* assesses that the painting by Rubens is simply too big: the work of art will not be able to fit through the gateway of the room. He undertakes a series of tragicomic attempts to get the canvas through the doors — such as sawing off the frame or widening the passageway. These attempts form a layer of slapstick on the surface of the production. What lies beneath is an investigation that aims to understand the significance of this space, what possible meanings this museum hall encompasses — whether that be in the past or in the future. The actual star of the play *The Land of Nod* is the Rubens hall itself, which transforms before the eyes of the spectator from a real space (where people gather to find shelter from the rain) into a metaphoric place. FC Bergman defines this place as a shelter from war, as a refugee camp, as a place for individual reflection, but most importantly as a space that lives and breathes. The museum is not museum-like at all: life storms in and out, and through the walls, as it should, just as it does in a beautifully choreographed variation of the famous scene in the Louvre from Godard's

Bande à part. In a nutshell, *The Land of Nod* contains everything FC Bergman stands for: the illustration of a tragic world view expressed in monumental style and spirited by the energy of the six young artists who, now grown up, have not yet lost an ounce of their refreshing radicality.

The building

After a series of wordless productions and three years of a creative break, FC Bergman bring forth the kaleidoscopic textually based performance *JR*. This production came to life through the collaboration of the three largest theatre production companies in Flanders: Toneelhuis, KVS, and NTGent. The cast showcases some of Flanders' best actors like Jan Bijvoet, Stijn Van Opstal, Oscar van Rompay, Frank Focketeyn, and Geert Van Rampelberg. *JR* is an adaptation of the eponymous and complex cult novel by William Gaddis. In the novel, U.S. society of the mid-seventies is laid bare, showing how capitalism facilitates the greed, helplessness, lust, and resentment of the floundering characters in it. In this world of stock magnates and stock traders, an eleven-year-old boy appears onto the stage, only to play the stock exchange game more consistently and more radically than anyone else, consequently destabilising the entire system. *JR* is a phantom, an allegorical character. He is the elusive engine that fuels the downfall of the real people that surround him.

Gaddis' novel is a kind of intersection for the corporate, familial, relational, political, and imperialistic subplots that all receive their own space in *the building* — an enormous construction that is four storeys tall, around which the audience is seated on the four sides. Moving within this tower are fifteen actors, twenty-one extras, two camerapersons, four technicians, and two costume designers. About twenty-five rooms have been installed in the tower including a lift, a metro station,

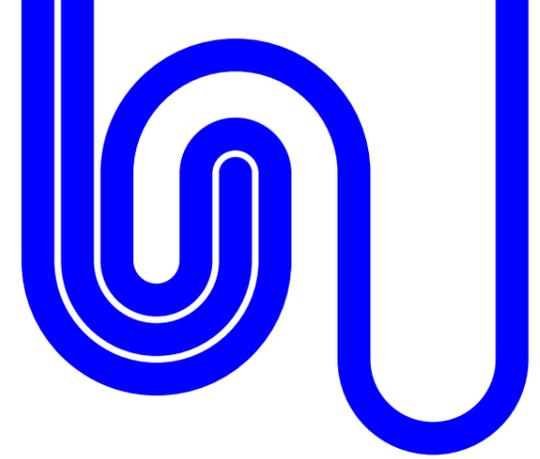
a cinema, and a convenience store. Throughout the performance, the audience witnesses the continuous transformation of the tower at the hands of the technicians. In the meantime, the two camerapersons are focused on capturing the main storyline. They move around the actors with their mobile cameras and the footage is assembled live from the control booth. The audience is divided into groups across the four seating sections that surround *the building*, causing some information to be hidden from the spectator depending on where they are seated. Different storylines develop simultaneously on each floor: the spectator is able to follow some of these stories directly from their seat, whilst others are taking place on the other side of *the building*, out of their eyesight. These narratives are then streamed onto the closed blinds of that particular floor. This implies that the audience must work to follow the story and keep up since both content and style are constantly in development. Whoever follows the 'film' however, will be able to grasp the main storylines of the plot.

JR is another example in which content and style complement each other perfectly. This causes the text to receive another status than it would within classic repertoire theatre. The language, the jargon, and the content of the text are truly like a maze. It is not of importance that the audience understands each word. In contrary, it is the content and the way in which the text is delivered that, together with the stylistic format of the performance, allows the audience to truly grasp and feel this rogue capitalism. In this way, the dialogues about life in the stock market pass by rapidly. At certain moments, the text, just like the main character, is an elusive machine. This allows the text to take on a complementary role and place the spectator in front of closed doors in the same way that the decor does. By breaking free from an overly narrated tale and by choosing to evoke this associative and atmospheric space through images, FC Bergman is able to break with the traditional conventions that mark the boundary between film and theatre.

Les pêcheurs de perles

In the same year as creating *JR*, FC Bergman directed their first opera: *Les pêcheurs de perles* by Georges Bizet in collaboration with Opera Ballet Vlaanderen. The operatic genre is a perfect fit for FC Bergman. The text in opera is artificial and finds itself enclosed in the atmospheric music, in the score. The score is sacred, only allowing the director creative liberty in the visual composition of the play. Just as in *JR*, the text is part of the stylistic format of the production. FC Bergman do not allow the audience to sit back and relax but rather they expect the audience to complete the performance with their own associations based on the images that they are presented with. Unlike Bizet, FC Bergman do not transport their audiences to the exotic beaches of Ceylon but rather take them to a retirement home where the residents spend their time looking back at the past and recalling memories. The past is hidden here behind the blinds of this retirement home. Continuously traveling between past and present it becomes difficult to make the distinction between the two. With their monumental, unique theatrical style and their trademarked spectacular decor, FC Bergman create a world that is located on the border between realism and a dream-like atmosphere. *Les pêcheurs* is a FC Bergman production by its poetics: it possesses the cinematic strengths of *300 el x 50 el x 30 el*, the alienating absurdism of *The Land of Nod*, and the existentialist tragedy of humankind and their struggles that penetrates the entire oeuvre of FC Bergman.

Throughout the years, FC Bergman have developed a theatrical language of their own that distinguishes itself via its memorable decors, the grandeur and monumentality of its images, and its visual poetry with an underlying relativist, humoristic tone and untamed radicality. In this megalomaniacal, baroque spectacle, humankind fights a lonely tragic battle. In their productions, FC Bergman invite their audiences to form part of the event, the experience, the universal total work of art. •

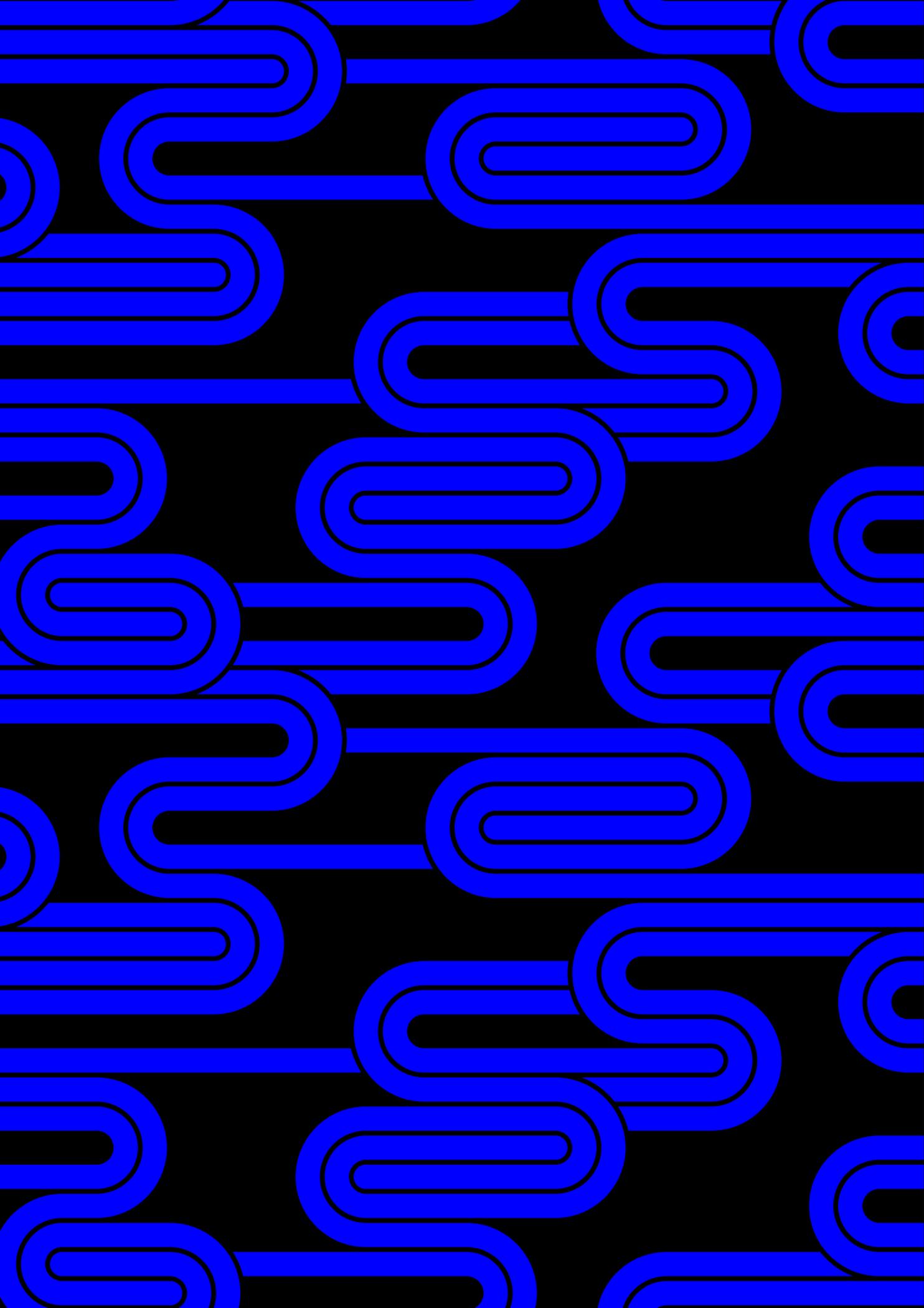


This text is based on two articles written by Flemish theatre critic Evelyne Coussens, “Het verlangen om uit te breken” (The desire to break out), published in *Toneel(ge)ruis* (2012), “De ongetemde radicaliteit van FC Bergman” (The untamed radicality of FC Bergman) published in *Mest* #10 (2015). Marthe De Ruyscher has edited both texts, and Carolina Van Thillo did the translation from Dutch into English.

Taming the wild beast

an Interview with the Belgian
Theatre Collective FC Bergman

EDITH CASSIERS
HANNE ROOFTHOFT



‘Our performances are wild beasts that need to be tamed.’ Talking are actors, artists, and makers Stef Aerts, Joé Agemans, Thomas Verstraeten, and Marie Vinck, who make up the relatively young Belgian theatre collective FC Bergman. Indeed, their larger-than-life productions consist of ambitious scenographic installations in which visual voluptuousness gilts stories of ever struggling and stumbling human beings. In this interview, we ask them about their inspirations, their creative processes, and their work as a collective in an increasingly individualised theatre landscape.

The four members and theatre scholars Hanne Roofthoof and Edith Cassiers meet at a time when, because of the SARS-Covid-19 pandemic, all the theatre houses are closed. Nonetheless, behind the closed doors of Toneelhuis, the Antwerp municipal theatre that FC Bergman is affiliated to, something is stirring on stage. FC Bergman presented their new performance, The Sheep Song, there a few days before this interview — not to a public audience, but rather to a handful of staff members. The performance is finished (insofar as a performance can ever be finished) and is ready to be shown to the public as soon as live shows become possible once more.

How did the ghost premiere of The Sheep Song go?

We have long thought that the audience doesn't matter that much to us. By premiering *The Sheep Song* in front of about five people in the theatre, we were suddenly struck by the impact of the lack of an audience. An audience creates the feeling of a collective experience. It is the happening, the tension of whether or not something is going to happen that you experience together. The near total absence of an audience created a very depressed feeling. You are confronted with the fact that you make a performance for the sake of communication. When there is no audience, that communication is left vacant — it's a dead thing. You want to communicate in the most direct way, not through chat rooms or other means of digital theatre. You want the gasps; you want the laughs. As much as you can create many things with film, you cannot have that.

In theory, you could communicate with an audience of just one person in a room but a small audience didn't work with *The Sheep Song*. Maybe our images are too big to show them to so few people. Maybe just 'ordinary' isn't good enough for our performance. Maybe our work requires a two-way dialogue. The narration and dialogue you have with the audience is a conversation you have with society. You want to interact with a society.

What does a creative process look like for you? Are there constants in such a creative process?

Our creative process is always different with each project, but there is a basic pattern. This pattern applies to the performances that do not originate from a text. The few performances that did originate from text, such as *JR* (2018), *Van den vos (About Reynard the Fox)*, (2013), and our opera *Les Pêcheurs de perles* (2018) were made differently.

Most of our (modest) oeuvre, however, is textless. We usually start from an idea, a few dramaturgical thoughts. At first this is not a conclusive dramaturgical idea, but rather an idea of what we want to talk about. Usually by then there is a book, an image, or an idea around which thoughts are formulated. We ask ourselves why this appeals to us and why we want to talk about it. A first idea for the form that the performance might take usually follows fairly quickly. This conceptual form will transform and evolve over the course of time and will set all the rest of the process in motion.

With *300 el x 50 el x 30 el* (2011), the initial idea was the biblical story of Noah's ark and a series of paintings by Belgian artist Michaël Borremans, who was much less well-known at the time. We wanted to create a performance around the myth of the Genesis Flood. Why and how, we didn't quite know at the time. However, as we talked it through, the form caught up with us. The form pushes the whole idea a lot further. Allowing the form to guide and even overtake us is the only constant you can detect in our creative process.

In the beginning with *Terminator Trilogie (Terminator Trilogy)*, (2012), there was only a title. We really liked the title and had the belief that we would do something in relation to the Terminator films. After all, Arnold Schwarzenegger has been an incredible figure. We discarded the idea of the films pretty quickly but kept the title. We asked ourselves: Why do we like that title so much? Why is Schwarzenegger such an icon? Pretty quickly, we had a few ideas for the form that brought with them new topics of conversation. The location played an important role. The piece is about emptiness, about depression, so we decided to perform it on a gigantic parking lot in the Antwerp harbor. There you have emptiness, but also a kind of defencelessness against the elements around you — which would become a common thread throughout the performance. The form is so emphatic, so all-pervading, that it drives the performance forward. We just have to follow.

We often describe our performances as wild beasts that need to be tamed. Every performance is a beast that we run after: a beast that actually wants to tell its own story, that sends us further and deeper into its belly.

However, we shouldn't pretend that we had a clear method and vision from the beginning. There are many decisions that didn't come from a well-worn idea, but are taken intuitively. Our first performance, *De Rotsebreker* (2007), was actually a very political play that explored the life and work of Leopold II. Yet we didn't care about politics... We started with a list of images as a reaction against the acting course we were taking together. We saw an old ship and started working on what we could do with it. That was absolutely against what we had learnt at school (*the former 'Studio Herman Teirlinck', in Antwerp, eds.*) where all dramaturgy had to come from the text. All our earlier works had a text, but we hardly read it, let alone built a conclusive dramaturgy around it. We used the text as an excuse. We wanted to make something that came from the gut and was very visual. We only really started making theatre with *Voorproef op fragmenten van een nieuwe wereld (A preview on fragments of a new world, 2008)* — a one-time small performance that had a kind of dramaturgy and a form with the early Bergman stamp. For the first time, everything was driven by the visual dramaturgy.

The 'form' is characterised by large-scale scenographic installations, often bursting out of their seams. Both actor and spectator seem to drown in the visual exuberance and magnitude of your landscapes. This scenographic ambition often leads to projects on location. What drives this love for working on location? What role does the location play in your creative processes?

Location often gives direction to our performances. This was especially true in our earlier work. For example, with *Wandelen op de Champs-Elysées met een schildpad om de wereld beter te kunnen bekijken, maar het is moeilijk thee drinken op een ijsschots als iedereen dronken is (Walking down*

the Champs-Elysées with a tortoise to get a better view of the world, but it is hard to drink tea on an ice floe when everyone is drunk, 2009) we adjusted the performance to each location where we performed. The performance was completely adapted to the location where it was shown.

The creative process of *Het Land Nod (The Land of Nod, 2015)* began with a location. We wanted to create a production around a location and started looking for one. We fell in love with the Rubens' Gallery at the Royal Museum of Fine Arts (*in Antwerp, eds.*) — an enormous room that had to be built around the gigantic paintings of Pieter Paul Rubens and was then closed for renovations. We asked ourselves why we were so drawn to this immense room that almost looked like a ship, why we wanted to tell a story from this location. The ruined Rubens room gave us the idea that a space can have some kind of life of its own. And if a space can be a character, we can tell the life story of that space. That idea formed the basis of the whole performance *The Land of Nod*.

After the location project of *Terminator Trilogy*, we started bringing the location inside or building the locations ourselves. Sometimes exact copies of existing spaces, such as in *The Land of Nod*. When you entered this exact copy of the majestic Rubens' Gallery in an actual theatre, you were immediately transported to a new reality. For *Van den vos*, we created a new, imaginary space. For *ƒR*, we built a gigantic set that didn't fit inside the theatres. It was a so-called 'location project' but really we just looked for a location with enough space to place it.

The process of going from location scouting to building locations ourselves has been a very organic, and at the same time very profound, transformation in our work. We create places that you could get lost in. Our characters always have to compete with the spaces they end up in, large spaces in which they are terrifyingly small.

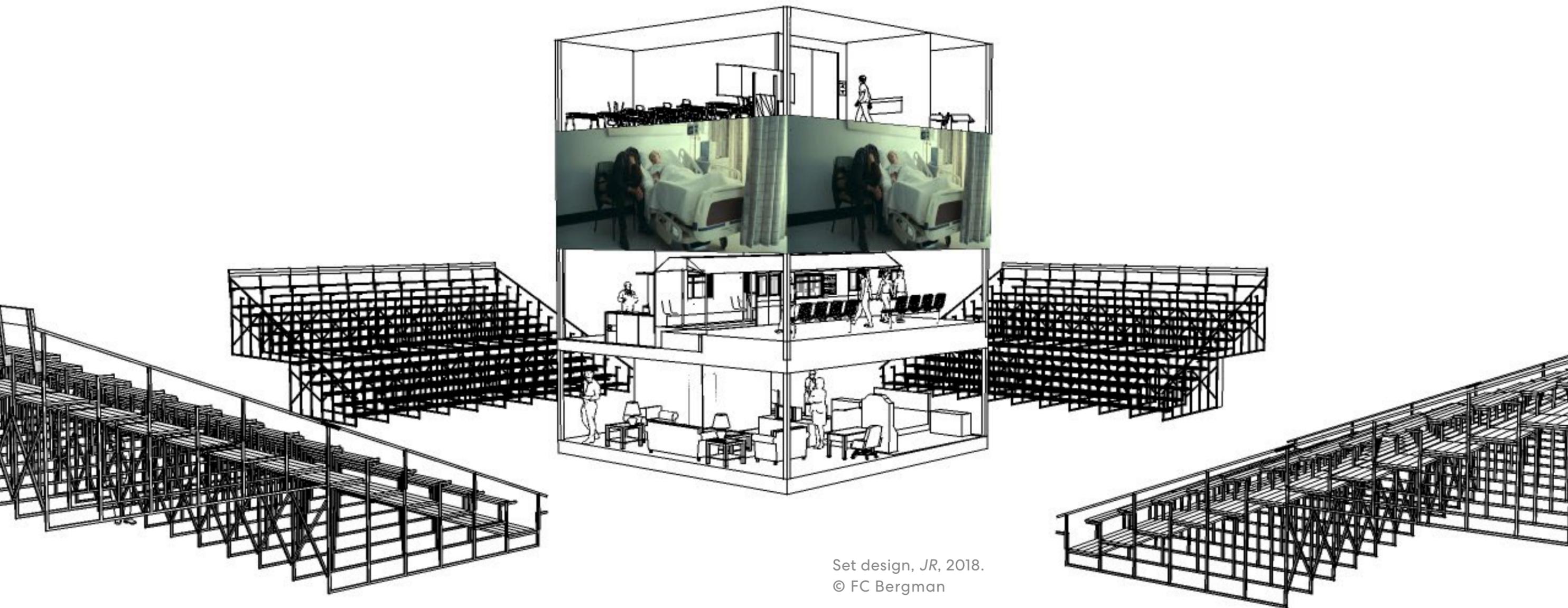


The Land of Nod, 2015
© Kurt van der Elst

Through the sheer size and complex construction of your monumental sets, the audience is invited to reflect on the boundaries of the stage, of the theatre hall, and thus of the theatrical arts in general. Is this theatre? How is this theatre? The (im)possibilities of the theatrical experience are augmented. Is this a conscious choice or does it flow organically from the form of your performances?

We always try to build our sets so that the audience automatically participates in the form and therefore in the narrative. Like the characters, the audience needs to find ways to relate to the sometimes-intimidating spaces. This became especially clear with the tower that we built for *JR*.

The basic idea of *JR* is that people lose themselves in an excess of communication, an excess of information. The audience found themselves in the same situation, as they were only able to see one side of the tower. They couldn't see from all sides at once. Thus, they received only a small piece of all the information that was there to see. We tried to create the same experience for the audience as for the characters, in an almost physical way. This is something we hope to make our main characters and audience share: a sense of being lost, a futile attempt to sustain and secure yourself in a too large space. Without becoming participatory theatre, the audience becomes part of the performance.



Set design, *JR*, 2018.
© FC Bergman

We look for a hyper-theatricality, for something that goes beyond the boundaries of theatre. This inevitably brings you to the point where you start accentuating those boundaries. We show that this is not enough, that things will have to go further. This is the attempt we make. In a way, we always try to break through the physical boundaries of theatre. Not for the sake of breaking through but to lead or guide the viewer's gaze as far as possible, as if there is always some part of the form that we have not reached or that we cannot show.

You want to create an infinite gaze but some staged performances create the impression that the spectator's gaze is actually confined. For example, in Van den vos, you could not look behind the glass wall and in 300 el x 50 el x 30 el you had no direct view into the houses but rather had to rely on the camera. What is the role of the camera in your performances?

With *Van den vos*, we blocked off the audience's view with a giant glass wall. However, behind it the scene continued. The end of the fern forest behind the glass could not be seen. Through the glass wall we jumped to pre-recorded video images that took us all the way to Scotland. The glass wall literally became a gateway that could lead to anywhere.

In *300 el x 50 el x 30 el* the stage is similarly bordered by an enormous forest. In this way, we enclose the village and the audience. At the end of the performance, one of the main characters literally walks out of the theatre and the camera follows him as far as possible until the signal cuts off and disappears. You will never know how far the character has gotten.

Neither the forest in *300 el x 50 el x 30 el* nor the fern forest in *Van den vos* have an ending. The camera makes the space become much larger. We try to enlarge the theatrical space — in all directions. We go into corners, crannies, and sides. We film where the audience's gaze cannot reach. We make the audience see to infinity. When we use a camera, it is

to show something that the audience cannot see by themselves. Our use of the camera is first and foremost poetical, and thus not merely guiding.

The use of a camera always serves our theatrical intention. The camera can be a narrator or a dramaturgical element. For example, in *300 el x 50 el x 30 el*, the camera represents the passing of time, the suffocating impasse that people find themselves in, the circling movement of life. The audience knows that the camera is always coming back. Eventually, the camera starts circling madly on its rail and the men pushing the camera desperately and feverishly try to follow. There is a system overload. In *Van den vos*, the camera hangs during the entire performance from the neck of the main character to symbolise a kind of conscience. An external gaze that he can't shake off. He sees himself through the inescapable lens of the camera.

Of course, our use of the camera is partially guiding, which is a function that we use to cheerfully 'cheat'. We give the impression that the audience has to put the performance together themselves. That is not quite the case. We do ultimately decide what you should definitely see and not miss. This is a secondary function of the camera. In *JR*, the audience is unable to see three of the four sides of the tower. The audience there is totally dependent on the camera that shows the most important scenes on whatever floor.

When did the camera enter your performances?

This guided perspective applies primarily to the camera performances. All in all, we have more performances without a camera than with one. We started using a camera in 2011 with *300 el x 50 el x 30 el*. Not because we necessarily needed it, but because we were very eager to work with a camera. It wasn't a very well thought out dramaturgical idea. We were at the beginning of our career, there was a lot of Scandinavian



Van den vos, 2013
Performers: Bent Simons, Marie Vinck, Dirk Roofthoof
© Kurt van der Elst

cinema at the time that we found inspiring, and we were often working as actors in film and television ourselves. The choice to use a camera in *300 el x 50 el x 30 el* was very much linked to the format of the piece. The audience can only see the front of the houses that make up the set; the camera gives a view from the back of the houses. We really only want to use the camera when it is necessary to tell a story. With *Van den vos* and *JR*, the choice for a camera came from the material: we came quickly to the conclusion that in order to get under the characters' skin, we really needed a camera. There is deliberately not a camera in every performance. For every performance with a camera there is a performance without a camera. In recent years, this may be a little less strict but we try to stick to it; we are still theatre makers and not filmmakers.

The cinematic medium is nevertheless present in your performances in many ways. Your acting style has been regularly described as cinematic and you often take inspiration from films. How would you define your relationship to film? Where would you place the gap between film and theatre?

Narrative is an important factor in the distinction between film and theatre. In cinema, there is only one point of view. You are sucked towards that one close-up or towards that one thing that the director decides you must see. We always want to create a certain openness of observation. As an audience member of *JR*, you need to decide whether you focus your attention on the projected film scenes or on the 'live' scenes that unfold on your side of the tower. That makes theatre so unique: as an audience member, you can decide for yourself whether to wander off into a detail. The live scenes, on one hand, and filmed live scenes, on the other hand, exist next to each other and interact. No spectator will see the same performance. Everyone can watch actively and will not get sucked into anything. Everyone has to choose whether they will follow the film or wander off. Watching the performance becomes thus performative as well. That's where we distinguish ourselves very much from cinema. If we were to

break the narrative of film and still make a film, we would end up with a kind of video art. While this is also interesting, that's something that our work leans less towards. We try to circumvent the laws of film in one way or another because we are still making something other than film.

The big difference, of course, is that theatre is *live*. It is important for us that you can see at all times that our performances are happening live, that you can see how they are being made. You don't have to believe it if you don't want to. For us, this is an important choice. It makes the whole thing theatrical. With a movie, the audience has to believe what you're doing, or you'll get in trouble. With theatre, it's interesting that you seemingly give the audience a choice: they don't have to believe you. Most of the time, fortunately, they do and we get the audience all the way along. However, by showing the creation of the performance, that choice seems to remain open.

Handling the camera feels *meta*. As a maker, you decide what you show. We're not professional camera people but cinematography is not what this is about. It's more about an energy, paying attention to things and wanting to show those.

An intriguing friction within your work is how, on the one hand, the seemingly technically and productionally impossible is presented whilst, on the other hand, you actively reveal how it is made possible. The unthinkable is promised and then created in the moment, in front of the audience's eyes.

We find the creation of a film, especially on film sets, an endearing process. You see far too many people dancing around a small action, like a group of scientists trying to dissect a small beetle. In *JR*, you could see camerapeople who were very close to the action. In the small rooms in the tower you could see a few actors, yet often more than half the space was occupied by two camerapeople. The camerapeople wedged themselves between the intimacy of the actors.



Behind the scenes, *JR*, 2018

Performers: Thomas Verstraeten, Stef Aerts, Kes Bakker, Marie Vinck, Geert Van Rampelberg, Imke Mol

© Kurt van der Elst

The creation of a film carries with it a great failure: kind of dragging on with far too many resources to capture the essence of something very fragile. You know that this will not succeed, that you will never get to the core. Perhaps this is also how we work with our performances. It is not by chance that the camera is so visibly present in our performances. As an audience, you are allowed to see that it's us who are creating and constructing the images. Even without a camera, our performances are always a bunch of people standing around something very small and trying to grasp the essence of it, knowing that they will not succeed. That connects all our performances.

On the other hand, before and after a performance you are very careful with the information that you give away. Insight into the creative process or sources of inspiration is scarce. Is this a conscious choice?

This comes from a desire to create open works of art, much to the annoyance of communication and PR services. The more information you give to people, the more they come to see the performance from a certain point of view and that's always a shame. As an audience member, you want to be surprised. As an artist, you want to give the responsibility to the audience to read what they want to read. It's incredibly important not to take people by the hand. We want to emancipate the viewer, treat them as sovereign beings. We have made something and worked hard on it but now it is up to the viewer to do something with it, without becoming non-committal. We think it's important that people can decide for themselves what they do with our work, without saying that it doesn't matter what they read in it.

For years, there has been a naive desire to make something that goes straight to the heart, something that needs very little rational or intellectual filters in order to be understood. We want to communicate with the audience in a very direct way. However, that becomes difficult when,

before the performance, you are given a booklet with dramaturgical texts that you have to read. You have to read something when you just want to wait for the performance to start. Then, when you have read it, you start referring back to those texts during the entire performance. Conversely, it's even worse when you get a leaflet afterwards with all the references that were in the performance. You are, as it were, confronted with your own stupidity as an audience member in contrast to the cleverness of the performance.

You start from an idea and arrive at a form. That form will dictate everything, even inspire content. What follows next? How do you go from there?

That's the next step. [Pointing to a mood board full of images as big as the wall] We let ourselves be inspired as broadly as possible. We set some lines but we try not to use too many filters. It is a very intuitive phase.

In that respect, *300 el x 50 el x 30 el* was very interesting. That performance was made over the course of one month, so we didn't have time for filters. It's the only production that we didn't make a mood board for. We had to open ourselves entirely to inspiration and say yes to every idea. Ironically, *300 el x 50 el x 30 el* is one of the most solid performances we have ever made; it is very well put together. The show was nevertheless made without a plan: it was made up and written down in a sort of direct line, built and performed while we were making it up on the fly. All the steps happened at once and were intertwined. Oddly enough, that worked very well.

Now, our creative process follows a certain structure: first there is an idea, then we come up with the form, next we collect pictures, we come up with scenes, create a sequence for those scenes, and finally start rehearsing those scenes. In the beginning, this was certainly not the case. The steps were intertwined for a very long time: for *Walking down*

the Champs-Élysées..., *300 el x 50 el x 30 el*, and *Terminator Trilogy*. With the *The Land of Nod*, we worked on the scenario until the very last day.

However, during *Van den vos*, we tried to maintain more of a structure, as we were working with external partners and due to the increasing size of the production. The first time a method really seeped into our preparation was with *JR* — a production so big that we needed this structure. But we only became aware of that method during *The Sheep Song*. By consciously implementing this methodology, we were able to create a performance in a very short amount of time. By going through each phase one by one, we became very productive, making it possible to create an ambitious performance within tight time constraints imposed by Corona.

Does such a fixed working method lead to a fixed role division within the collective?

Always an annoying question... *(silence)*

We have come to know each other better and better over the years and have come to trust each other's strengths and weaknesses. That's how our collaboration happens organically. Trust is very important. What is also important is that towards the end, no opinions matter any more. It is the performance itself that dictates what is best. We place ourselves at the service of that performance.

If we have to indicate a division of roles, we can say that Stef is very involved with the form, Thomas is more involved with the dramaturgy and concepts, and Joé has a very technical eye. We work very much together on the visual phase and the development of scenarios. Stef and Marie are very good at directing actors. Lighting is something that Joé and Stef work hard on. Managing large groups, such as extras, is up to Thomas and Marie. Thomas also deals with finances and dossiers or writing texts.

This division of roles has grown organically over the years. If someone encroaches on someone else's territory, it's fine, we'll work it out.

Generally speaking, a theatre director is still expected to exist. There is a belief that to harmonise all the elements of a performance, you need an outside eye. And yet, as a collective, you manage to bring ambitious projects together into one unified body of work.

We are fortunate that we all need each other. In the end, there is always a division of roles, which is often the same. However, shortly before the final stage — what you would call the final direction — there we are again as a collective, very much the four of us together. The final decisions, what people consider directing, is always a collective process. Likewise, coming up with something new is collective for us as well. It's a fun phase, to gather images that go on to become scenes and are placed in a certain order. These two phases are the processes that happen most collectively: coming together for the gathering of images to create a first draft of the performance and then again in the last weeks before the premiere.

Our projects are so large, there is always so much work to do: performing, directing, and building sets... There is so much for everyone to do. Due to the size of such projects, we don't get in each other's way. There is something for everyone to relate to, everyone has his or her own specialty to dive into.

Until recently, until JR more precisely, the phases of the creative process were often intertwined. You talk about an organic creative process, you describe your way of working as 'intuitive'. The medium of opera, in contrast, is by definition not organic or intuitive.

They had warned us about this beforehand. A cliché exists about opera that the concept must be ready one and a half years in advance.



The Sheep Song, moodboard, 2020
© Lynn Van Oijstaeijen

That turned out to be true, but the concept for *JR* had to be ready two years in advance. In a way, the concept for *JR* was much more tightly plotted, the creation was much more complex than that of *Les Pêcheurs de perles*. If you create such large productions that you need other people to collaborate, you need planning.

We learned this the hard way. There was still a lot of chaos with *Van den vos* and *The Land of Nod*. Luckily, Toneelhuis supported us — courageously, desperately — and fortunately it ended well. During the rehearsal process for the opera, so much was done for us. However, the singers in front of you still need direction. Of course, opera is different compared to when you are in your own power, for your own projects where you create the scenario, all the images, camera, and video...

Since *The Land of Nod* we started to work more methodically, simply because we needed to. This might have been also the moment when we started having children. Until *The Land of Nod*, a large part of the performance was made in a café or while hanging out. Since we started having children, our work process has become more delimited and more transparent for everyone.

So, we were prepared for an opera production. Commissioned work also requires much more preparation. Tomorrow, for example, we have to pitch a project that is scheduled for the summer of 2022. The questions always come a very long time in advance. From now on, we are going to do a lot of commissioned work. There have been several interesting questions, which we would like to respond to. Our calendars are already full with FC Bergman plans until 2025.

You are a collective of makers, but also a collective of actors. When does it start being about acting? When does your own role in a performance become clear? How and when are roles distributed?

For us, acting is totally unimportant. Although performing is part of the performance, how the roles are distributed is of little importance. We're not that interested in performing personally anymore. In *The Sheep Song* we perform again, but we actually want to perform less and less ourselves. We perform personally because we need people in the images we create.

In thinking about our acting, we have found out that it requires a more specific profile than we initially thought. Because of our common training and our common frame of reference that we have developed over the years, we expect an actor to behave in a certain way in our scenographies. We know what our images should look like, so it's easy to place ourselves in there as well. We don't need much direction, as we know how to relate to the scenography.

However, we notice with guest actors that the acting and 'standing' in our sets that we aim for is not that obvious. Outsiders often have to get used to what we expect of them. On the one hand, we want a sensitivity for the scene you're performing in and, on the other, soberness. This last one is very important but quite difficult for most actors, as they are often used to carrying and pulling the performance, both emotionally and dramaturgically. That is rarely the case in our performances. Our performances are not carried by an actor all the time, which can cause misunderstanding. Either you have to be in function of the set or you need to pull the performance yourself. Our performances are on the borderline. For the most part, it is letting yourself be carried along by the form. There is always a moment in every performance when an actor has to lose against the form, followed by a kind of dramatic catharsis that then has to be performed.

Someone who can be beautiful in the image is not enough. Someone who wants to be too much of a leading character is also problematic. Whenever we work with good actors, we come across a moment of confusion where

they don't know whether they should act or not. Our answer always depends on the scene and often sounds like 'not now, but later'. The actors have to know when it's up to them and when it's not. They have to trust that most of the emotional trajectory will be played out by the scenery and not by themselves. And then suddenly they need to go all the way in their acting.

For too long we assumed that this was an obvious thing to do because for a long time we played our performances ourselves. It was an interesting discovery for us that this is actually not that easy for most actors. We lost two of our core members to this (*founding members Bart Hollanders and Matteo Simoni, eds.*). Matteo and Bart are true players who want to meet each other on stage. They visit us as guest-actors in our performances, which is always very nice. You notice that we speak the same language, that we don't have to discuss anything anymore because they know what our intention is.

Your acting style is characterised by (psychological) realism, by emotional and physical nuances. Earlier work is generally more grotesquely performed, although in recent work there are some flamboyant characters that clash with the subtle intimacy of other characters. How would you describe your acting style? How has it evolved over time?

We don't have a thoughtful vision on acting. Most often we intuitively use psychological, more cinematic acting, especially when we use a camera.

This nuanced acting is often interspersed with a more extreme kind of physical slapstick. Sometimes there are different characters that take on both styles. For example, 'Den Beestenneuker' (*The Animal Fucker*, eds.) or the art conservator in *The Land of Nod*. For us, these characters aren't acting but rather become part of a choreography, of a painting or an image in a formal, functional way. These two acting styles — the cinematic and the slapstick — are in all our performances. In *JR*, for example, we

made Belgian actor Geert Van Rampelberg perform quite extravagantly. He wondered whether his acting wasn't too big, especially for the camera, but we wanted it even bigger so he would become a cartoon character.

Is collaborating on a set, co-creating the scenography, necessary for moving as an actor on that set?

We have asked ourselves that question many times before. We used to hammer every nail into our sets ourselves, so to speak. At some point, our performances became too big and we couldn't do everything ourselves anymore. Up to and including *300 el x 50 el x 30 el*, we built the sets ourselves. After that, we came under the wings of Toneelhuis, who logically took over a large part of the set building. At first, it felt like a relief to be rid of it but then we started to miss the building. We wondered if perhaps this was an essential part of the process after all. Building and furnishing a set down to the last detail has something intimate about it. We spread out a bed for the actors. When we walk through the decor with a camera, we know every corner. Everything passes through our own hands. When the technicians took over, it was a kind of farewell. But we are not missed by them. (*laugh*) And, with time, the melancholy surrounding it has left us as well.

For *The Sheep Song*, we took two weeks of studio time — as a kind of nostalgic rebound, a romantic reunion. However, except for Joé, we all felt lost and useless. For Joé, combining acting and working on the set you're in is what theatre is all about. Joé's position in that sense remains exceptional. He remains the conduit between the artistic and the purely technical. Even when the sets are being made for us, Joé is still the one who makes the sets work. He knows how to breathe life into the mechanics. When they are made for us, there are limits. Joé, however, succeeds time and again in stretching those limits. He follows the construction of the sets and that is indispensable for us. Joé is the



Behind the scenes, *Walking down the Champs-Élysées with a tortoise to get a better view of the world, but it is hard to drink tea on an ice floe when everyone is drunk*, 2009

Performers: Marie Vinck, Thomas Verstraeten

© FC Bergman

intermediary between the material and the content. He speaks our language, the language of FC Bergman. He knows what is expected. He knows that we don't necessarily need something 'high-tec' or perfectly made, but that it needs to do what we want it to do.

The form becomes imperative to determine the content. Have you ever encountered limitations of the form, ideas impossible to implement?

Never! *(laughter)* *(silence)*

At some point, you always have to adjust your dreams a little bit. Usually this has purely to do with scale. For example, the tower in *JR* actually had to be twice as big: twenty rather than twelve meters high, yet that wasn't possible. The room in *The Land of Nod* was going to have a whole ceiling but this would have required an extra van to transport the scenery.

There are scenes that don't make it but we have never had to give up on a basic idea. We do always have to go through a kind of wall of resistance. This wall of resistance might have diminished over time, as we have become more mature and reasonable ourselves. We are not fantasists. We want the impossible, sure, but we are still theatre makers and not fools who want to carry out their idea at any cost. We want to play for an audience and ensure that a performance sells and can be performed several times.

Nevertheless, people know who we are and what we do. They know that, eventually, it will work out. We know we can demand certain things — up to a certain limit. We felt that limit with the production of *JR*. It was too much, not only for our collaborators but also for ourselves. The press always reflects how big our new production will be next time, how we could go even bigger. Now we can say that it won't get any bigger than *JR*. *JR* was on the edge, was over the edge. We won't do that anymore.

But you continue to look for the edge in each production. In a lot of performances, water is brought to the stage in many different ways. This ranges from swimming pools, to rain showers, to ponds. Yet, water and theatre collide — the use of both water and fire is forbidden on stage. Do you consciously use this to test the boundaries of theatre?

The use of water is not a conscious *leitmotif*. All the same, we do like to include real elements on stage: elements that grind against the boundaries of truth and theatre such as water or fire. We used to include a child and an animal in every performance. We look for unpredictable things, dangerous things, performative things. We're looking for sensations that you can't fake; something that goes beyond the theatrical. An actor who gets soaking wet due to an artificial rain, has still a reality, a viscerality, that you can't avoid. We always aim for the limits of the forms that we use. How can we go beyond the form and enter the realm of the real? It is a performativity that we search.

In a meticulously designed installation where all the radars have to run smoothly, it does add a subversive and almost destructive component.

Absolutely, that's why we have a dog on stage in our newest performance. It's always exciting whether the dog will stay or run away, whether he will do what he has to do or less or suddenly more. As makers, we consciously build in this tension that — in the best-case scenario — will add something to the performance. The big towers we build are shaky.

In each project, there are uncalculated factors that can go wrong. It always comes back to the taming of the indomitable beast: a beast that you have created yourself and which you need to keep in check to make sure that it is contained. But that can fail badly and even become dangerous. We all bear the physical marks of that too, especially from our early years.

We hope to preserve that performativity. In our early years, that performativity was very physical but over the years it has faded. The last time was with *The Land of Nod*, which contained a dance piece that we started making together. After two weeks, everyone had shin splints or something similar. *(laughter)* We all just passed the age of thirty and came to the realisation that we weren't as invincible as we thought after all.

Is music part of your mood board? Sometimes the music is so overwhelming that it also directs the spectator's gaze, as for example in some scenes of *Walking down the Champs-Élysées...*, *300el*, and *The Land of Nod*.

Although we describe our performances as compositions, as they always have a musical element, we actually use music mostly functionally. It is much less directive in the creation of a performance. Music first and foremost needs to be supportive. For example, there is a piece of music that we have wanted to use for quite some time but have not yet used, as it is not dominant enough. On the other hand, we have already created an opera, where music truly is the starting point.

Towards the end, we do need music as reinforcement. When we work with live music, as with *Van den vos* and *The Sheep Song*, it is never an obvious course. We don't speak the language, we're laymen. At the same time, we have a very well-defined idea of what we despise and that doesn't make it easy... Between us we know exactly what it should be but we cannot put it into words, which makes it difficult to discuss this with musicians or composers.

You mentioned before how you, as founding members of the same collective, speak the same language but that the translation of your intentions to others is often more difficult. Nonetheless, you work together with a wide range of others: guest actors, technicians, composers, etc. How do you deal with this?

We look for words, we try to learn to speak each other's language. Often it is a matter of backtracking, of retracing our steps — we know what we mean but someone else does not necessarily. It is also a matter of including people in our collective, which we find more difficult to do. We do the preparation and ultimately decide. Still, during the period of time that we work together with others, we try to extend our inner group as much as possible to everyone who participates.

When working with large groups, we organise information meetings at regular intervals. We try very hard to communicate as openly as possible about what we are working on. Even with groups of extras, we always provide a presentation on the story, the references, and the underlying dramaturgy of the performance. Thomas always takes his time for this and that pays off. People — be they actors, technicians, or extras — become fully involved when they know what they are getting into and what we are doing. Because our performances are very technical and complex, we expect a lot from actors, the technical crew, the set, and costume designers.

You need to make everyone part of your dream. It remains difficult, as there are always difficult moments when everyone, including ourselves, suddenly don't see it anymore. Therefore, you need to make your dream big enough so that people want to follow you to the end. Sometimes we are shocked that people keep following us. We wonder if our ship is heading in the right direction. But you have to have the courage to draw that card from the beginning. To tell everyone that it will be fantastic, that we'll do it together, and that we'll eventually get there.

Your performances are regularly interpreted as reflections on social trends or concerns or as political statements. How do your performances relate to current events? Do they have a political function?



Our performances are never political statements. We try to avoid to explicitly refer to current affairs. The performances are political by definition because they are about *human* concerns. We always show a person in a world: a big world that is also governed by that person as well as by others. It is always a larger story that is told through an individual narrative, never a political statement or a metaphor.

The dramaturgical idea that underlies all your performances is the fragile, fearful, floundering human being in an overpowering environment. Little people who try to get home. Is there hope for that struggling human being?

At least there are moments, there is a silver lining.

But our characters often do come crashing down, completely. Optimistic performances do not necessarily make great art. Performances that are moving, touching, as well as hopeful, are rare. It takes great wisdom and sensitivity to make such performances — qualities we may not yet possess. This might be something that we wish for ourselves: that we are able to slowly evolve towards this. Maybe then our performances will become a little less heavy. Although we were initially on a milder course, *The Sheep Song* is again a quite heavy performance.

Tragedy has existed for so long and has had and continues to have such an important function in society. Coming out of the theatre together, hearing the church bells ring: that's something we all need. You have to go through hell together to be able to see the light again. It might not be very hopeful, but we do hope that it will be comforting in the end.

That is the one thing, after all, that we hope to accomplish with our performances. To offer recognition, to bring comfort and catharsis. To know that you are not alone. •

PORTFOLIO

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WALKING DOWN THE CHAMPS-ÉLYSÉES
with a tortoise to get a better view of the world, but it is hard
to drink tea on an ice floe when everyone is drunk, 2009

Performer: Matteo Simoni
© Sofie Silbermann



WALKING DOWN THE CHAMPS-ÉLYSÉES with a tortoise to get a better view of the world,
but it is hard to drink tea on an ice floe when everyone is drunk, 2009

Performers: extras
© René den Engelsman



WALKING DOWN THE CHAMPS-ÉLYSÉES with a tortoise to get a better view of the world, but it is hard to drink tea on an ice floe when everyone is drunk, 2010

Performers: extras
© Sofie Silbermann



300EL x 50EL x 30EL, 2011

Performers: Oscar Van Rompay, Greg Timmermans, Arne Focketeyn, Bart Hollanders, Eddy Verrijcken, Ramona Verkerk
© Sofie Silbermann



300EL x 50EL x 30EL, 2011

Performers: Evelien Bosmans, Ramona Verkerk, Maurice Luyten, Herwig Ilegems, Bart Hollanders, Greg Timmermans, Wim Verachtert, Arne Focketeyn, Eddie Verrijcken
© Sofie Silbermann



TERMINATOR TRILOGY, 2012

Performer: Maurice Luyten

© FC Bergman



TERMINATOR TRILOGY, 2012

Performers: extras
© Sofie Silbermann



TERMINATOR TRILOGY, 2012

Performers: Bart Hollanders, Joé Agemans, Thomas Verstraeten,
Matteo Simoni, Jonas Vermeulen
© Sofie Silbermann



VAN DEN VOS, 2013

Performers: Viviane De Muynck, Stef Aerts, Dirk Roofthoof
© Kurt van der Elst



VAN DEN VOS, 2013

Performer: Vicky Van Bellingen
© Kurt van der Elst



THE LAND OF NOD, 2015

Performers: Joé Agemans, Stef Aerts, Marie Vinck, Bart Hollanders, Matteo Simoni, Thomas Verstraeten
© Kurt van der Elst



THE LAND OF NOD, 2015

Performers: Joé Agemans, Matteo Simoni
© Kurt van der Elst



THE LAND OF NOD, 2015

Performer: Joé Agemans

© Kurt van der Elst



JR, 2018

Performers: Ella-June Henrard, Junior Mthombeni, Marie Vinck, Jan Bijvoet, Imke Mol, Geert Van Rampelberg, Oscar Van Rompay
© Kurt van der Elst



JR, 2018

Performers: Paul Schrijvers, Marie Vinck, Arno Synaeve
© Kurt van der Elst



LES PÊCHEURS DE PERLES, set design, 2018

© FC Bergman



LES PÊCHEURS DE PERLES, 2018

Performers: Jan De Boon, Stefano Antonucci, Charles Workmans
© Annemie Augustijns



LES PÊCHEURS DE PERLES, 2018

Performers: Charles Workman, Elena Tsallagova
© Annemie Augustijns



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From the Archives

VÁCLAV HAVEL:
A SELECTION OF TEXTS ON THEATRE 1963-1986

heirs c/o DILIA 2021

GUEST EDITOR

MARIANA ORAWCZAK KUNESOVA

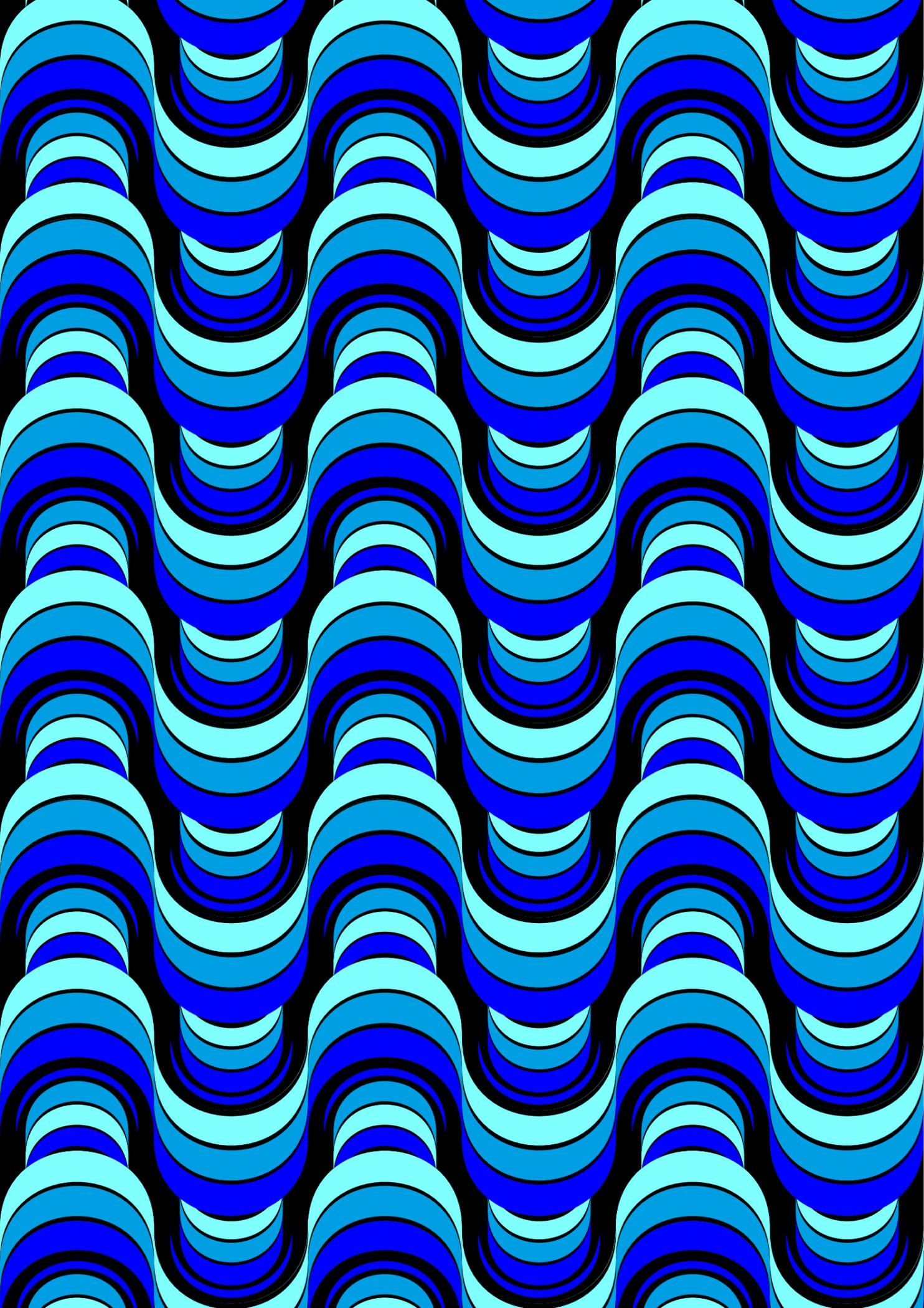
TRANSLATOR

PAUL WILSON

The background of the page is a solid black color. It is decorated with several vertical, wavy bands of color. Each band consists of multiple overlapping, slightly offset lines in various shades of blue and cyan, creating a sense of depth and movement. The waves are rhythmic and repeat across the width of the page.

Introduction

MARIANA ORAWCZAK KUNEŠOVÁ



This year is the tenth anniversary of Václav Havel's death and to mark the occasion we are dedicating our *From the Archives* section to this most important of 20th century European dramatists, who combined his work in the theatre with the struggle for democracy and human rights, not just in totalitarian Czechoslovakia, but elsewhere as well.

All six of Havel's texts appear here for the first time in English. Indeed, until relatively recently, three of them were not even readily available in Czech. All of them were included in a volume called *Václav Havel: On Theatre* (2012), published a year after his death by the Václav Havel Library and edited by his long-time collaborator, Anna Freimanová. This is the first book to contain all of Havel's writing on the theatre, comprising letters, detailed studies of his own work, and theoretical and critical articles and reviews.

The texts that follow are linked thematically by Havel's work in and for the theatre. They span a period of twenty-three years, from 1963 to 1986, and capture the playful atmosphere of the 1960s and Havel's early successes in the Theatre on the Balustrade with the director, Jan Grossman (whose work includes a famous production of Alfred Jarry's *Ubu Roi* in 1964, which Havel worked on as dramaturge); the suppression of the Prague Spring when Havel was banned from the theatre and not allowed to publish; and the years of dissent. Havel's reflections on theatre are thus inextricably linked to political and cultural developments in Czechoslovakia as well as to his personal circumstances.

The first text is called *Self-Portrait*. He wrote this text in 1964 at the request of a publication dedicated to theatre news called *Divadelní noviny*. With a degree of self-irony, Havel remarks among other things on how he got his basic education by studying for entrance exams to schools that ended up not accepting him. The reason for this lack of success was his inappropriate 'class' origin: since he was the son of a wealthy Prague developer, the totalitarian regime in the 1950s made it impossible for him to study at any institution of higher learning.

This is followed by three letters (written between 1963 and 1972) to Alfréd Radok, founder of the Magic Lantern Theatre.¹ Radok was a generation older than Havel, and although he was not part of the Theatre on the Balustrade team, Havel had a great deal of respect for him and knew his work well. Havel wrote theatre criticism and had collaborated with Radok on two productions. In the first letter, Havel invites

1. The Magic Lantern is known throughout the world as the first multi-media theatre. It is also an ensemble of the National Theatre in Prague. It was created by Alfréd Radok for the Brussels World Fair in 1958, together with the set designer Josef Svoboda and the film director Miloš Forman. The basic principle of the Magic Lantern is the interplay of film projections with live action (the combination of acting, dance and ballet, pantomime, and black box theatre.) The productions are always written and produced exclusively for the Magic Lantern troupe.

Radok to guest-direct an adaptation of Kafka's *Trial* at the Theatre on the Balustrade. He spends a considerable portion of the letter laying out the artistic aims of the theatre, which unlike the large theatres in which Radok worked, was a so-called 'small stage'.² Havel also explains his and Grossman's view of the significance of theatrical performances as such here. On the one hand there was the official conception of theatre as a kind of 'industry' that cranks out 'cultural product', and on the other hand, there is what he and Grossman called 'appellative theatre' that appeals to, or addresses, the 'basic situation of modern man in the world', which they believed was absurd.

In the next two letters to Radok, who left the country after August 1968, Havel describes how he was labelled 'the bane of Czech theatre' and how he was accused of having written *The Garden Party* for the sole purpose of undermining communism. He also talked about how being forbidden to work in and for the theatre made his situation almost unbearable, and how people who were only slightly better off than he was turned away from him, a situation he manages to find mildly amusing.

Havel's letters to Radok are followed by a letter to his friend František Janouch, who was living in Sweden and was president of the Charter 77 Foundation, an organization established in exile to help dissidents at home. Havel describes their efforts to establish a *samizdat* journal to be called *On Theatre*, and he asks Janouch for financial support. The journal, he says, will incorporate two revolutionary approaches: it will be 'meticulously edited' to 'emulate a normal, serious magazine

2. 'Small stages' were a typical phenomenon in Czechoslovakia during the 'thaw' that led up to the Prague Spring. Instead of presenting ideologically acceptable work, their aim was to capture the authentic, unvarnished truth about life, in all its levity, poetry, humour, and absurdity. The 'conspiratorial atmosphere' of these theatres, Havel says, made them centres of 'a wider social awakening' (Havel 1990, translated by Paul Wilson).



25th anniversary of the Velvet Revolution: picture of Václav Havel with words 'Havel forever', National Museum building at Wenceslas Square, Prague, 2014
© David Sedlecký

from the time when there were such things', and it will publish contributions from non-dissident authors as well.

The last contribution was written for a festschrift published by the Burgtheater in Vienna to honour the theatre's director and *intendant*, Achim Benning. Here Havel describes how, after the regime made it impossible for him to work in the theatre, publish, or have his plays performed, the Burgtheater (German) — thanks to the fact that Benning staged all the plays Havel wrote during the dissident period — became a kind of second home, though one he was paradoxically separated from by an impenetrable wall.

These texts about Havel's work in the theatre are valuable documents that illustrate the kind of atmosphere Havel created within, what stimulated him, and the themes that were important to him, as well as what creating for the theatre meant to him. Stylistically, the texts reveal Havel's sense of drama, irony, and the absurd, and his gift for calling things by their proper names. In them, Havel displays his skills as a theatre critic and theoretician (especially in the first letter to Radok). As the Czech theatre scholar Vladimír Just observed, Havel used the genre of letter-writing as a place where he could write 'brilliant essays on theatre, (Just 2013). It is also worth noting that Havel's interest in all aspects of the theatre remained strong even in his dissident period, where he continued, as he had done in his years in the theatre, to set the agenda for cultural life, for instance through his work on the aforementioned samizdat journal *On Theatre*.³

3. See also the essay by Lenka Jungmannová, 'Václav Havel vzdálen (i blízek) divadlu' [Václav Havel: Far From (and/Close to) the Theatre], in the book from which these texts have been taken.

→ 4. I thank Martin Palouš for this idea.

In conclusion let us add that Havel's work in the theatre strengthened his connection with all the themes and subjects that engaged him so intensely throughout his life — civic activism, politics, philosophy.⁴ As he said in his autobiographical book, *Disturbing the Peace*:

[T]heatre doesn't have to be just a factory for the production of plays. It is not just a mechanical sum of its parts: the plays, directors, actors, ticket-sellers, auditoriums and audiences; it must be something more: a living spiritual and intellectual focal point, a place for social self-awareness, a vanishing point where all the lines of force of the age meet, a seismograph of the times, a space, and area of freedom, an instrument of human liberation. Every performance can be a living and unrepeatable social event, far surpassing what it had first seemed to be. (Havel 1990: 40)

Our warmest thanks to Mrs. Dagmar Havlová for graciously granting us permission to publish the following texts.

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Václav Havel in 1960 © Horst Tappe/ Gettyimages

A Self-Portrait 1964

First appeared in *Divadelní a filmové noviny* 8,
1964-65, No. 1, page 2

If others take a writer more seriously than he does himself, it's the sign of a healthy situation. If, on the contrary, a writer starts taking himself more seriously than others do, it's a sure sign of his impending decline. That is why I have always been terrified of being asked, with a straight face, 'How do you create? Which of your own works is your favorite? What is your relationship with Ionesco?' and I, with a straight face, reply at some length, unaware that the questioner may simply be pulling my leg. In other words, when a writer loses a healthy awareness of his own insignificance and begins to see himself as being worthy of greater attention, it almost always means that he has also ceased to see the world in which he lives in its proper proportions — and that is a very bad thing.

← Caricature of Václav Havel by Adolf Hoffmeister.

AH68
PRAHA

Perhaps this will explain why, when the editors of *Divadelní noviny*¹ asked me to write a brief self-portrait, my first reaction was that they were making fun of me. Upon looking further into the matter, however, they appeared to be quite serious, and so I decided to give them a serious reply. Should it turn out to be no more than a joke after all, it would mean I have a tendency to take myself more seriously than others do, and that my decline is immanent, something I would regret, since I have time enough for such a decline ahead of me.

So here goes: I was born in Prague in 1936; I attended primary school (during the war), then junior high, and in 1951, when I tried to continue my rather average studies in a grammar school, I was sent instead to apprentice as a lab technician. I worked as a lab assistant for four years, while studying for my high-school diploma at night. Then I applied to study chemistry, both because chemistry interested me to some extent, and because as a lab assistant, I had no other options. I was not accepted, however, and a year later I had lost interest in chemistry and sat an entrance exam to study art history. I was not accepted, and so I tried again, this time to study philosophy, and when I was not accepted there as well, I went to study the economics of automotive transportation, the only department that was willing to accept me. Foolishly, I hoped the subject would spark my interest. I stuck it out for two years, then realised I'd made a mistake and tried to transfer to the film faculty in the Academy of Fine Arts. I was not accepted. So I enlisted in the army where, oddly enough, I was accepted immediately. That was in 1957. Two years later, having risen to the rank of private, I was demobilised and applied to the Theatre faculty in the Academy of Fine Arts. I was

not accepted, and so I became a stage hand at the ABC Theatre.² A year later, I moved to the Theatre on the Balustrade³ as a stage hand and I am still there, having worked, successively, as a lighting technician, an administrator, a reader, and dramaturge. In 1961 I applied again to the theatre department at the Faculty of Fine Arts. Again, I was not accepted. I was accepted — for the external study of dramaturgy — in 1962, when I became dramaturge at the Theatre on the Balustrade. Clearly, I got my basic education by studying for entrance exams to different schools. It's a method I can recommend, with the caveat that there is always the danger that one might be accepted somewhere.

As far as my creative work is concerned, from the time I was sixteen, apart from various theoretical essays, I wrote mainly poetry, but I had gotten over it by the time I did my stint in the army. To my great good fortune, the time was not as favorable to poetic debuts as it is today, and so I have no need to feel ashamed — in the presence of second-hand bookstore customers — of my early forays into the depths of my own emotions. I first became interested in the theatre in the army, where participation in amateur theatre productions provided an escape from military exercises. I created the role of Second Lieutenant Škvoránek in a play called *September Nights*. Škvoránek is a negative character who aspires to the rank of company commander and I was so convincing in the role that I was sharply criticised for my portrayal by my company commander, and stripped of my rank of Panzerfaust operator and of

1. *Divadelní noviny* [Theatre Journal] was a newspaper founded in 1957, then banned during the period of 'normalisation' after the Soviet invasion and revived in 1992. Its mission is to cover events and developments in the Czech theatre and place it in the context of world theatre.

2. When Havel worked in the ABC Theatre, it was run by Jan Werich, a legendary actor from the inter-war period, when he helped establish the Liberated Theatre, one of the main centres of the Czech historical avant-garde. It was here that Havel first definitively embraced the theatre. His observation that the theatre is a 'living spiritual and intellectual focal point' in the introduction comes from his experiences at the ABC Theatre.

3. The Theatre on the Balustrade, established in 1958, became the first of the 'small stages' (see the Introduction) in Prague. The period of its greatest importance came with Jan Grossman's directorship, from 1961-1968.

the chairmanship of our Czechoslovak Union of Youth branch.⁴ This rare example of a primal and immediate response to theatre really did happen. Then I played Corporal Trojan (also a negative character: I was beginning to be typecast) in a play set in the military called *Life Is Ahead Of Us*, which I wrote with a friend, K.B., for our troupe, designed to incorporate as many friends from the troupe as possible. Today, the exact intentions of that play are still being discussed, or so I hear, in the appropriate places in the army.

After the army, when I failed to be accepted into theatre school, I began to take a serious interest in theatre, and from then on I have published occasional theoretical and critical pieces in *Divadlo*⁵ magazine. I also began to write plays. Ivan Vyskočil⁶ read something from my work and took me on at the Theater on the Balustrade. I worked with him on the play *Hitchhiking* and, with Miloš Macourek, I wrote a play called *Mrs. Hermanová's Best Years*. I was the sole author of *The Garden Party*. At the moment, I'm working on the final version of *The Memo*. I've also written a collection of typographical poems called *Anticodes*. All my current work belongs to the Theatre on the Balustrade which, in my opinion, and under Jan Grossman's⁷ leadership — has a real chance to do good theatre.

And that's everything. Not long ago, a Czech writer made manifest his affinity with Jan Neruda⁸ by quoting Neruda's declaration: 'All that I have been, I have been gladly'. I cannot say that of myself. I have done many things that, though the experience was valuable, I did not enjoy doing and would rather not have done at all. The important thing is that I love what I'm doing now.

4. A youth organization in Czechoslovakia run by the Communist Party.

5. *Divadlo* [Theatre] was a magazine published from 1960 to 1970, when it was shut down by the regime as part of the 'normalisation' process. It bears comparison with its high-quality counterparts abroad at the time. It published interviews with directors, reviews of books, and of plays both at home and abroad, articles and essays on the theatre arts and the humanities. The complete script of a play, either domestic or foreign, ran in each issue.

6. Ivan Vyskočil (born in 1929) is a Czech writer, playwright, actor, director, and teacher. He was one of the co-founders of the Theatre on the Balustrade and from 1958 to 1962 he was its artistic director. According to Havel, Vyskočil brought to the Theatre on the Balustrade a 'completely original imagination', 'unconventional theatrical and esthetic impulses', 'intellectual humour', 'erudition', and a 'sense of the absurd'. (See Havel, Václav, *Disturbing the Peace*, Chapter 2).

← 7. Jan Grossman (1925-1993) was a Czech dramaturge and director, and a literary and theatre critic. His greatest directorial achievements were connected with the Theatre on the Balustrade, where he was artistic director from 1962-1968. That period is considered one of the greatest eras in the history of Czech theatre. Among others, Grossman directed Jarry's *Ubu Roi* (1964) Havel's *The Memo* (1965) and Kafka's *The Trial* (1966). After the crushing of the Prague Spring, Grossman left The Balustrade. He returned in 1989, and in the early 1990s, he staged Havel's *Largo Desolato* and *Temptation*.

8. Jan Neruda (1834-1891) was a Czech poet, essayist, playwright, journalist, and a literary and theatre critic. He was one the best-known Czech writers.



Letter to Alfréd Radok¹

'The Kind of Theatre We Want to Make'

August 4, 1963

Dear Mr. Radok,

Even though we agreed not to correspond over the holidays, I am writing to you anyway, on a matter that for me, and equally for Grossman and for our whole theatre, is of the utmost importance.

Not long ago, Grossman and I laid out some more or less detailed plans for our future work, thinking through both the immediate and long-term ways and means at the disposal of our theatre, and we kept coming back to certain things — some general, some more specific — that seemed to us essential. One of the more specific ideas we had was that, given our work and our aims, it would be immensely valuable if you were to agree to guest direct in our theatre for a season.

1. Alfréd Radok (1914-1976) was one of the most important Czech directors. In the theatre, he directed *Offenbach (Tales of Hoffmann, 1946)*; *Osborne (The Entertainer, 1957)*; *Chekhov (The Swedish Match, 1961)* and *Gogol (Marriage, 1963)*. Václav Havel worked with him on those last two plays. He also directed films: *A Long Journey, 1949*, and *Grandfather Automobile, 1956*. He founded the Magic Lantern Theatre and was its artistic director from 1956-1959. The political situation disrupted his career several times. He was forced out of the Magic Lantern, and had to leave the National Theatre. His films also fell into disfavour. After 1968, he chose to emigrate; he died as he was preparing to stage Havel's one-act plays at the Burgtheater in Vienna.

Both of us have already spoken to you about this many times, and at one point, it almost happened. But there was a rather improvisational air about it, based as it was on our personal relationship. We have yet to have a more substantial conversation about the whole matter. This is what I would like to initiate in this letter.

I'll be frank: I'm well aware that despite the friendship and the shared opinions that connect us, and despite your sympathy for the ambitions we have for the Theatre on the Balustrade, and despite all the arguments in favor of your working with us, you are still wavering. You've never made a secret of your reluctance — and I take seriously your reasons for it (particularly because I understand them; after all, I've worked for you before) and I completely respect them. I know too that your hesitations are not driven by any misgivings about us or our work, and that regardless of how you decide, your decision will be carefully considered and impervious to any efforts on our part to sway you. Any pressure from us would, by its very nature, be absurd, on the one hand because it would have no hope of success, and on the other hand because your working with us would only make sense if you did it entirely of your own free will, and on your own terms.

We all know this very well, and I mention it only to make it absolutely clear that *my aim here is not to persuade you to reconsider*, but rather to explain why we think your participation as guest director in our theatre would be important, and why we are so eager to have you. I merely wish to lay out certain circumstances and possibilities, to give you a basis for your thinking, the outcome of which we can only impatiently, if passively, await.

I'll start from the beginning: even though our company is only one component in a larger theatrical organisation in which there are other groups,² and even though we have an administrative director,

supervising departments etc.³ above us, and even though creative opportunities these days are neither ideal nor unlimited — despite all that, our situation today is a relatively fortunate one. We can do practically anything we want, and no one can essentially tell us what to do; we can put on whatever we like, and we can cast anyone we'd like, etc. In other words, we have the circumstances we need to ensure that our theatre will slowly but surely evolve — according to our best lights — into a genuinely excellent, modern theatre.

Will such propitious circumstances ever be repeated? Not to grasp this opportunity would be a sin, and we intend to work in that spirit, with all the risks that go with it. That is our general situation, our starting point, as it were.

But now the question arises: what kind of theatre do we in fact want to create? What are our specific aims? I shall try to lay this out briefly, but first I will state what our aims are not. We are not interested in theatre that is part of the cultural industry, that is, the conception of theatre on which the majority of Czech theatres (including the Prague Municipal Theatres⁴ are based. These theatres put on various productions — some good (if, for example, they happen to be directed by Radok), some bad (not everyone can be Radok); some serious, some light-hearted;

← 2. In 1963, when Havel wrote this letter, the Theatre on the Balustrade shared the space with the Pantomime of Ladislav Fialka, the internationally recognised mime, and the Black Light Theatre of Jiří Srnec.

3. A reference to the communist government agencies (for instance the office of the censor) to ensure the preservation of 'public order'.

4. Prague Municipal Theatres (MDP in Czech) was established in 1929 as an umbrella organisation for several theatres in the centre of Prague. Its 'golden age' was from 1959 to 1972 under the leadership of Ota Ornest, who created a troupe of actors famous for the quality of their acting. He also directed plays by many world-renowned playwrights, many in his own translation. Radok was working for the MDP when Havel wrote this letter.

some ‘problem plays’ that flay away at shortcomings and expose problems; some are merely escapist (let the people have some fun, and relax); some are original Czech plays, some Western; some classical, some Soviet; some have longer runs, some shorter; and that’s about it. The main thing is to have something on stage, with new productions in the works. Everyone’s happy when they come off well, and everyone’s upset when they don’t. Playwrights write, directors direct, actors act — and the theatre industry prospers.

It is against this conception of theatre that we would like to take a stand. We should be less concerned about whether a play succeeds or not, and more about what it was trying to say, and why what was said was sometimes expressed in a penetrating, arresting way and at other times, in a confused and unconvincing manner. What matters is not whether a play is light-hearted or serious, but — be it comedic or otherwise — whether it speaks to people about their problems, how it speaks to them, what impact it has on them. Our concern should not be whether the play is Czech or Western in origin, but whether it is current, whether it compels us to want to put it on, whether it captivates us with its living truth, which is not so much conveyed to us, but rather awakened and uncovered within us. We do not wish to tie our theatrical program to any given aesthetic — for instance that, starting tomorrow, we will present only comedies, or allegories, or chamber dramas, or musicals, or that our productions are going to embrace this or that directorial style. Our program should be grounded in *intellectual* rather than aesthetic norms. We should only put on plays that meet certain standards of urgency, that are intellectually penetrating, complex, challenging, and powerful.

Grossman calls the kind of theatre we want to make ‘appellative theatre’. What are we to understand by that? In theatres that partake in the ‘cultural industry’, the audiences arrive, buy ice-cream bars, wolf them down, take their seats, and watch the performance. Sometimes

what they see on stage moves them or amuses them; sometimes they enjoy it, sometimes they don’t; then they leave the theatre, either having experienced two hours of suspense, or two hours of boredom, or two hours of fun, or two hours of emotional turmoil, or two hours of ‘biting wit’ (uttering things we all know, but what a fine thing it is that they know it in the theatres as well!). Appellative theatre isn’t primarily concerned with whether people laugh or clap or jeer or are swept away, or otherwise moved. What matters is that the laughter, the tension, the emotional turmoil, the acceptance or rejection, and all the other things that people experience in the theatre, and probably always will, become a *vehicle* for a far deeper impact than one that affects only the tear ducts. Theatre should challenge an individual’s entire being, and impact it by uncovering and analysing hitherto unknown truths; it should provoke their imagination, compel them to think things through, arouse their interest in problems, encourage them to participate, to experience, and to work with others in the audience — but on a deeper level than the fleeting ‘participation’ that happens when people merely laugh. Of course it’s a good thing when people laugh; laughter is one of the most elemental means of communication between the stage and the audience, but it must only be a *means* of communication, not its final purpose. We simply wish to make theatre whose aim is not to produce so-called ‘well-made plays’ — everyone wants to do that, especially in theatres that see themselves as part of the general ‘culture enterprise’ — but rather plays whose aim is to communicate with audiences about things of vital interest to both sides, wherein the measure of a play’s quality should not derive from some general, *a priori* notion of what constitutes ‘good theatre’ (in any case, everyone has different ideas about what that is) but rather the incisiveness, the supremacy, the power and appeal of that communication between the audience and the actors, the power of the truths that are both sought for and found. We do not wish to base our choice of plays on the usual mix of plays domestic and foreign, comedic and serious, and so on, but rather on problems, themes, on intellectual

and creative purpose. Nor do we wish to confine our theatre in the straitjacket of a particular directorial style. A program based entirely on the style of a single director is somewhat like a program in which a fat actor chooses to play only fat characters. A directorial style, after all, is not the aim of theatre, but merely a means: its rigour is, in the end, always directly proportional to the rigour of the intellectual program it serves. It is not, after all, just a collection of skills that enables a director to artfully direct something, but rather a capacity for putting certain themes on stage.

This is all very generally put, but I think it is well to be aware of these things. In the given moment, and also in the context of various discussions that have taken place here and there about our theatre, our concern is for several matters: for instance, we would like, through our work, to demonstrate just how arbitrary is the classification of theatres into the so-called ‘small forms’ (cabaret, etc.) and ‘normal theatre’. People often take us to task for ‘having betrayed small-form theatre and beginning to make normal theatre’ while others praise us for doing precisely that — but none of them understands that we couldn’t care less whether someone considers a particular production to belong to one form of theatre or another. We are concerned neither with ‘small’ forms nor ‘large’ but only with an appellative theatre which, in formal terms, could be cabaret, or merely a ‘normal’ play, or yet again a kind of montage, and another time a form for which no pigeonhole has yet been invented. The specific nature of the theatre we wish to create with lies elsewhere than in form, and especially not a form so mechanistically conceived that it can be measured by physical dimensions (small or large). To make form — whatever it may be — a part of one’s program is always formalism. The important thing, after all, is what a particular form is giving form to. Intellectual emptiness can as easily take the form of a large play as it can of cabaret. But both forms can also be the form of something that is both powerful and of vital current interest.

And now, at last, I come to what this is all about. Certainly, there are many theatres that want you to direct for them. You’re a good director, everyone knows that, and everyone wants to do good theatre — that is, everyone wants you to direct for them, because you are a guarantee of a good production. I needn’t stress at this point that this whole way of thinking is typical for the theatre as cultural enterprise — if we have to put up a production, let it be a good production rather than a bad one: that’s somewhere at the bottom of this kind of thinking. We, too, would like you to guest direct with us, but after all that’s been said, it should be clear that our reasons come from a somewhat different way of thinking: we do not wish you to work with us because you’re a good director and nothing more; our concern is — as we believe — that you are a good director because you are supremely capable of addressing, on the stage, certain burning issues that vitally concern us (you are supremely capable of addressing things that may not be of such vital concern to us — but if you couldn’t do the former, you certainly couldn’t do the latter as well — one is merely a consequence of the other) and because what we wish to address on our stage are precisely the things that vitally concern you as well, we are turning to you. Bluntly put: *we don’t want Radok (that’s just snobbery), we want — for instance — Radok’s The Trial*. If we were only concerned about your name, about the quality you guarantee, about what you can bring to the actors (regardless of what you do), then we wouldn’t have spent all this time trying to decide what you might do in our theatre — because you could do anything at all. That, however, would demonstrate the same lack of principle as the ‘cultural enterprise’.

By this, I mean to say that what drives our desire to work with you is somewhat different from what would move any other theatre to make the same request, and I am not saying this because I want to elevate us above the rest — I don’t think we’re involved in any kind of competition here — but to characterise the nature of the whole enterprise more

precisely. Other theatres may be able to offer you much that we cannot — a larger pool of actors to draw on, more latitude in choosing scripts, more production money, etc. etc. As I know you, however, even though you may, quite rightly, consider such matters to be important — what is far more important to you is what we are attempting to offer you: an opportunity to give full range to your vision, an interest in that vision, and the need for that vision in the context of what we do.

In most of the basics concerning the world and theatre, you see very much eye to eye with Grossman and me — we've talked about this often — but even so, you and Grossman are such unique individuals (I'm leaving myself out of this, not out of false modesty, but because you can only talk about individuality when there has been some expression of it) that there are certainly many things about which you would not see eye to eye. The concept that Grossman gave our theatre may well have in it something you disagree with (I don't mean in the area of programming, but in the area of results), for instance Grossman's faith in the theatricality of material that is not in and of itself theatrical or dramatic (various literary genres), the weight he gives to the intellect, or rather analysis, in his 'appellative theatre', his belief in the theatrical suggestiveness of processes that are purely intellectual, etc. etc. — all of these aspects you clearly view with a certain scepticism. Grossman, on the contrary — and few understand your work better than he does! — would certainly not agree with you in everything. I think, however, that not only are such matters not an impediment to your working with us, but on the contrary, they argue in favour of it: I believe that cooperation could be an interesting adventure for both sides. How else can ideas grow but by confrontation with other ideas?

To sum up: our theatre has a particular program and this program, in very specific ways, *could be most powerfully addressed by you, and could through you, in certain moments, be most clearly enhanced by you* — and

similarly, this program, in connection with the social context, dictates the play though which it might be given a voice, so it dictates the director as well. That, then, is the basic and most important reason why we wish to work with you. The world around us — in our opinion — has created a certain complex of situations and themes, that art today, in its unforgivable indifference, does not see, and which cries out for revelation and expression — and as we know you (and your work) no one can express certain of these themes in the theatre more precisely than you. Our biggest concern is the problem, and the fullest way of expressing it. From our point of view, it would be an everlasting pity and loss if that problem and the person who is best able to capture it were never to come together. I suspect you understand what I mean.

Let's try to explain it from a different angle: all of your recent productions, thanks to the conditions in which you are compelled to work, the scripts made available to you, the troupe you work with, etc. etc. — regardless of what their general level is like (and it has to be said that every one of your productions, from *The Magic Lantern* to *Marriage*⁵ was an event) — seemed merely to come close to something that none of them were allowed to express fully. Beginning with *The Magic Lantern* and ending with *Marriage*, in everything you did — even though you came at it each time from a different angle and to a differing degree — you addressed something about the *basic situation of modern man in the world*. You were never able, however — for a number of reasons — to address it directly and completely. So far, you've been able to do that most completely in *Marriage* — and it's typical that you were given the opportunity to say something *about contemporary man* through a century-old anecdotal drama. Your working in our theatre would have meaning for us (and perhaps for you as well) if you were able to express

5. *The Magic Lantern* — see the first note in the Introduction. *Marriage* — see the first note in this text.

directly what all your productions have been circling around for years. Such a production could well have generally aesthetic values that might be lower than your other productions (our company, after all, is less experienced than a Prague Municipal Theatre company) and it might be possible to take them to task in some things — especially if it were to be measured against the perfectionism of a play like *Marriage* — but that would be a negligible circumstance, especially if your production were to achieve what I’m talking about. To shy away from that would probably mean unwittingly acceding to the criteria of the general cultural enterprise, where they talk, of necessity, about a general theatrical quality because they have no more profound criteria.

Please understand, I’m not making a case here for some kind of amateurism. Our theatre has already had some rather dire experience with that, and if it has any ambitions at all in the realm of craft, then it’s only to achieve maximum professionalism — but a type of professionalism whose measure is the precision, rather than the beauty, with which it communicates. The point is, I believe in the dynamic and dialectical essence of the profession: Václav Voska, with all his actorly skills, is certainly, in the abstract sense, a greater professional than Václav Sloup, for instance.⁶ And yet, measured concretely and informally, I firmly believe that Sloup, as Hugo in *The Garden Party*, will be in a certain sense more professional than Voska in some of the many conversational pieces in which he plays. The strength with which Sloup, in his performances, exposes certain mental processes of modern man, the mechanism of his thinking and behavior, the newness of this exposure and its exactness, all of that, for me, exhibits a far greater professionalism than the comfortable routines of theatrical expression in those

6. Václav Voska (1918-1982) was a star actor with the Prague Municipal Theatres for which Radok worked. Václav Sloup (1936-2014) was a member of the Theatre on the Balustrade from 1962-1977, where he played in several legendary productions: *Ubu Roi* (as Giron), *The Garden Party* (as Hugo), and *Waiting for Godot* (Vladimir).



Václav Havel and actor of Theatre on the Balustrade Václav Sloup (right) at an author reading in the Museum of Czech Literature (1969). Author: unknown

conversational plays. Professionalism does not reside in the degree of professionalism attained (Voska is, in his own way, quite flawless!) as much as it does in a kind of derivative of the work itself — in its potential to go further, upward, in a new direction. From that point of view, the performance I’m speaking about [Kafka’s *Trial*] could in fact be far more professional (even though less brilliant) than many performances in the Prague Municipal Theatres.

[...]

The question arises: what could you direct for us? Regarding original scripts, we have two of my plays, and I don't think I need to emphasise how delighted I would be to have you direct one of them — you must understand that it is neither immodesty nor flattery if I say that you are the only director who completely grasps and can present on stage that fundamental, absurd situation of man in the world that concerns me — but Otomar Krejča is doing *The Garden Party* (and he is really approaching it with enormous commitment, and we are grateful to him, even though there are certain pitfalls that I mentioned to you a minute ago by telephone). We want to do *The Memo* in a future season; I have more work to do on it. Miloš Macourek is also working on a play but so far, I can't tell you anything more definitive about it. And so, looking at what we'd like to achieve from the point of view of your possible participation, our thinking always comes around to Kafka's *Trial*.

No one — and I know this from my own work — who attempts to formulate a deeper understanding of the situation of the individual in today's world — can avoid the world of Franz Kafka. I believe that in everything that penetrates to the heart of things — from the philosophical essays [...] to your production of *Marriage*, there must necessarily be a piece of Kafka. Probably no one has captured our situation in the world — in general terms — more profoundly than Kafka, and nowhere else can Kafka be understood quite as precisely as he can only here. The more I think about it, the more I'm convinced that this would be the material capable of making it possible for you to say, directly and completely, everything that shines from all of your productions; I don't think there is anything else in which you could be so completely yourself. I understand your natural fear of such a text, but isn't that fear, which is quite logical, really just a tax payable to this era, which has

accustomed you to expressing yourself in round-about ways,⁷ to project yourself into things that don't deserve it, and simply to do everything differently from what you would normally do? Isn't it necessary to break free of these restrictions and that treacherous pressure that compels us to transpose ourselves into the realm of the purely aesthetic and aesthetic experiments just so we can say some basic things about the world? [...] And in any case, does not the excessive pressure that *Marriage* has in its dramatic structure, *the pressure of the present day*, tell you that slowly but surely you can no longer be satisfied with anything less than a script that allows you to say certain things about this world. Wouldn't it be wonderful if that script were in fact Grossman's 'dramatisation' of *The Trial*? Nothing would give us more delight than if your most important production in recent years were to take place precisely in our theatre, which would, of course, be to some degree logical: it would fit well with the program I have tried to outline — with a theatrical program that does not depend on acquiring good scripts or good directors, but whose primary concern is to achieve the greatest possible intellectual power and immediacy. I can imagine that your production of *The Trial* would hold a very large mirror up to the times we live in — and it would be good if that could be done via Kafka, the same Kafka who today, thanks to the mad scramble to celebrate his anniversary, is threatened with total incomprehension. If certain people really understood him, they wouldn't talk about him with such enthusiasm.

Quite simply, no matter how I look at it, it becomes clearer and clearer to me that *The Trial* is the only way to go. It wouldn't be just an ordinary guest directorship; it would have to be clear why you, of all people, are doing it: because you're the only one who can.

Grossman's dramatisation of *The Trial* derives from a different principle than every other dramatisation and adaptation so far — because it derives directly from Kafka. Grossman understands, I think, quite

→ 7. Because of the strict censorship imposed by the régime, people learned to find ways to express themselves indirectly.

correctly, that Kafka is a natural dramatist. The whole of *The Trial* is written in such a way that you see and feel every situation directly. Nothing more needs to be added. All you need do is *feel* his way of writing, his tragedy, his humour, his absurdity, his reality. It's paradoxical: at first glance it seems to be quite clear and simple: every educated person knows what a Kafkaesque situation is, and yet apart from yourself, I have yet to meet a director who could put that on the stage. I can almost see your *Trial* in front of me now — quite real, and in real circumstances — just as sober, matter-of-fact, focused on the down-to-earth, full of the absurdity that *Marriage* has, hilarious and chilling at the same time.

[...]

One of the main reasons why you are reluctant to work with us is the actors. So before you render your verdict, there is one thing left for me to do: say a few words about our ensemble.

I don't want to pretend that it is better than it is. I think, however, that because of a series of optical illusions and accidents, it's better than you might think.

Today, it consists of ten people and soon it will grow to about twelve — we have an opportunity to expand the troupe and we plan to take it. As in every company, there are good actors and average actors, but I'll bet that the ratio of one to the other is better than in most other theatres. [...] They are all fine people, enthusiastic and committed. The problems that you have with actors in the Prague Municipal Theatres are unthinkable here.⁸

⁸. A reference to problems with actors in the Prague Municipal Theatre circuit while rehearsing a dramatisation of Chekhov's *Swedish Match* (which premiered in 1961). Radok was new to the troupe and the actors were not prepared for the intense, 'laboratory' work he demanded from them.

Personally, I think that with you as director, more of the company's potential would be liberated. You would do them a world of good. Often, as actors, they are still feeling their way and I can clearly see how you would open their eyes [...] I believe that after what I saw at your rehearsals, the way you worked unstintingly with the actors, and I think that nothing of what we want to do in our theatre can be done — as far as working with actors is concerned — in any other way but yours. I seriously think that your direction could free up this company's acting and prepare them and it seems so absurd to me that you have to work with actors who don't understand you and are incapable of taking anything from the work, while in our theatre there is a troupe that is literally waiting for something like this and would get so much out of it. But I'm getting a little ahead of myself. I understand that such matters have no bearing on whether or not you would consider working with us. I offer them more to round out the situation than as arguments.

Quite simply, we'd like you to direct Kafka's *Trial* at our theatre next February and March. We have a thousand reasons why we want this to happen, and why we think it would be vitally important to us, and why it could be meaningful to you as well. I don't know how you will decide; I no longer have any influence on it at this moment, but I firmly believe that it will happen, and I look forward to it.

*Many greetings,
Yours,
Vašek⁹
Prague, August 4, 1963*

⁹. The diminutive of 'Václav'. It indicates the closeness of his relationship with Radok, though he uses the formal 'You' throughout the letter.

Letter to Alfréd Radok

From a hitherto unpublished letter
to Alfred Radok, 1972



Alfréd Radok

The Bane of the Czech Theatre - 1

[...] As far as publishing is concerned, it's completely unthinkable here at the moment (and in any case, even if I were allowed to publish, I don't know what I could, given the state of censorship these days). It's even forbidden to mention my name anywhere other than in a politically derogatory way. Prisoners had to cut a page mentioning me out of the entire print run of *The History of Czech Theatre*. It's funny that at a relatively young age I've managed to get into the textbooks and, at the same time, to get cut out of them. Dilia [the official literary agency] is not allowed to grant performance rights to my plays, and yet they are still collecting performance fees from older contracts and for some time now, have refused to pay me the regular honoraria. By the way, I've sued Dilia — it's de facto theft — so that I'm defendant and plaintiff at the same time. Right is unambiguously on my side, so I'm curious about what means they will use to quash my lawsuit. For now, they don't quite know how to deal with it, being bound by their own declarations that a certain regard for the law ought to be maintained. To be black-listed along with the main counterrevolutionaries is a rather strange situation to be in: it's amusing to see how many people are afraid to have any contact with me — and the better off they are, by which I mean the more they have to lose, the more they fear me. It's another paradox: I have no reason to fear those who serve the regime, but they have reason to fear me. They can't do me much more harm, but I can do a lot of damage to them by compromising them. Obviously, none of this applies to my real friends; present circumstances have instead rid me of people I don't much care for, and has strengthened my ties to those I do. •



Alfréd Radok

Letter to Alfréd Radok

From a Letter to Alfréd Radok,
written in November or December, 1972

The Bane of the Czech Theatre - 2

[...] The constitutional congress of the Union of Czech Theatre Workers has just met. I've read the main paper that was delivered there, and found that it paid more attention to me than anyone else. I was branded as the bane of Czech theatre; *The Garden Party* apparently started the counter-revolution; I deliberately became a well-known playwright for the sole purpose of destroying communism and fighting for the return of my family businesses (so that clearly, after the changes I allegedly tried to provoke, I would have become a restaurant owner¹) etc. etc. The radio has broadcast several unbelievable stories about me; I was interrogated again in relation to something or other; a number of colleagues who are slightly better off than I am are distancing themselves from me in various ways, and so on.

¹. Among other things, Havel's father built the famous Terraces restaurant at Barrandov, Prague, inspired by Cliff House near San Francisco.

To be clear, I'm a long way from being in the throes of self-pity; these matters, in and of themselves, have not upset me and I'm taking them with humour. But there's something else that bothers me about this whole business: a kind of secondary consequence that it has for me, even though I try to resist it: it's making it hard for me to write, because I'm losing the feeling that it makes any sense. It's not just directors (as you've written) who create for 'this moment'; a playwright does too. A play is not finished, has not fully become itself, if it's not put up on the stage. It's not the same as a novel or a poem, which have a kind of inherent life of their own, even when they are still just a manuscript. A play is written — or at least authors of my type write them — for a particular situation, to address a certain social condition, under pressure from a particular social climate and for it; in short, we write for a specific audience. But I think I've already written about this to you in some of my previous letters.

It's true, that while I may have lost my domestic audience, I have not lost — theoretically — my foreign audience, so I can only pin my hopes on them. But that's very hard to do — it's like writing in a vacuum. My experience is that if a play is fortunate enough to connect with the specific and limited audience for which it was written, and if, in that dialogue with the audience, it manages to attain some kind of truth then — oddly enough — it suddenly begins to say something to different people in quite different circumstances, at a different time. Its truth is somehow so concrete that it is comprehensible everywhere. In any case, wasn't that also true of the greatest playwrights, like Shakespeare? On the contrary, however, a play that is written for some kind of abstract viewer, who could be anywhere, that is written for 'the ages', often meets with incomprehension everywhere, and history, in particular, will take no interest in it. Theatre, as you yourself know best, is a very particular, living social organism — and that applies to a great extent to the plays that are written for it as well: without that immediate

contact with an audience, a play becomes dry, abstract, and lifeless — and if it doesn't come alive as theatre, it strangely enough ceases to come alive as literature as well. In short, it seems that even plays need to have a 'home' of their own, and only then can they step outside the confines of their own backyard. Very seldom does a play that is written for the purpose of catching on beyond its own back yard ever catch on beyond that backyard. Perhaps it's hard to generalise, but I myself am beginning to feel that in my own case. Perhaps that's in part because I'm a kind of homebody that is not nimble enough to adapt to something other than what he's used to. But to be concrete about it: if some of my plays are still being performed in various places around the world, they are usually only plays that were first performed here — and so far, not one of my texts that has not been performed here has ever been put on anywhere else. And yet — and this is most curious — that possibility theoretically exists: to this day, as I've already told you, they haven't yet found a legal way to prevent Czech authors who are blacklisted here from enjoying a legitimate presence abroad. I can quite legally sell the foreign rights to plays that I am writing now, or that I have written. The only difference now is that I can't get any money for it — but truly, that's not the main thing. Perhaps all this is just unintentional, merely an interplay of circumstances, and it will change in time, but I can't help feeling that it's not just unintentional.

[...]

And so I'll move on to more concrete matters: I recently saw Ornest's² production of Shakespeare's *Richard II*. By the way, Ornest is no longer director-general of the Prague Municipal Theatres; he was sacked, just like all the other Prague theatre directors have been; nevertheless, he is still allowed to direct in Prague theatres. The play was very beautifully

2. Ota Ornest. See earlier note (text 2).

translated by Zdeněk Urbánek (there is not even a cyclostyled version of the text, so I can't send it to you), and even if the production is not very good (we know Ornest) it had a great impact, mainly because it's an exceptionally interesting play, and very relevant here now (it's a kind of anatomy of humiliation), and also because Václav Voska³ is good in the title role. If you get the chance you should look at the play; maybe through it, you could do Shakespeare justice; it's not very well known here, but you can certainly get hold of a copy in German. After the performance, I had a long conversation with Voska, who sends his greetings, and who told me now much he thought of you while working on this play.

•

3. Václav Voska. See earlier note (text 2).



Václav Havel in 1976 © Bettmann/ Gettyimages



Letter to František Janouch

Václav Havel writes to František Janouch about *On Theatre*
4-8 March and 7 July, 1986

[...] Several friends from the theatre [...] and I are getting ready to launch a samizdat revue on theatre, something that is sorely lacking here. It should be thought of as a continuation of that excellent revue *Divadlo*, but it will, naturally, be more modest. Given that the work will be done by older people and not by young enthusiasts, it will need some start-up capital, because although we're not paying our contributors, we will still need to pay something to those who will have to run errands for us, do research, translate and the like.

[...]

Most important of all, I'd like to write at some length about this new theatre periodical. The whole thing is turning into something that's exceeding our greatest expectations. It was my wife's idea, but it caught on. First a few facts: it will be called *On Theatre*, it will be a thick semi-annual, something between a magazine and an anthology. The first issue (July) is already being transcribed, that is, it's in production. It has 200 pages and further issues will be roughly the same length. It will be typed out at first, then it will be Xeroxed. In many respects, it will be something new in the field of samizdat. For instance: it will be meticulously edited, which means we'll accept nothing 'over the transom'. Many contributions have been rejected, others rewritten in conjunction with their authors (people have got used to bad writing; young writers in particular have trouble with diction and style, because no one has taught them how). Every issue will have a theme; there will be regular departments, and a certain architecture and professionalism. In short, it will emulate a normal, serious magazine from a time when there were such things. We've brought in a number of authors from the official 'structures'¹ (they will write under pseudonyms), which is another innovation (this practice already exists, and only partially, among historians) and what is very important here: they'll be given the chance to write freely about what they know, and what the outcasts² don't know, and that will open up new horizons and make the whole enterprise attractive. We expect there to be great interest in the project in the theatres and among the general public, since no official theatrical review has existed for many years now, let alone one that is uncensored.

1. 'Structures' was a term used by the dissidents to describe institutions and organizations, including government, officially sanctioned by the regime (the theatre, universities, research centres, the media, and so on.) Within these 'structures' there existed a so-called 'grey zone' of people who quietly sympathised with the regime.

2. I.e. the dissidents.

As you must have guessed, I'm writing about this in such detail because, among other things, I'd like to get money from the Foundation.³ It turns out that if we are to maintain a professional standard, we can't get along without a generous grant. Concretely, some time ago I requested that you increase support to Kraus and Pavlíček, and that request still stands. Both of them deserve it, particularly Kraus, who has devoted three months of his time exclusively to the first issue. In fact, he did nothing else — the bar was set so high that there was no other way to do it. We gave him 5,000 crowns from the operating fund for the first issue, but we can't keep that up indefinitely. The problem is that, for various reasons, it would be appropriate to pay an honorarium for some of the contributions. Beyond that, there are occasionally extra expenses, for theatre tickets or for trips out of Prague, and so on, but those aren't large sums. In other words, would it be possible to send money, in the form of support for a fictional recipient,⁴ that we could use to create a small separate fund for this magazine? You could send it to my wife's address, who is acting as a kind of bookkeeper. Besides that, I would request a moderately large amount of support money to be sent to Andrej Krob, Italská 9, Prague 2. His wife is acting as an editorial secretary; she runs all the errands, makes arrangements, is Kraus's right hand, and she enjoys doing it (she works in the Theatre division of the National Museum). [...]

3. The Charter 77 Foundation was a fund that was created to support dissidents, mainly Czechoslovakian, in their samizdat and other projects.

4. The financing of dissident projects was often accomplished, for security reasons, by awarding grants to 'fictional' persons. The funds would then be used for a particular project. Havel is open about this, and the details of the new magazine because his letter to Janouch was going to be smuggled out of the country.



Achim Benning

Festschrift to Achim Benning

Contribution to a Festschrift to Achim Benning,
director of the Burgtheater in Vienna, 1984

For the whole of the 1960s — that is, from my beginnings in the theatre around 1960 until 1968 — I worked in the Theatre on the Balustrade in Prague, where I held various functions, from stage-hand and lighting technician, to secretary and dramaturge. But more important for me than those formal positions was the fact that for the whole time, I was part of the artistic organism in this small, ‘specialty’ theatre, side by side with my friend, the theoretician and director Jan Grossman who, as head of the theatre’s drama division, had an immediate influence on its artistic identity. I naturally took part in everything that had to do with our theatre, from building a company of actors, the choice of plays, the hiring of directors, to participation in the day-to-day operations. In other words, the Theatre on the Balustrade, throughout the 1960s, was something that could be called my ‘artistic home’.

It's understandable that, given circumstances that, for me, were so fortunate, I did not become the type of playwright who simply sits at home and writes plays (the way a novelist writes novels or a poet poetry), which he or his agent then offers to theatres. I wrote my plays surrounded by the intellectual atmosphere of a particular theatre, which was always the first to put them on, which in turn meant I had a direct say in how they were presented. The fact that they were then put on by other theatres in Czechoslovakia and elsewhere in the world is another matter. In other words, not only were these plays written in the specific intellectual atmosphere in Prague at the time, but they were written for particular actors and a particular stage, with regards for the possibilities and limitations they offered, and they were written in the spirit of a certain conception of theatre that Grossman and I were attempting to initiate at The Balustrade. They were not just an expression of my personal dramatic poetics, of my particular authorial tendencies, preoccupations, opinions, and limitations, but they were always a reflection, an expression and, at the same time, a constituent part of a particular theatrical poetics. I got used to following, on an almost daily basis, how they resonated with audiences, and in that process I was able to test and verify many things, and through that daily, practical contact with the theatre as an institution, and with its audience, I gained the first experiences that were so decisive for my future as a writer.

In short, I wrote for a particular theatre, for particular actors, and for a particular audience, all of which I was intimately familiar with.

After 1968, everything changed radically: I not only lost the right to work in the Theatre on the Balustrade, but in any theatre in the country, and as an author, I was banned.

It's clear that thanks to the way in which I was shaped as a dramatic author, and with regard to the conditions and the kind of work that



Pavel Kohout



I had become accustomed to until that point, those radical changes represented a far greater handicap to my writing than they would have had I been the kind of writer who writes at home and then sends his work somewhere, without being connected in any immediate way with the particular artistic milieu in which his work was to be presented. And that's what happened: I found it very hard to write; I had the feeling that my writing made no sense; I felt myself in a vacuum because I did not know for whom I was actually writing. I think that reflected on my work: the first play written in the new circumstance (*The Conspirators*) gave me more trouble than any of the plays I'd written before, and at the same time, I like it the least. It is somehow 'dry' and contrived, lifeless, with no tension, no humour, and it's clear that it was written in a kind of vacuum.

But why am I writing about this on this occasion? Because a strange thing happened. As time has gone on, I've been able to find a new 'artistic home'. An artistic home away from home.

As far as I know, all my plays have been performed in Vienna (except for the one I've just mentioned, which is no great loss), albeit in various theatres and with varying success. For this and other reasons I've long had an intimate cultural relationship to Vienna. I have felt in the city's intellectual climate (certainly thanks to history, that is, to the long co-existence of our two cities in the same political state) a certain nearness to the intellectual climate of Prague and a better understanding of the things that have been created in Prague. I rather immodestly might paraphrase Mozart's well-known declaration: 'My Praguers understand me' and say: 'My Viennese understand me'. And so if I have long had an intimate relationship with Vienna as a cultural centre, it was only natural that I gradually found my new 'artistic home' there as well.

The Burgtheater under the direction of Mr. Benning has become that home. Not only has everything I've written since 1975 (including the

very strange and exclusive play, *The Mountain Hotel*, that no other theatre, as far as I know, has dared to do), been premiered there, but they also put on one of my older plays (*The Memo*) which had its new Vienna remount almost twenty years after its first presentation in Vienna. I feel close to the Burgtheater for other reasons as well: for example, for engaging and presenting plays by my friends Pavel Kohout and Pavel Landovský;¹ or presenting work by another friend, Tom Stoppard; and not least because the branch of Amnesty International in the theatre kept a watchful eye on me when I was in prison.

I have no doubt that most of the credit for all this goes to Mr. Benning, and most of all, I have him to thank for the fact that, in my current circumstances, I have something like ‘my own theatre’, my mother stage, that I can almost consider myself its house author, and which I can consider my new — albeit distant — ‘home’.

My relationship to this new home of mine is, it is true, very odd. As far as I can remember, I’ve never been in the Burgtheater, and of course I’ve never seen any of my plays performed there; I have never met Mr. Benning in person; I have no direct personal influence on the work of the theatre; and naturally, of course, I haven’t had any influence on how my plays were presented.

So, it’s a genuinely odd kind of home, shrouded from me in a fog of mystery, separated from me by an insurmountable border, so that in a sense, I’m infinitely far away, and at the same time, very close.

1. Pavel Kohout (b. 1928) is a poet, writer, and playwright, and was one of the most outstanding figures in the Prague Spring. Pavel Landovský (1936–2014) was an actor and playwright. Both were dissidents and organisers of the human rights manifesto, Charter 77. Kohout was a co-author of the Charter’s text; Landovský played a role in evading the state secret police and getting copies of the charter in the mail. Both men were forced into exile in Austria in the late 1970s, where they settled down. Kohout continued to write, Landovský acted in the Burgtheater. After the Velvet Revolution in 1989, they both returned to Prague.

But we live in a strange time, and that private strangeness of mine — that I have an ‘artistic home’ in which I’ve never been and that I cannot visit — is merely an immediate product of that strange period.

Regardless of how curious this situation is, I must say I’m glad that things are at least as they are, not just because my awareness that a distant, but nevertheless a ‘mother stage’ exists makes it a little easier for me to write, but above all because precisely the strangeness of this situation confirms the hopeful fact that even people who have been so long and so drastically separated by the absurd curtain of today’s ‘theatrum mundi’ still have things to say to each other, can still understand one another, and can even work together in some way.

Mr. Benning is leaving the Burgtheater. Others, more qualified than I, will be able to evaluate that era and his impact on it. I would only ask that when they do evaluate it, they remember that in Prague, there lives a playwright who has every reason to be grateful, because even with the distance between them, Mr. Benning has given back to him something that, in the course of history, was taken away from him, and that without that, he would have found it even more difficult to write than he does.

Prague, August 13, 1984



Book Reviews

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NARRATIVES IN BLACK BRITISH DANCE EMBODIED PRACTICES

Adesola Akinleye (ed.)

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review by

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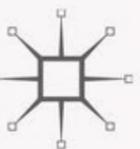
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Narratives in **Black British Dance**

Embodied Practices

EDITED BY ADESOLA AKINLEYE



N

narratives in Black British Dance: Embodied Practices, edited by Adesola Akinleye, is an essential read for artists, scholars, and activists from a diversity of fields, and particularly those interested in the confluences between decolonial thinking and practice; dance, theatre, performance, and cultural studies; and embodied and critical approaches to research and creation. This book offers a diversity of perspectives, with a focus on the stories, experiences, and creative processes of — as well as recounted and written by — dance makers, practitioners, and scholars of African descent in Britain today. That is people that are traversed by and redefine the experiences of blackness, Britishness, and dance. This includes individuals whose bodies, minds, and creative processes are marked by journeys, challenges, and questions concerning memory, dislocation, migration, displacement, belonging, and being part of a transnational African and diaspora arts community.

This book is a key contribution to the emerging research, practice, and reflection in and around — the when, where, and how — of diverse embodied arts approaches under the porous umbrella of Black British Dance. Using an ethnographic and narrative approach, this book is responding to and honoring oral traditions of African and indigenous diasporas that transmit embodied experience through story. It promotes a multi-perspectivism and pluralism that critiques the monolithic European narrative that ignores and invisibilises diverse non-western

aesthetics and modes of dance-making and understanding what dance may mean. To complement the book, a website has been created with an on-going collection of interviews and sharing of practices that can be accessed at <http://narrativesindance.com>

This book also contributes to and enters into dialogue with key issues being discussed within transdisciplinary perspectives of postcolonial and decolonial studies. In particular, it brings to mind and resonates with authors such as Patricia Hill Collins, who writes about the experience of being an ‘outsider within’, likewise using the narrative method in her research within the field of Black Feminist Thought. The ‘outsider within’ refers, in part, to a unique perspective on social, political, intellectual, cultural, and economic realities, and the possibilities and responsibilities that come with seeing from outside in. Through the sharing and weaving of diverse narratives, *Narratives in Black British Dance* contributes to a reflection of how bodies and unique artistic processes reveal the mobile ground that one’s multiple hybrid identities may fall or root into. It also brings to mind the notion of encouraging and cultivating what Fred Moten and Stefano Harney (2013) refer to as an ‘undercommons’. That is, a space-time and way of being, studying, and experimenting with others on the borders and edges of institutions, as discussed by Moten and Harney in their co-authored book *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning & Black Study*. In parallel, the book being reviewed here exemplifies diverse approaches to this mode of subversive and creative existence and shares essential questions around practice as research in relation to the body and its collective nature as a key source of knowledge.

A central issue in this book is that of contesting, negotiating, and moving through and beyond labels and categories that tend to simplify and stereotype. These get in the way of a deeper discussion and building of strategies to create cross-cultural and cross-disciplinary alliances. According to Akinleye, this means ‘Negotiating a label, a sense of

community, not a label that summarizes a community' (2018: 21). This manifests itself in a commitment to cultivating spaces to reflect on and visibilise emergent and consolidated contemporary artistic practices and non-western philosophies of African decent that contribute to dance and performing arts making, as well as a growing sense of *collective* empowerment through the embodied arts.

The book is divided into three very coherent and complimentary sections entitled 'Paradigms', 'Processes', and 'Products' respectively. As it is presented and explored in the introductory chapter by Akinleye, one of the central focuses of the book is to challenge specific contexts, give visibility to the lack of other essential contexts, and present new contexts and stories within and beyond the field of dance. This includes challenging the context of the 'other' and 'otherness', the context in which dance is given value, contexts for talking and writing about the dancing body, contexts for seeing the dancing body, the context that dualism creates, along with acknowledging the lack of contexts for telling non-western tales through dance. Ultimately the book presents new perspectives, environments, and stories amplifying the ways of thinking about, creating, seeing, and theorising dance 'informed by rich practices of artists that identify with Blackness and Britishness' (Akinleye, 2018: 14).

From my subjective perspective as a dance artist and scholar who has grown up, studied, migrated, and worked between contrasting cultures and identities, resonating with and finding deep inspiration and affinity with the cosmologies, philosophical visions, and artistic practices of indigenous, African, and African diaspora artists throughout the world, this book offered new and diverse tools, methods, and language play to analyse and question the dominance of western philosophical approaches to the body, dance, and society that inform our artistic education, arts industry, and cultural sector. As a reader I felt invited to reflect on many things such as the search for identity, healing and

a sense of home and ground through dance; acknowledging the challenges of writing about certain unspeakable elements that are only communicable through the moving body, yet that we attempt to articulate in words; dance as a movement philosophy over a technique or set of skills; the content, research and writing methods and philosophical debate brought up around accessing, embodying, and applying non-western and non-binary approaches to the artistic and academic process.

Ultimately, this book invites the reader to take on a subjective and embodied voice in relation to one's own position, perspective, and privileges: 'the story of dance is filtered through the I, crafting, writing the somatic, the I needs to be present [...] A re-articulation of self as embodied is a process of decolonization' (Akinleye, 2018: 6-7). Where embodiment is rooted in non-western views, this book acknowledges the legacies of colonialism and western dualist philosophies in how we perceive the body and the self on a daily basis.

To conclude, this past year, 2020, has been filled with unpredictability, fears, frustrations, and dis-orientations, as well as an inspiring growing force in social movements among the African diaspora throughout the world. This book is an important contribution giving voice to contemporary reflections and both historical and current practices, responding to the oppressions being dealt with daily, and proposing pathways of creative resilience and solidarity. Reading it in the current context of the Covid-19 pandemic, with collective embodied practices diminished and restricted, gives the material an additional urgency and relevance in the re-orientation and construction of an emerging present and future in dance. •

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PERFORMANCE, MOVEMENT AND THE BODY

Mark Evans

London: Macmillan International
Red Globe Press, 2019, 210 pp.
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THEATRE &
PERFORMANCE
PRACTICES

performance,
movement and
the body

mark evans

In *Performance, Movement and the Body*, Mark Evans focuses on movement practice and the role played by the actor's body in the twenty-first century, without ignoring a larger historical background that has its roots at the beginning of the last century in the renovation of theatre and training practices. This is an element he had already pointed out in his previous books *Jacques Copeau* and *Movement Training for the Modern Actor*.

Specifically, Evans looks at different aspects of movement practice in theatre, from mainstream performances to more alternative forms, and proposes this analysis:

The body of the mainstream actor can become limited by too closely defined notions of craft, by what can become (particularly in some cultures and some industry contexts) very fixed notions of what it means to be an actor. Movement directors within mainstream theatre cannot change this directly, but only impact upon these forces through making opportunities for change available as and when they arise (p. 42).

Evans gives an insightful and detailed description of actor training trends nowadays and the way in which movement is central to their possible development, pointing out the necessity of going beyond fixed trainings and the preconceived assumptions of the actors' role in the

creative context of a performance, and specifically of their body. His analysis brings to light the risk of a rigid separation between a strictly technical and physical interpretation and a more "natural" physical one, a dichotomy that is always present in the traditions and techniques that define movement practice. The plural nature of this practice, specifically in the case of the physical theatre genre, according to the critical perspective of Simon Murray and John Keefe in their *Physical Theatres: A Critical Introduction* (2015) and *Physical Theatres: A Critical Reader* (2007), has always helped to find a balance between these two possible ways of approaching movement practice. According to Evans, there are 'challenges facing the moving body in performance within the twenty-first century' (p.177) that embrace many more issues also related to the socio-cultural context. He has an innovative approach that focuses on the body of the performer also as receiver of the training practice, bringing both a social and subjective perspective to the analysis of movement practice in theatre trainings and productions — '[i]n order to open up critical dialogue around the dominant narratives of movement practice for actors, we need to find ways in which students/actors can identify: how the stories underpinning their acting came to be; what practices they are built on; and what bodies wrote them' (p.11).

From this point of view, Evans is constantly rethinking the role of training and its function both for the actor and for the individual: '[the body] is an important location from which individuals and groups can assert their sense of difference and the significance(s) of using their bodies differently' (p.72). This is because he is interested in all of the multiple narratives that codified movement practices do not consider or bestow. Similarly to what Derrida has suggested about written text being woven by all the traces it leaves, the performance might be considered as a place where movement and bodies in movement tell the story, as Evans also suggests recalling — from de Certeau's argument — the spatial relevance implicit in telling a story: '[t]he stories we tell with our bodies

cannot escape the socio-political reality of where our bodies are from, and the spaces that we have taken them to' (p.178).

The starting point in the history of movement practice is the revolutionary vision, at the beginning of the twentieth century, of a theatre that should be centered on the role of the actor. Therefore, many aspects of theatre practice started revolving around the figure of the actor. In many cases this awareness led to the perceived necessity of a systematisation of the actor's work, and particularly of the actor's training. As Alison Hodge clearly states, in the introduction to her *Actor Training*, from a twenty-first century perspective many of the systems, methods, and protocols developed in Western theatre-making are still the basis of professional training and remain significant. Hodge also argues that many actor-training practitioners have investigated the body/mind dynamic, and that movement is a constant element of many practices, albeit to different degrees. In this book, Evans questions the extent to which movement is incorporated in theatre training and theatre production not as a secondary or extra element but as a 'means of meaning-making' (p.44).

Performance, Movement and the Body outlines the significance of movement in theatre practice both in conventional and innovative theatre approaches, thus bringing the focus back to the body not as mere executor of codified languages but as embodiment of personal and cultural stories: '[t]he body is also examined as an area of resistance, transgression, transformation and change' (p.13).

Stressing the importance of the possibility of communication through the body of the performer, and how this body becomes the medium that performers and audience share, Evans wants to analyse also how the body can be the direct point of connection between the cultural story and the inner self of the performer within the outer cultural context

of the performance. The author is looking at the consequences and uses of specific training methods and performance systems and at the possible effects of these on a performer's awareness of the theatrical context. This system of analysis is present also in Evans's investigation of well recognised movement-based training methods, for instance in his analysis of Lecoq's training in the third chapter. Here he focuses on the importance of the notion of play because it brings an element of freedom in relation to the body and the metalinguistic work that the actor might feel constrained to do with it: '[f]or Lecoq, although play may sometimes come very close to "reply", ultimately it allows the actor to transform or extend reality, though always rooted in the performer's embodied understanding of the world' (p.52).

Evans's research on actor training focusing on the actor as author of his movements is embedded in his own practical experience and experiencing as an artist, as he states in the introduction and in the conclusion of this book. This personal and direct relation with the material studied might be linked to the tradition of actors writing on the art of acting, a tradition that can be traced back to practitioners of the eighteenth century such as François Riccoboni in his *L'Art du Théâtre*. Here the author's entire theory is based on his own practice and this becomes a necessary and fundamental condition for discussion concerning the art of the actor and the legitimacy of his theorisation.

Evans's book is organised around six different themes, following a non-linear but still chronological order to describe and analyse these processes — 'Moving into the Mainstream', 'Movement, Play and Performance', 'Doing Movement Differently: Dance and Circus — Danger, Touch and Sweat', 'Movement and the Cultural Context', and 'Movement and Digitized Performance'. This organisation of themes does not connect only to specific techniques, working methods, or companies, but stresses the importance of a perspective on the use of movement in

trainings and performances that would consider the political relevance of a story or stories told through the body and what effect this might have culturally both on the performer and on the audience:

Our dispersed, diverse, dynamic bodies are evolving in relation to a context that is itself in flux. Our bodies, throughout our lives, have to settle into new cultural environments, along with the coming-into-being and the letting-go of other practices that that involves. Though deeply conditioned within our own, often complex, cultural contexts, we are all also increasingly active in our struggles for agency, and aware of the need to be so (p. 126).

For this reason, Evans includes an analysis of the practice of 'Animal Study', probably never considered so specifically before. This practice is looked at in connection with the idea of abstraction and transformation, considering the results that occur on the body of the performer:

In animal study, notions of character are almost entirely physicalized and embodied; the actor (re)composes their bodily rhythms and dynamics, what Deleuze and Guattari describe as the 'affects' of their body, in order to take on the movement dynamics of the animal. In so doing, they enter into new knowledge about their own body and about bodies in general (p.61).

Evans wide ranging research on movement praxis and embodied performances presents an exciting point of view on the importance of recognising both 'the socio-cultural context and the poetics of each form of movement practice in order to fully recognize its potential' (p.178). The body, according to Evans, plays the role of communication not through gestures, mere translation of words, but also simply through its presence in the double role of producing movement and receiving movement.

In conclusion, *Performance, Movement and the Body* brilliantly situates movement practice in a new perspective. Evans acknowledges the plurality of movement trainings and techniques but brings the focus back on the story of the body and the story told through the body, through its singularities and differences, thus generating a political reflection. •

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A HISTORY OF ROMANIAN THEATRE FROM COMMUNISM TO CAPITALISM CHILDREN OF A RESTLESS TIME

Cristina Modreanu

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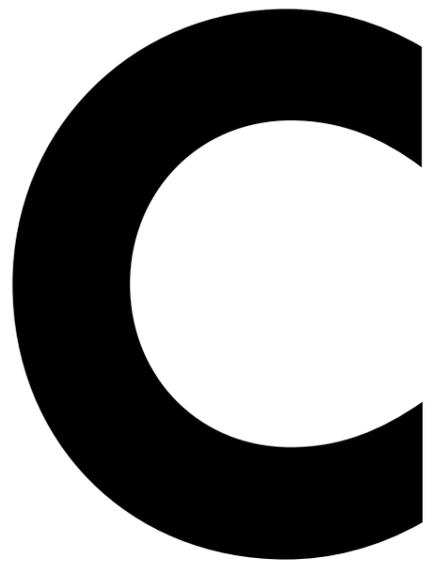
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A HISTORY OF ROMANIAN THEATRE FROM COMMUNISM TO CAPITALISM

CHILDREN OF A RESTLESS TIME

Cristina Modreanu

ROUTLEDGE

Cristina Modreanu is currently one of the most expert figures on Romanian theatre, active in both the academy and in theatre journalism. *A History of Romanian Theater from Communism to Capitalism — Children of a Restless Time* is the latest piece within a considerable bibliography produced by Modreanu. The scholar has already dedicated important contributions to the subject of Romanian theatre both in the form of articles and monographic volumes such as *Fluturele gladiator. Teatru politic, queer & feminist pe scena românească* (2016). In addition, Modreanu has initiated the theatrical promotion organisation ARPAS (Romanian Association for Performing Arts Promotion), *Scena.ro* magazine dedicated to Romanian theatre, and the project *Hedda's Sisters* dedicated to the empowerment of female artists from Romania and Eastern Europe.

A History of Romanian Theatre from Communism to Capitalism is a multifaceted and complex book. Divided into ten chapters, plus an introduction (*Red past. An introduction*) and an epilogue (*Epilogue. Thirty years after Romanian theatre from communism to post-capitalism*), the volume has the strong ambition to outline an exhaustive history of the Romanian theatre from Nicolae Ceaușescu's regime and the moments preceding the end of the dictatorship to the present day. This is attempted through the analysis and descriptive investigation of the work of specific key figures. These figures are mainly directors, as we will see.

The introduction and first chapter (*The old road rapidly aging. Changes in Romania's theatre before and after 1989*) both provide a general picture of Romania and of the Romanian theatrical and cultural environment. It is a real review of events, artists, and shows. Here Modreanu pays attention to Lucian Pintilie and his version of *The Government Inspector* by Gogol (1969). Analysis is also offered of *The Oak* (1992), the first film Pintilie directed after the fall of the Berlin Wall, a work seen by Modreanu as a 'manifesto defending the right to see the world in a different way, the power of protest and the need to systematically question authority, as an act of social hygiene' (p.7). Other artists considered in this first chapter include Liviu Ciulei, Alexandru Tocilescu, Gábor Tompa, Mihai Mălaimare, Alexander Hausvater, and others. The chapter is an intense roundup full of information regarding artists and shows, which already highlights one of the main intentions of Modreanu's volume: the creation of a bridge between Romanian theatre and artists within the international performing arts environment. Highlighting the international relevance of Romanian theatre is one of the key thrusts of Modreanu's text. This can be seen, for example, in the relationship drawn between *Hamlet* as staged by Alexandru Tocilescu and *Hamlet* as directed by Richard Eyre, with Modreanu quoting Eyre speaking of Tocilescu's production: 'When I saw *Hamlet* in Bucharest, I was seeing a play whose resonances were, literally, painfully telling' (p.16).

This first chapter is followed by portraits of some of the main Romanian artists from a national, transnational, and global point of view: Andrei Șerban, defined as a 'prophet without a country'; Silviu Purcărete, defined as 'the visionary'; Mihai Măniuțiu and his 'trial of communism on stage'; and Radu Afrim as an example of an alternative path and 'a queer look at life'.

Before continuing, it is important to note how Modreanu proceeds in her analysis and which sources she uses. Each artist/topic is investigated

using both academic and journalistic sources. These are organized in a reference list at the end of each chapter, many times also with indications for further reading. In this way, each chapter has a sort of autonomy of its own which, on the one hand, facilitates reading, but, on the other, sometimes affects the flow of the volume as a whole. Secondary sources are also accompanied by the personal voice of Modreanu herself who often refers to her own direct experience as a journalist and theatre professional. From this perspective, academic discourse becomes imbued with personal memories at many points within this book. A clear example can be found at the opening of the volume:

When my mother told me how she cried in 1953 at the death of Stalin, she was the first one to be surprised. She was telling the story after such a long time. She was now another person living in another society. But she remembered well how the whole kindergarten was full of tears, teachers tearing their shirts in despair and children running home to find comfort in the arms of their parents, who were also devastated by the news. I saw the same reactions on television from North Korea, at the death of Kim Jong-Il in 2011 – young women having real crises, and even the men crying or fainting as Kim's coffin passed by. Kim was declared after his death 'the Eternal president': an amazing mix of politics and mysticism. (p. 2)

This is evident again within the following extract from the chapter dedicated to Andrei Şerban:

In 1996 I had a chance to witness one of Şerban's workshops in a small theatre in one of Romania's regions, Moldavia, at the Youth Theatre in Piatra-Neamţ. His arrival there was like a small miracle for the actors, and almost all of them happily enrolled just to be near him for a while. He conducted the workshop, based mostly on stick exercises meant to enhance the physical presence and awareness of the

actors onstage, always smiling and avoiding any judgemental comments with an elegance and composure that made him resemble some kind of theatre God suddenly descended to Earth. (p. 30)

Yet another example of this tendency can be found within the pages about Silviu Purcărete:

Since the late 1990s, when I first began to travel abroad for theatrical events, the minute I said that I was coming from Romania the answer came in the form of a name, more specifically Silviu Purcărete's name. I remember that I used to hear his name almost as often as Nadia Comăneci's, so I guess sometimes, if one finds oneself in the right places, culture can after all compete with sports. (p. 36)

These are a few samples of Modreanu's personally reflective style that becomes yet more prominent within chapter seven (*Three pictures with Gianina Cărbunariu*). This chapter is dedicated to the artists of the so-called 'dramAcum' movement — 'drama of nowadays' — including Gianina Cărbunariu and David Schwartz. The text here is configured as an interesting first-person account, divided into three episodes about Modreanu's educational and theatrical experience with Gianina Cărbunariu. This chapter functions almost as an appendix that is at the centre of the volume, instead of at the end.

Chapters eight and nine complete the portraits of artists by investigating figures such as: Alexandru Berceanu, Cinty Ionescu, Peter Kerek (*Attempts at participatory art or cracks in the pedestal of the statue*); Catinca Drăgănescu, Ioana Păun, and Carmen Lidia Vidu (*Feminist theatre on Romanian stages*).

Here another fundamental aspect of this volume may be identified: Modreanu's predilection mainly for directors rather than playwrights,

writers, or other theatre practitioners. This is a tendency that can already be found in a previous short piece by Modreanu, *Prima e dopo Ceaușescu breve guida ai registi romeni*, published in Italian as a part of the *Dossier: La nuova scena romena*, edited by Irina Wolf, for theatre journal *Hystrio*.

In *A History of Romanian Theater from Communism to Capitalism*, however, Modreanu dedicates the tenth chapter to, as the title puts it, *Mapping contemporary Romania: Thirty years of new drama*. In this section, the author considers some key playwrights that include Matei Vișniec, Saviana Stănescu, András Visky, and Alina Nelega. However, the consideration of playwrights would have needed more space in relation to the investigation of Romanian directors, in order to obtain a balance within the volume. Chapter ten may have seemed less incongruous if it functioned for the playwrights in the same way that chapter one functions for the directors: an overview before focusing on specific case studies. As for these, Modreanu could have selected some authors and dedicated monographic chapters to each one of them, thus creating a history in two parts (directors and playwrights) as would have seemed natural following the progression of the volume. However, this critique does not affect the overall strength of the book as an analysis and an understanding of a theatrical tradition of absolute value and interest, still little known compared to others and of which Modreanu is one of the main experts. •

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STRAVEDERE LA SCENA

CARLO QUARTUCCI IL VIAGGIO NEI PRIMI VENTI ANNI, 1959-1979

Donatella Orecchia

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DONATELLA ORECCHIA

STRAVEDERE LA SCENA

CARLO QUARTUCCI. IL VIAGGIO NEI PRIMI VENTI ANNI 1959-1979



I volume di Donatella Orecchia presenta una struttura volutamente definita, apparentemente rigida e suddivisa in parti distinte e ben identificabili, che l'autrice ha denominato attraverso la terminologia letterario-teatrale — *Prologo, Atto primo, Atto secondo, Atto terzo, Epilogo* — corredando ogni Atto di appendici documentarie che rendono merito alla straordinaria ricerca delle fonti. Questo volume contiene numerosi documenti, notizie, riferimenti storici e personali, elementi che convivono all'interno di questo racconto e che rappresentano, in effetti, la moltitudine di esperienze vissute da Carlo Quartucci e, di riflesso, anche dall'autrice. Orecchia definisce questo lavoro 'il romanzo di una vita teatrale', raccontando la complessa carriera di questo artista pur limitandone l'analisi al primo ventennio 1959-1979, in previsione di un'ulteriore pubblicazione.

Come si evince dal titolo del volume, *Stravedere la scena*, la tendenza a combinare ossimoricamente un elemento codificato nel tempo, la scena, e la natura centrifuga del teatro, si colloca pienamente all'interno di un periodo di grande sperimentazione. Quartucci considerava la tradizione come solido punto di partenza per arrivare a soluzioni influenzate anche dagli artisti europei e statunitensi.

Il *Prologo*, intitolato *Carlo Quartucci o dell'irrequietezza come poetica del moderno*, descrive le esperienze personali attraverso cui Orecchia racconta gli anni Ottanta e Novanta trascorsi tra le lezioni all'Università di Torino, tenute da Gigi Livio, e gli incontri con le compagnie e gli attori della nuova avanguardia, individuando e analizzando le esperienze e i progetti che caratterizzavano la ricerca teatrale italiana in quegli anni e negli anni precedenti. Il *Prologo* viene offerto al lettore come esempio di 'autore a chi legge': l'autrice descrive, infatti, il processo di creazione del suo studio, attraverso approcci non solo scientifici, ma anche personali e privati, indicando come supporto imprescindibile le fonti e i contributi che Quartucci, fino al 31 dicembre 2019, data della morte, le ha generosamente regalato o suggerito inconsapevolmente.

Orecchia delinea la molteplicità delle modalità di recupero della documentazione, evidenziando l'eterogeneità dei contenuti e offrendo i codici e i mezzi per proseguire nella lettura, attraverso un percorso che include varie strategie d'indagine, tenendo conto di ogni possibile fonte, compreso l'indispensabile confronto e dialogo con l'artista in vita. L'apporto dato dalle interviste, dai dialoghi privati, dagli appunti sviscerati attraverso lunghe e amichevoli conversazioni, senza tralasciare il contributo degli articoli pubblicati sulle pagine dei giornali dell'epoca, affianca le fonti 'istituzionali' che documentano l'artista in questione, il contesto in cui ha prodotto, gli studi che lo riguardano, ma anche la storia di un Paese e di un'epoca.

Il *Prologo* è seguito da un *Abecedario*, che ne costituisce la parte conclusiva ed è definito un primo omaggio all'artista: anche questa sembra una scelta apparentemente didascalica, ma in realtà coerente con l'intento dell'autrice di proporre al lettore una sorta di percorso propedeutico affinché arrivi preparato al nucleo dell'analisi.

All'interno dell'*Abecedario* sono riportati termini specifici che derivano dal linguaggio teorico teatrale, descritti e approfonditi attraverso la poetica, il punto di vista e la genialità di Quartucci.

L'apparato su cui poggia questo studio e il suo percorso sono inevitabilmente caratterizzati da un approccio storico, attraverso cui si articola un discorso che sembra, in un secondo momento, orientarsi verso l'analisi critica e stilistica della poetica teatrale di Quartucci. L'attenzione alla stesura del testo è volutamente meno presente rispetto all'attenta osservazione della performance, dello studio sull'attore e sull'interpretazione del personaggio. Orecchia, però, non trascurava l'aspetto drammaturgico e inserisce, nella sezione finale del volume, la bibliografia di scritti e l'elenco delle opere firmate da Quartucci, lascito prezioso in un'epoca difficile per l'editoria italiana del teatro. Pertanto, confluiscono aspetti diversi, complementari o contrastanti, in uno studio riguardante un artista complesso e 'irrequieto'.

Il nucleo del volume è suddiviso in tre 'atti', intesi come periodi di vita artistica. Il *fil rouge* corre lungo la storia della vita privata e artistica di Quartucci, considerando gruppi, teatri, amicizie e innumerevoli sodalizi — De Berardinis, Remondi, Sudano, Squarzina, e altri — descrivendo la creazione di spettacoli e progetti. Non mancano i riferimenti alla cronaca italiana del ventennio in questione, le descrizioni delle vite artistiche dei suoi compagni di viaggio, i riferimenti alla tradizione teatrale, l'analisi dell'avanguardia italiana attraverso gli influssi delle tendenze internazionali, le citazioni dalla critica teatrale, quest'ultima

fonte imprescindibile che rende ancor più solido il discorso biografico, autobiografico e storico-artistico.

A conclusione del ricco excursus di ogni atto o periodo della vita dell'artista — *Roma-Genova 1959-1965; Torino-Venezia 1966-1969; Camion e oltre* — Orecchia aggiunge l'appendice *Pausa*, che contiene materiali fotografici, e una seconda intitolata *Documenti*. La 'pausa' inserita sembra un momento di respiro nella lettura. L'appendice intitolata *Documenti* è costituita, invece, da lettere e da carteggi dell'artista con i teatri, gli attori, gli autori.

L' *Atto secondo, Torino-Venezia 1966-1969*, è ulteriormente suddiviso in parti e fasi che analizzano la realizzazione dello spettacolo *Il lavoro teatrale*, attraverso sottoparagrafi che contengono testimonianze, lettere, note di regia, programmi di sala e registrazioni di interviste, i cui minuti sono riportati in nota e si riferiscono al testo sbobinato e citato all'interno del paragrafo. A conclusione, all'interno del sottoparagrafo *Disegni e progetti per un teatro in divenire*, sono inserite delle splendide fonti iconografiche: disegni e appunti autografi sulla ricerca scenica di Quartucci e dei suoi collaboratori.

Nell' *Atto terzo*, l'autrice sceglie un cambio di direzione, allontanandosi apparentemente dal percorso cronologico per soffermarsi su un momento particolare della vita e della carriera di Quartucci. Orecchia afferma di scegliere un'altra forma di narrazione, cercando di assecondare le deviazioni e le ramificazioni del percorso dell'artista, il quale, ad un certo punto della sua vita, si dirige verso un'inaspettata scelta, dettata dall'irrequietezza sottolineata precedentemente. Non si tratta di una scelta avventata, sebbene possa sembrare tale, ma il processo che ha portato Quartucci a comprare un camion e a viaggiare si concretizza in questa definizione: un'opera aperta in viaggio. Si parla, dunque, di crisi del teatro, non solo di fuga dal teatro borghese, di crisi del teatro

di ricerca, di fuga dai luoghi del teatro, codificati e strutturati. Tra gli anni Settanta e Ottanta l'immagine del teatro italiano rispecchia quella di un Paese alla ricerca di cambiamento intellettuale, artistico, politico e sociale. L'esperienza di Quartucci, raccontata in *Camion e oltre*, rivive attraverso una narrazione dalle sfumature diaristiche, corredata di aneddoti che mutano la struttura e la natura dell'ultima parte del volume.

Altre cinque parti si aggiungono alle già descritte e contenute nel nucleo: un epilogo con relativa appendice di documenti, anche fotografici, sul progetto *Camion*; un'appendice firmata da Rodolfo Sacchettini, prezioso e raro documento sul radiodramma e sul contributo di Quartucci in tale ambito; un elenco delle opere firmate da Quartucci per il teatro, la televisione, la radio e il cinema; un'approfondita bibliografia degli scritti, che trasforma il volume in una vera e propria summa sull'artista. •

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RITMOS AFECTIVOS NAS ARTES PERFORMATIVAS

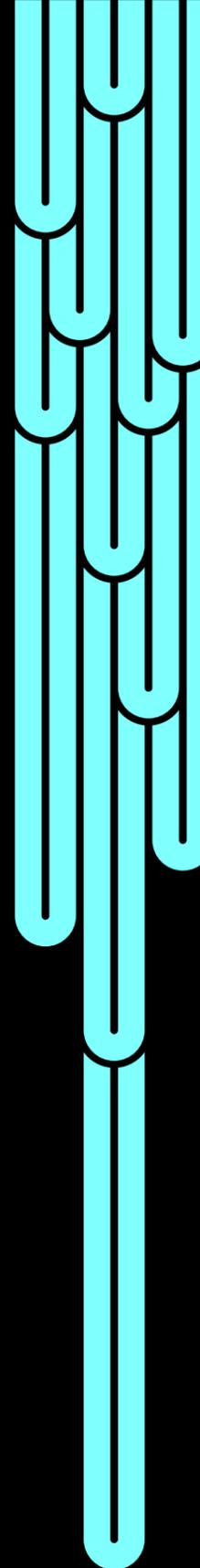
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ANA PAIS

RITMOS AFECTIVOS
NAS ARTES PERFORMATIVAS



Edições Colibri

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s Anna R. Burzyńska (2016: 9) has remarked, '[t]he nineteenth century was a century of actors. The twentieth century was a century of directors. The twenty-first century is a century of spectators'. In the last ten years, critical work on the audience/performer dynamic in contemporary performance has grown exponentially. Much of this work has focused on the ethical and political questions raised by the participation of spectators in performance, whether through minor scripted interventions or as co-creators in immersive performances. Such work has often been sceptical about performers' sometimes exaggerated claims for participation. Jen Harvie (2013: 40) argues that such 'delegated art practices' can 'model shared participation, engagement, community and responsibility-taking, features which are perhaps particularly important if conventional political models of democracy are feeling worn, slow, disappointing, faulty, moribund or dysfunctional'. However, as Harvie elaborates, when audience members are given no credit or payment for their performances then 'what might appear to be *participation* in such art and performance might be understood more accurately as delegated or outsourced labour' (2013: 43). As such, while audience participation in performance can function as a laboratory for exploring new forms of democracy within theatre and society, it can also reinforce neo-liberal forms of organization of labour that hide the 'work' of performance.

Ana Pais' wide-ranging work on affective rhythms in the performing arts analyses the relationship between performers and spectators from the perspective of affect theory rather than theories of political performance, although politics remains a key part of her approach. She makes this clear in her introduction: 'the thesis I wish to develop is that the affective atmosphere created and transmitted by the audience re-affects the stage in the sense that affects are performative, they 'do things' to the bodies on stage. As the concrete matter of the performer-audience relationship, they have aesthetic consequences' (p.13). Such atmospheres do not necessarily involve the active participation of audiences but can also include emotional and physical responses. The initial chapters of the book outline Pais' affect-based approach and offer a historical account of critical approaches to the audience from classical antiquity to Josette Féral. Following this, Pais analyses the relationship between performers and audiences in three performances: *Until God is Destroyed by the Extreme Exercise of Beauty* (2006) by the Portuguese choreographer Vera Mantero; Gob Squad's *Gob Squad's Kitchen (You've Never Had it So Good)* from 2007; and Punchdrunk's immersive adaptation of *Macbeth, Sleep No More* (2003-). While the latter has attracted much critical work because of its uncomfortable tension between consent and enforcement, the other performances are less well-known and contribute greatly to ongoing debates about audiences and performers. Pais notes how the affective rhythms of each of these performances differ, ranging from the wider affective spaces in the work of Mantero to the more restricted interactions of the Punchdrunk performances. In chapter four, a key chapter of the book, Pais interviews artists about the terms they themselves use to describe this relationship, counteracting a tendency within performance criticism to downplay the intellectual component of artistic comments on performance. The terms discussed include metaphors of 'heat', 'breathing together', an 'ocean', 'surfing', and 'chemistry' (p.204, 226, 230). While few of these metaphors will surprise readers, the fact that Pais takes such imagery seriously enables

her to build on these vivid and physical metaphors and create one of her own that is used throughout the book. This metaphor is ‘commotion’ (co-moção in the original Portuguese), which she defines as ‘an affective coming together to describe the reciprocity of the relationship between performers and audience’ (p.60). Pais explores the affective and relational potential of the etymology of this word, noting the suggestion of a movement ‘which requires something or someone to occur’. Connotations of social agitation and disturbance associated with the term are also noted within the argument that ‘commotion (..) suggests not only inner emotional agitation but also the impact of a collective atmosphere’ (p.242). The term thus combines a more personal, embodied response and a collective political one without pre-empting the specific form this ‘commotion’ may take in individual performance events. Such a role remains with the audience whose affective and corporeal responses either increase or reduce the flow of energy between stage and auditorium. This is what Pais labels moments of ‘affective resonance’ (p.12).

Pais’ book is a novel approach to a much-debated question. It is invigorating and stimulating to read. Theory and practice are discussed in unison rather than creating a division between the intense subjectivity of performance and the distanced objectivity of performance criticism. As such, it approaches the kind of performative writing outlined by Peggy Phelan (1997) which ‘does things’ to the bodies, minds, and imaginations of those who read and write it, in much the same way as performers and audiences create energies and flows with material effects on those who create or co-create performance. In a saturated critical field that does not always question the premises on which it is based, Pais’ thought-provoking book is a welcome addition. •

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A HUGE REVOLUTION OF THEATRICAL COMMERCE

**WALTER MOCCHI AND
THE ITALIAN MUSICAL
THEATRE BUSINESS
IN SOUTH AMERICA**

Matteo Paoletti

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**Cambridge
Elements**

Musical Theatre

**A Huge Revolution
of Theatrical
Commerce**

Matteo Paoletti



Nel 1914 Luigi Pirandello pubblica la novella *Zuccarello distinto melodista*: il protagonista, *melodista* quindi esecutore dell'attardato repertorio belliniano o rossiniano, si può esibire solo in un oscuro caffè-concerto sotterraneo. Nella Roma affollata, convulsa e già pre-capitalista che fa da scenario alla misera performance, Zuccarello, cantante d'opera tradizionale, può ritagliarsi un suo spazio solo nell'estrema periferia del sistema teatrale, adeguandosi alle richieste di un'industria dell'intrattenimento che ha ormai ben altri obiettivi: ai primi del Novecento infatti si è ormai aggravata la crisi del melodramma (cfr. Guido Salvetti, *La nascita del Novecento*, 1991, per la serie *Storia della musica*), in concorrenza con generi spettacolari più leggeri e affascinanti, quali l'operetta; o innovativi, come il cinema. L'immagine degradata di un teatro — nel senso di luogo, operatori, pubblico — ormai asservito alla mercificazione, destinato quindi a snaturarsi privilegiando forme semplici, di immediato riscontro economico, costituisce un *topos* della narrativa italiana nei primi decenni del Novecento; dalla prospettiva autoriale, infatti, modernizzazione equivale a massificazione e perdita d'identità, soprattutto per i costosi e complessi allestimenti dell'opera lirica, ma anche, sia pure con minore intensità, per la prosa. Il quadro si modifica notevolmente se osservato dal punto di vista di chi si è occupato in quegli anni decisivi della gestione economica e artistica del sistema teatrale attuando, nel bene e nel male, la trasformazione novecentesca della scena italiana; questa storia, non raccontata dagli scrittori se non in

forma parodistica, attraverso figure grottesche di impresari avidi, ignoranti, furfanteschi, deve essere portata alla luce dal paziente lavoro degli studiosi. In realtà non molto è stato fatto in questo senso — ad esempio il noto lavoro di John Rosselli, *L'impresario d'opera. Arte e affari nel teatro musicale dell'Ottocento* (1985), riguarda l'età d'oro del melodramma, precedente alla crisi —; gli ultimi anni hanno visto però un rinnovato interesse per l'aspetto imprenditoriale della 'macchina' spettacolare nei cruciali primi decenni del Novecento. Si segnalano al riguardo in particolare un articolo di Livia Cavaglieri, *Trasformazioni nell'organizzazione teatrale in Italia all'inizio del Novecento* (2016) e due recenti atti di convegno: *La grande trasformazione: Il teatro italiano fra il 1914 e il 1924*, a cura di Federica Mazzocchi e Armando Petrini (2019); *Financing Music in Europe from the 18th to the Early 20th Century*, organizzato dal Centro Studi Opera Omnia Luigi Boccherini a Lucca dal 16 al 18 ottobre 2020.

Il volume di Matteo Paoletti, *The Huge Revolution of Theatrical Commerce. Walter Mocchi and the Italian Musical Theatre Business in South America*, costituisce pertanto un contributo significativo alle ricerche in questo ambito, ancora *in fieri* e suscettibili di ulteriori sviluppi. L'autore, studioso di storia dell'organizzazione e dell'economia culturale e teatrale, prende in esame la figura di Walter Mocchi (1871-1955), la cui azione imprenditoriale ha interessato non solo il contesto italiano ma anche europeo e sudamericano, sfruttando il fiorente mercato del teatro musicale nell'emisfero australe per compensare la grave crisi in cui versavano gli operatori del teatro in Italia. L'operato di Mocchi, nel suo ruolo di 'interoceanic impresario' (p. 1), in grado di adattarsi con intelligenza e spregiudicatezza a ogni situazione, stabilendo relazioni professionali con editori e compositori quali, rispettivamente, Sonzogno e Mascagni, o audaci alleanze politiche — ad esempio quella, contestatissima, con il governo fascista —, tenendo sempre presenti le esigenze e i gusti mutevoli del pubblico, è analizzato sin dalle prime tappe di un'attività quasi cinquantennale.

Da una vivacissima e multiculturale Buenos Aires, in cui Mocchi fonda nel 1907 la Sociedad Teatral Italo-Argentina (STIA) che collega i principali teatri sudamericani alle attività italiane, il percorso dell'intraprendente uomo d'affari si conclude a Rio de Janeiro, dove egli approda nel 1955 come modesto organizzatore di spettacoli per la municipalità: 'The musical and theatrical impresario whose very name had inspired a mixture of curiosity, hatred, fear, respect, and envy on an international scale spent his final years employed as a civil servant far away from his homeland' (p.73). Paoletti evidenzia con chiarezza l'acume di Mocchi nell'adattare situazioni già esistenti a nuove esigenze di mercato, trasformando le episodiche tournée ottocentesche di cantanti e attori italiani nell'emisfero australe in un'organizzazione complessa, che prevedeva in primo luogo la creazione di una rete di teatri sudamericani con al centro il Colón di Buenos Aires, poi la possibilità di una stagione ininterrotta fra l'Italia e il Sudamerica, dove gli artisti italiani si spostavano dopo il periodo invernale; infine l'opportunità di sfruttare un mercato più ricco poiché, soprattutto in Argentina, l'opera lirica italiana diventa un simbolo di prestigio sociale, con conseguenti ingaggi più alti per i cantanti. La STIA dura pochi anni ma ha un effetto notevolissimo sulla gestione delle attività teatrali, ottimizzate secondo i principi del nascente capitalismo: 'Its extensive network brought together theatre managers and touring companies into a single enterprise, the ultimate aim of which was to minimize costs and maximize profits' (p.16). Mocchi sfrutta inoltre abilmente gli strumenti mediatici come cassa di risonanza acquisendo delle riviste, quali *Il Teatro illustrato*, in partnership con Sonzogno, per assicurare il costante supporto dei critici e del pubblico.

Paoletti sottolinea il carattere sinergico dello scambio Italia-Argentina all'interno del nuovo network teatrale, che costituisce un precoce esempio di *cultural mobility* (cfr. Stephen Greenblatt, *Cultural Mobility: A Manifesto*, 2010): i paesi sudamericani non si trasformano in 'colonia', degradati a serbatoio delle attività teatrali del Vecchio Continente,

anzi l'azione di Mocchi costituisce uno dei primi esempi di integrazione economica e culturale fra nazioni, poiché le città del Sud America giocano un ruolo importante nella promozione dell'opera lirica, ospitando anche prime mondiali di noti compositori, quali Mascagni, con il quale Mocchi stabilisce una fruttuosa, per quanto non sempre pacifica, collaborazione. L'impresario 'envisioned, and in many ways created, a holistic theatrical ecosystem in terms of performance and production' (p.75); un ecosistema che vive fra l'altro di un sapiente equilibrio fra 'alto' e 'basso' dell'industria culturale, quindi tra la costosa e impegnativa opera lirica e l'agile operetta, di grande *appeal* sul pubblico, i cui proventi sono destinati a risarcire le perdite degli allestimenti per il melodramma.

Il titolo del volume di Paoletti non ne descrive però compiutamente il contenuto: l'autore racconta infatti, ed è questo uno dei principali pregi del volume, l'intera parabola imprenditoriale di Mocchi, che dal Sud America ritorna in Italia, duplicando la STIA nell'italiana Società Teatrale Internazionale (STIN); una struttura complessa, che possiede direttamente il teatro Costanzi di Roma e controlla le principali *opera houses* della penisola: 'Through the STIN, Mocchi discovered creative solutions to the financial dilemmas engulfing the Italian theatre industry, namely mounting lucrative operetta seasons and promoting high-profile celebrities such as Mascagni' (p.39). Il ruolo di questo compositore è particolarmente importante per mantenere attivo il valore artistico di un'impresa economica che in alcuni casi non supera la diffidenza degli addetti ai lavori; è il caso di Arturo Toscanini, il quale, durante la prima guerra mondiale, critica aspramente Mocchi per aver realizzato una cooperazione tra il teatro La Scala e il Colón, fatto che il Maestro considera 'to be a betrayal of the cultural ideals and artistic mission of the most important theatrical institution in the world' (p. 54). Nonostante le critiche, l'impresario riesce ad ampliare il suo progetto includendovi anche l'Opéra e l'Opéra comique di Parigi, dando luogo quindi a un produttivo interscambio culturale fra produzioni

francesi e italiane. La successiva crisi durante l'era fascista conduce a fenomeni ancora oggi visibili sulla scena operistica, quali la cosiddetta ossificazione del repertorio, limitato a poche opere famose e di immediato richiamo, e la fuga dei cantanti nostrani all'estero, attirati da condizioni lavorative migliori. 'It was time for Mocchi to reinvent himself yet again' (p.63), mettendo in secondo piano l'Italia e rivitalizzando invece il mercato sudamericano all'interno del quale promuove autori locali sostituendo, al tempo stesso, l'opera italiana con quella tedesca, particolarmente apprezzata; Mocchi si sposta poi in Brasile, dove fonda la Società Teatrale Italo-Brasiliana per terminare la sua esistenza operosa come semplice 'addetto al settore culturale' a Rio de Janeiro.

La ricerca di Paoletti restituisce al lettore, tramite una scrittura agile, avvincente, ma al tempo stesso rigorosa, la figura sfaccettata di un impresario che tenta, con alterni successi, di conciliare le esigenze economiche e la componente artistico-creativa di un mondo spettacolare in rapida e tumultuosa trasformazione. Il volume mostra anche, pur non discutendone esplicitamente, i prodromi del teatro musicale odierno, della sua fragilità e delle sue contraddizioni, tra il fascino e la presa sul pubblico di innovativi allestimenti e artisti d'eccezione, e l'inevitabile declino dovuto alla presenza di più moderne forme d'intrattenimento. La globalizzazione dell'offerta spettacolare e la sinergia fra prodotti elitari e commerciali appaiono oggi fra le poche strategie possibili per risolvere una crisi profonda del sistema teatrale; il lungimirante Mocchi, sembra suggerire Paoletti, già un secolo prima aveva indicato la strada da seguire, qualificandosi come attento interprete della modernità. •

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**LA MALATTIA
CHE CURA IL TEATRO
ESPERIENZA E TEORIA
NEL RAPPORTO TRA SCENA
E SOCIETÀ**

**Andrea Porcheddu
and Cecilia Carponi (eds.)**

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**La malattia
che cura il teatro**

Esperienza e teoria nel rapporto tra scena e società

A cura di **Andrea Porcheddu**
e **Cecilia Carponi**



Dino Audino

The project of this book originates from the homonymous conference organized in 2019 in Bolzano by Teatro la Ribalta-Kunst der Viefalt to mark World Mental Health Day. The title, which can be literally translated as *The Illness that Cures Theatre*, clearly outlines not only the subject, but also the new perspective that the volume explores through a multiplicity of angles. The main question appears to be subverted: the starting point for this investigation is not ‘How may theatre help people to cope with disability?’ — as it used to be within the Italian-speaking discourse — but rather ‘What can people with disabilities bring into the theatre?’. From this premise, each of the authors contributing to the book develops a different reflection.

Actors, dancers, directors, organizers, psychologists, scholars, and theatre critics, formerly gathered by Antonio Viganò (Teatro della Ribalta artistic director) for the 2019 conference, were invited by the editors Andrea Porcheddu and Cecilia Carponi to further investigate and reflect upon a variety of issues connected to applied theatre and, more specifically, to theatre with disabled performers. The volume consists of a collection of fifteen articles divided in two parts. The first part — entitled *Theatre in the Gaze* — assembles the critical and theoretical contributions of Guido Di Palma, Fabrizio Fiaschini, Piergiorgio Giacchè, Susanne Hartwig, Stefano Masotti, Oliviero Ponte di Pino, and Andrea Porcheddu. The second part — entitled *Theatre in*

Practice — collects the testimonies of different practicing artists concerning their experiences with applied theatre, such as Alessandro Argnani, Gianfranco Berardi and Gabriella Casolari, Thomas Emme- negger, Alessandro Garzella, Gianluigi Gherzi, Michela Lucenti, Ugo Morelli, and Rosita Volani. Many pivotal questions emerge from the panoply of voices that this volume intertwines:

What is the creative potential of people’s wounds?

From which standpoint are we looking at the extraordinary presence of these performers on stage?

What new directions can we imagine for theatre research within this field?

The narratives the reader will discover in response to such questions within this book range from studies focused on the social impacts of creating theatre with disabled performers to explorations more interested in going beyond the therapeutic framework. In this dialogue between apparently opposed stances, points of contact and affinity still occur. For example, bodies remain the centre of most experimental efforts in finding new codes. Meanwhile, it is undisputed that the sense of community amongst performers is strengthened when they are sharing the same efforts toward the *mise-en-scène* or even just when they are involved in a training routine. As Viganò himself explains in Porcheddu’s thorough interview:

In spite of the enormous diversities between all the different experiences, you can still feel at home, if that home is built on foundations shared by everyone. The various issues are not solved, but they gain a different weight. (p. 22)

Upon this common ground, the variety of each specific approach and even conflicts between different approaches become extraordinary opportunities for the continuous transformation that theatre needs to undergo to stay alive.

More specific discourses arise about how physical and mental disease may turn into an exceptional opportunity for an audience to seize and delve into the mystery and magic on stage. More than one author challenges assumptions that consider applied theatre practices as mere therapy, rather emphasising both the artistic qualities of the performers involved and the aesthetic value of the overall result. An attempt is made to encourage a shift in spectators' attitudes from a charitable inclusion of otherness (*allowing* disabled people to be on stage *just the way normal people would*) to a recognition of disabled artists' performances as professional practice (with distinctive features not aligned with dominant aesthetics or a normative perception of the world). Other authors avoid any definition that may apply to this field — as their aim is to include *this kind of theatre* on an equal basis within the wider realm of *the theatre* — and mainly concentrate their analyses on the performers' authenticity or on the importance that the quality of human relationships assumes for artistic creation.

Ethical and political issues are also addressed. For example, there is some discussion of how new approaches in theatre pedagogy should move away from predetermined protocols and embrace a more open and flexible way to deal with the unexpected. An issue which resurfaces throughout the book concerns the obsolescence of the idea that learning should consist in acquiring and repeating a technique, risking the mechanisation of any given process. In this case, the emphasis shifts to developing an awareness of the situation and associated relationships, or to adopting a ludic approach, or to being able to relocate ourselves in a provisional mental space situated between our original standpoint and the place the 'Other' resides in.

The Illness that Cures Theatre is valuable for its contribution to thinking about contemporary applied theatre. Its importance comes not only from the fresh perspective it proposes but also from the breadth of

different issues thoughtfully addressed in order to provide the reader with a careful navigation of such a delicate topic. As Porcheddu states in his lucid introduction to the book, the theatre needs to be healed: 'Theatre needs everything our society seems to expel. Diversity, awkwardness, disease, handicap, pain. It is the Other world, or perhaps just the Other's world, the source from which theatre can draw a new energy, a new spirit, a new research' (p.8). •

MARIONNETTES ET POUVOIRS CENSURES, PROPAGANDES, RÉSISTANCES

Raphaèle Fleury
and Julie Sermon (eds.)

Montpellier : Editions Deuxième Époque,
Institut International de la Marionnette, 2019, 411 pp.
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MARIONNETTES ET POUVOIR CENSURES, PROPAGANDES, RÉSISTANCES

OUVRAGE DIRIGÉ PAR RAPHAËLE FLEURY ET JULIE SERMON



éditions
DEUXIÈME ÉPOQUE

DOMAINE MARIONNETTE

Le théâtre de marionnettes est souvent associé à un théâtre de marges, populaire et irrévérent, rémunéré au chapeau. Cependant, si les marionnettes rassemblent les foules, déclenchant une participation collective immédiate, elles ont été, par ce fait, un instrument privilégié de propagande dans différents moments de l'Histoire. L'ouvrage *Marionnettes et pouvoirs : censures, propagandes, résistances*, organisé par Julie Sermon et Raphaèle Fleury ouvre une nouvelle perspective qui rompt avec les stéréotypes et lance une curieuse réflexion sur l'impact du théâtre de marionnettes dans l'Histoire politique, culturelle et sociale.

Ce volume collectif s'encadre dans un cycle de recherche du même nom qui a eu lieu entre 2011 et 2018, faisant suite au colloque tenu à Charleville-Mézières du 20 au 22 novembre 2014, organisé par l'Institut International de la Marionnette, avec le soutien du laboratoire Passages XX-XXI (EA 4160, Université Lyon 2), en partenariat avec la Bibliothèque nationale de France, les musées Gadagne, le Clastic Théâtre et THEMMAA.

Décelant les différentes traces identitaires des marionnettes dans l'usage langagier et dans son sens philosophique, le livre apporte un éclairage innovateur sur la notion de pouvoir associée à cet art. Manipulées, frondeuses, inoffensives, tels sont quelques adjectifs souvent attachés aux marionnettes et qui ont motivé, dans le cadre de cet ouvrage, une réflexion sur sa terminologie dans les représentations et les imaginaires

collectives. A ce propos, il convient également de mentionner le travail développé dans le cadre du chantier de recherche sur la terminologie multilingue des arts de la marionnette, coordonné par Raphaèle Fleury (IIM), Jeanne Vasseur (Cnac) et Stéphane Riou (chaire ICiMa).

Si les rapports de pouvoir sont forcément présents dans les enjeux discursifs associés à l'univers des marionnettes, ils peuvent se voir également reconfigurés dans le travail de création, tel qu'il est mis en question par Gabriel Hermand Piquet qui a banni dans son lexique de création l'idée de contrôle. Dans l'entretien mené par Raphaèle Fleury, l'artiste partage un changement important dans le processus créatif, évitant le rapport de force dans l'animation des marionnettes et ouvrant une autre dimension esthétique dans le travail de conscientisation du corps : « Je pense qu'entre la personne qui manipule une marionnette et celle qui l'accompagne, il y a une différence de vision du monde, comme il y a une différence entre la position de l'enseignant qui remplit un vase de son savoir et celui qui, suffisamment lumineux, permet à l'autre de laisser aussi passer la lumière » (p.351).

Organisé en quatre sections (Appareils d'État, Profession, Dramaturgies, Espaces alternatifs), l'ouvrage croise les recherches historiques et théoriques avec le partage d'entretiens, tables rondes et témoignages d'artistes. La première partie « Appareils d'État » aborde la notion de pouvoir incarnée par les régimes totalitaires européens au cours du XX^e siècle. Les exemples de l'Allemagne nationale-socialiste, de l'Espagne sous Franco et de la Tchécoslovaquie sont mis en étude par Anthony Liébault, Adolfo Ayuso et Rachel Fourmentin. Rassemblant les témoignages d'artistes, le chapitre « Profession » cherche à montrer les coulisses pour éclairer les trajets et les propos de création d'un ensemble de professionnels partagés par différents contextes et aires géographiques : Juraj Hamar et Jaroslav Blecha (Tchécoslovaquie), Kathy Foley (Indonésie), Annie Rollins (Chine), Daniel Urrutiaguer, Sylvie Baillon, Lucile

Bodson et Patrick Boutigny (France). Cherchant à éclairer comment les répertoires et les figures marionnettiques peuvent marquer l'histoire des nations et des sociétés, le chapitre « Dramaturgies » réunit des études qui portent sur la guerre civile en Espagne (Hélène Beauchamp), la Tchécoslovaquie à deux périodes de son opposition à l'Autriche et à l'Allemagne (Cheryl Stephenson), puis quand elle se trouva sous influence soviétique (Ida Hledíková), l'Indonésie de la Reformasi (Sarah Anaïs Andrieu) et l'Iran contemporain (Salma Mohseni Ardehali). La quatrième et dernière partie intitulée « Espaces alternatifs » clôt l'ouvrage, tout en proposant une mise en question des filiations, des mythes et des usages militants de la marionnette dans l'espace public (Alexander Gref et Elena Slonimskaya), dans les usines (Élodie Chaumaret), dans les manifestations et les parades de rue (John Bell), ou sur Internet (Karim Dakroub).

De souligner, la richesse iconographique qui émaille le livre, souvent méconnue, inédite et issue pour la plupart des fonds d'archives privés, et qui de plus se voit complétée par un ensemble d'annexes disponibles en ligne sur le carnet de recherche, organisé dans le cadre du projet : puppover.hypotheses.org/annexes-a-louvrage-marionnettes-et-pouvoir

Le lecteur trouvera des études et témoignages qui s'engagent à repenser la notion de pouvoir dans l'art de la marionnette, tout en parcourant différents contextes d'époques et de cultures. A travers les textes, les témoignages et les études de cas, le livre trace un parcours sur un ensemble de traditions et pratiques des arts de la marionnette dans le monde (en Europe, au Moyen-Orient, en Asie et aux Etats-Unis), tout en décelant les préoccupations théoriques qui constituent la base de ce projet de recherche. •

**DIVADLO
PREKRAČUJE
HRANICE
(THEATRE CROSSES BORDERS)
CHÉREAU
MNOUCHKINE
WILSON**

Soňa Šimková

Bratislava: Divadelný ústav, 2019, 373 pp.
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DIVADLO

SOŇA ŠIMKOVÁ

PREKRAČUJE

Patrice Chéreau
Ariane Mnouchkine
Robert Wilson

HRANICE

U

ntil 1989, knowledge of Western theatre culture was somewhat limited in Czechoslovakia. Because the Iron Curtain dividing Europe formed a watertight border, few theatre historians in Slovakia are able to give a direct testimony concerning the theatrical performances of directors active in the West in the years before the fall of the totalitarian communist regime. In this sense, Soňa Šimková, author of the book *Divadlo prekračuje hranice (Theatre Crosses Borders)*, is a very rare case of a Slovakian theatre scholar analysing the work of three major directors of the Western tradition: Patrice Chéreau, Ariane Mnouchkine, and Robert Wilson.

Although one of the directors in question is American, the thread that unites the practice of these three great personalities of theatre in recent decades is the French context. While Šimková avows that Chéreau, Mnouchkine, and Wilson are her 'three favourite theatre authors' (p.5), her choice to focus on exactly these directors in one monograph goes far beyond mere personal predilection and neither is it a forced combination. Throughout the volume, we discover that among the three artists there are various notable convergences. The monograph consists of an introduction, three central chapters, and a conclusion. The three chapters, which are respectively dedicated to the aforementioned directors, have a fixed structure. At the beginning of each chapter, we find some useful biographical references, followed by a series of case studies, and

finally a section dedicated to the theatrical concepts of the three directors in their own words, as reported in interviews conducted by theatre critics and translated into Slovak by Šimková herself. Thanks to a careful selection, these interviews complement the picture that the reader can already construe throughout the case studies.

To provide an image of the three artists in question, Šimková selects a number of performances she considers most characteristic of their work, especially those produced in France and, in the case of Wilson, also those made in Prague. For each case, she offers a fairly detailed description of the staging, the sets, and the actions on the stage. In crafting these reconstructions, Šimková reports making use of video recordings, yet in some cases confesses that the only supporting material consists of the personal notes she took while viewing the shows. These reflections are supplemented with quotes from other theatre critics, mostly French, and photographs. Both the author's resources and approach make clear that she is not aspiring to offer an allegedly objective analysis of the pieces she singles out. The use of the first singular person in some statements and the occasional references to 'the author of these lines' remind us that what we have before us is a personal interpretation. Therefore, the illusion of an absolute truth is not created: an openly subjective discourse becomes an honest and above all authentic one. Although Šimková clearly has great respect for the three directors under consideration, this does not prevent her from sometimes giving a critical judgment of their works. For example, by recalling her review, Šimková expresses lack of conviction in relation to the historical attendability of the Chéreau's reconstruction of the classicist theatre in *Mithridate* by Racine (p.72).

In part, the title of the book reveals to us what the main common ground is that connects Chéreau, Mnouchkine, and Wilson: the three directors somehow go beyond the boundaries. They do so by working outside their own country, collaborating with artists of different origins, or creating

works whose enjoyment is not conditioned by the knowledge of a language or a concrete cultural context. Even if the approaches change, the international character remains. In this respect, the monograph offers a contribution to the question of globalization in the context of theatre. In the introduction, there are various references to Schechner's Performance Studies, including the intercultural scope and potential problems of this label. References are also made to Hans-Thies Lehmann's postdramatic theatre and Jacques Derrida's concept of deconstruction. Looking at her object of study from another perspective, considering the political engagement of the directors, the author opens the question of the mission of theatre in society. It is precisely these references that provide a basis for future research, for which the book can provide valuable materials.

While the introduction and conclusion contain several suggestions for reflection, the three central chapters have documentary value. They document the work of the three directors, but at the same time also the research method of the author herself. Reading this monograph, we not only become knowledgeable of the concrete works, but we also have the opportunity to observe the functionality of the analytical tools used, especially the verbal description of the performances. In the case of Wilson, whose performances usually are not linear narrative, Šimková changes the way of describing the scenes in order to make the descriptions more concise. This process is interesting because it reveals in what measure different types of performances can be narrated and which elements can be described in words.

Soňa Šimková collects the results of studies carried out over many years within this book. We must not forget, in fact, that she is a critic and a scholar who has not been restricted by the Iron Curtain. In this way, with this monograph, boundaries are overcome in several ways and the practise of the three important directors is disclosed towards larger audiences in Slovakia. •



THE CHOREOPOLITICS OF ALAIN PLATEL'S LES BALLETS C DE LA B. EMOTIONS, GESTURES, POLITICS

Christel Stalpaert, Guy Cools
and Hildegard De Vuyst (eds.)

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dance
in dialogue

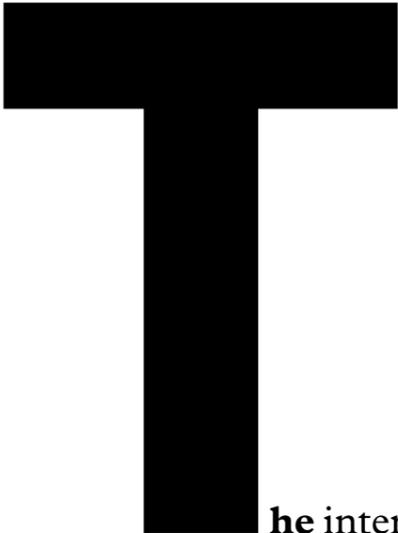
The Choreopolitics of Alain Platel's *les ballets C de la B*

Emotions, Gestures, Politics

Edited by
Christel Stalpaert
Guy Cools
Hildegard De Vuyst



B L O O M S B U R Y



The interdisciplinary book series *Dance in Dialogue*, established in 2020 by the Society for Dance Research and Bloomsbury Academic Press, has launched two new publication formats: *In Conversations and Moving Forward*. The *Choreopolitics of Alain Platel's les ballets C de la B. Emotions, Gestures, Politics*, is one of the two full-length edited collections opening the publication strand *Moving Forward*. In their introduction to the book, editors Christel Stalpaert, Guy Cools, and Hildegard De Vuyst state their intention: to broaden the range of critical dialogues about the cultural and social bodies presented in the work of this esteemed Belgian choreographer. The key notion in the title of the book, 'Choreopolitics', is a concept that the editors borrow from André Lepecki (2013) to compile a series of analytical approaches to Platel's idiosyncratic dance idiom. As the editors explain in their introduction, choreopolitics focuses on 'redistributing habitual and legitimate ways of moving in time and space' (ch.1 p.3) and, as such, this concept provides the shared focus of the writings of the thirteen scholars and practitioners who were invited to contribute to the volume. Together with the editors' own contributions, they comprise a heterogeneous collection of sixteen chapters, organised in four parts: 'Multiple Dramaturgies', 'Emotions', 'Gestures', and 'Politics'. In addition to this structure, the editors indicate that the 'Responsibility/response-ability' that comes with Platel's choreopolitics is the running thread through this volume (ch.1 p.13). With 'Responsibility/response-ability',



the editors refer to Platel's creative working process and different kinds of agency it produces in performance. Some of the examples clarifying this shared responsibility principle are collaborative dramaturgy, the reliance on particularly differing bodies, gestures, and cultures, and the conflictual emotional experiences shared by dancers and audience during the performances.

Editor Guy Cools elaborates on this particular choreographic agency when he opens the book's first part, 'Multiple Dramaturgies'. Guy Cools — one of the first curators to programme the early works of Platel — revisits two public dialogues with the choreographer (1993, 2010) and synthesises Platel's choreographic agency during his creative processes as an 'empathic witnessing' (ch.2 p.20) of the performers, a particular soft attitude of being with and caring for the improvising dancers. Different sections in the book address Platel's choreographic agency by referring to his personal composition method called 'bastard dances' (see, for example, page 126 in chapter eight or page 198 in chapter thirteen). This notion points to how Platel creates phrases or unisono dance passages as collages of movement qualities and personal gestures that cannot be identically reproduced or shared between performers. This implies nobody can claim ownership of the dances; they are disowned or 'bastard dances'. Referring to Christel Stalpaert's play on words, Cools renames the audience 'with-nesses', who are 'to be moved by and take responsibility for the instability and the fragility of the stuttering bodies' (ch.2 p.29). This ethical mirror of the productions is taken up again by Adrian Kear in chapter six, where he offers an insightful analysis of *Bernadetje* (co-created with Arne Sierens in 1996), a theatre-dance by teenagers in which a disturbed voyeuristic spectatorship is the main theme. In chapters seven and eight respectively, musicologist Francis Maes and PhD scholar in theatre and dance Claire Bessuelle reframe this call for individual and collective responsibility, tracing it back to the sacred polyphonic choirs in Platel's *C(H)OEURS* (2012)

and *nicht schlaffen* (2016). Bessuelle and Maes interpret the collective gestures of voices and the energy of the sound as metaphors for togetherness, community and society (ch.7 p.111, ch.8 p.123). According to Lourdes Orozco (chapter fifteen), studies on group dynamics and toleration are also the explicit theme that grounds the critical allegory *En avant, marche!* (co-created with Frank Van Laecke and local British brass bands in 2015). Orozco describes this staged struggle between mourning and celebration of community and friendship in a Europe in crisis as ‘a constant reimagining of personal and community identities’ (ch.15 p.218).

A second major theme running throughout the volume is introduced in Kéline Gotman’s movement analysis of Platel’s engagement with the concept of ‘chorea’, or ‘the neurological disorder most closely likened to dance’ (ch.11 p.156), which has long inspired his choreographical language. She categorizes Platel’s aesthetics as an ‘alterkinetic regime in the arts’, an alternative aesthetic order that dissolves the conventional urge for somatic control in popular dance genres by integrating ‘spasmodic and involuntary choreic gestures’ as meaningful qualities in his movement language (ch.11 p.159). In her analysis, Gotman situates this dance regime in stark contrast to the post-Judson contemporary dance and the French anti-dance as defined by Lepecki’s ‘exhausted anti-dance paradigm’ (2006). For her, the ‘alterkinetic regime’ is ‘a genre of gestural anarchy’ because it queries hierarchising gestures and counters representation and identification in the institutionalised dance theatre space (ch.11 p.163). Platel’s ‘alterkinetic regime’ is reframed in contemporary philosophy in Erwin Jans’ close reading of *Bernadetje* in chapter 10. Jans approaches this choreography from the angle of what Giorgio Agamben calls the ‘loss of gestures’ (1993), which for Agamben, is not only a sign of our loss of experiences in modern life, but also of the ethics underlying them. In addition, Jans refers to the dialectic dimensions in Antonin Artaud’s and Bertolt Brecht’s theatre regimes. Agamben’s philosophy returns in Piet Defraeyes ecological

description of *tauberbach* (2014) as a ‘somatic organism’ with a ‘puzzling gestural language’ (ch.13 p.194), a choreographic landscape that ‘leaves its inhabitants negotiating the meaning of everyday gestural movement’ (ch.13 p.196). Similar to Defraeye’s reflection, Claire Besuelle’s dissection of *nicht schlaffen* nuances the inquiry on aesthetics offered in other chapters. She analyses the aesthetics through what she calls a ‘dramaturgy of the skin’ (ch.8 p.119). I read this as a somaesthetic analysis (Shusterman, 1999) that articulates Platel’s regime of expressions in a most direct manner, by describing the sensitive sensibility of the dancers performing. Eventually, the middle ground between philosophy and the embodiment of the dancer is found in theatre scholar Miriam Dreysse’s essay on the dancer’s body and identity politics. Drawing on Judith Butler’s ‘precarious bodies’ (2009), she puts the fragile representation of identity, gender, and nation(ality) in *Gardenia* (2010) into question. Butler’s discourse on the responsibilities that come with ‘non-normative’ representations, in this case of *Gardenia*’s drag and queer aesthetics, ties the first two running threads, ‘response-ability’ and the ‘alterkinetic regime’ together and announces the last guiding principle of ‘decentred dramaturgy’.

In the volume’s third chapter, Katelin Trenscényi refers to ‘decentred dramaturgy’ (ch.3 p.52) — a notion coined by Peter Eckersall (2014) (ch.3 p.58) — to describe the shared responsibilities of all collaborating artists and dramaturgs in Platel’s creative processes. Trenscényi later describes it, citing Christel Stalpaert, as the ‘distributive agency of dramaturgical labour’ (ch.3 p.54). At that point, it becomes clear that this ‘decentred dramaturgy’ is a macroscopic version of the ‘bastard dances’: both the dramaturgy and dance composition of Platel stem from mixing and stretching personal repertoires beyond their initial ownership or authorship. According to Ann Cooper Albright, Platel’s dramaturgy produces, as such, a corporeal effect that she sees occurring in *Pitié!* (2008) as an ‘intertwining of somatic feeling and political

urgency' (ch.5 p.73). This structures not only an affective relationship with the audiences, but also, as Stalpaert remarks in the last chapter, a new mode of relationality between the international performers, their differing artistic backgrounds, and their folkloric heritages. According to Stalpaert, what is celebrated in the African-European productions, such as *Pitié!*, *Badke* (2013), or *Coup Fatale* (2014), is what Lepecki names 'bodies-as-archives' (ch.16 p.238), or, our personal storages of techniques, movements, and habits. In addition, these choreographies can be considered templates for Platel's choreopolitics as they open up a restless space between the artistic material, the performers, and the audience, by making these agents in performance 'with-nesses' of their own and shared 'response-ability'.

This volume brings together a series of personal, social, and political spheres of contemporary dance and choreographic practices making numerous excellent insights into Platel's oeuvre. Its inquiries, deeply informed by scholarship in dance studies in different languages, also breaks new ground by incorporating new stands of scholarly inquiry in dance studies such as somaesthetics and eco-politics. As such, it opens up a complex debate on the breadth of Platel's choreography in both a multicultural society and a multidisciplinary arts field. The publication is a significant and fascinating critical look at this artist's practices that was certainly still missing from Dance Studies scholarship concerning the Flemish Wave and is therefore a warmly welcomed and auspicious start of the new interdisciplinary book series *Dance in Dialogue*. •

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LABOR AND AESTHETICS IN EUROPEAN CONTEMPORARY DANCE: DANCING PRECARITY?

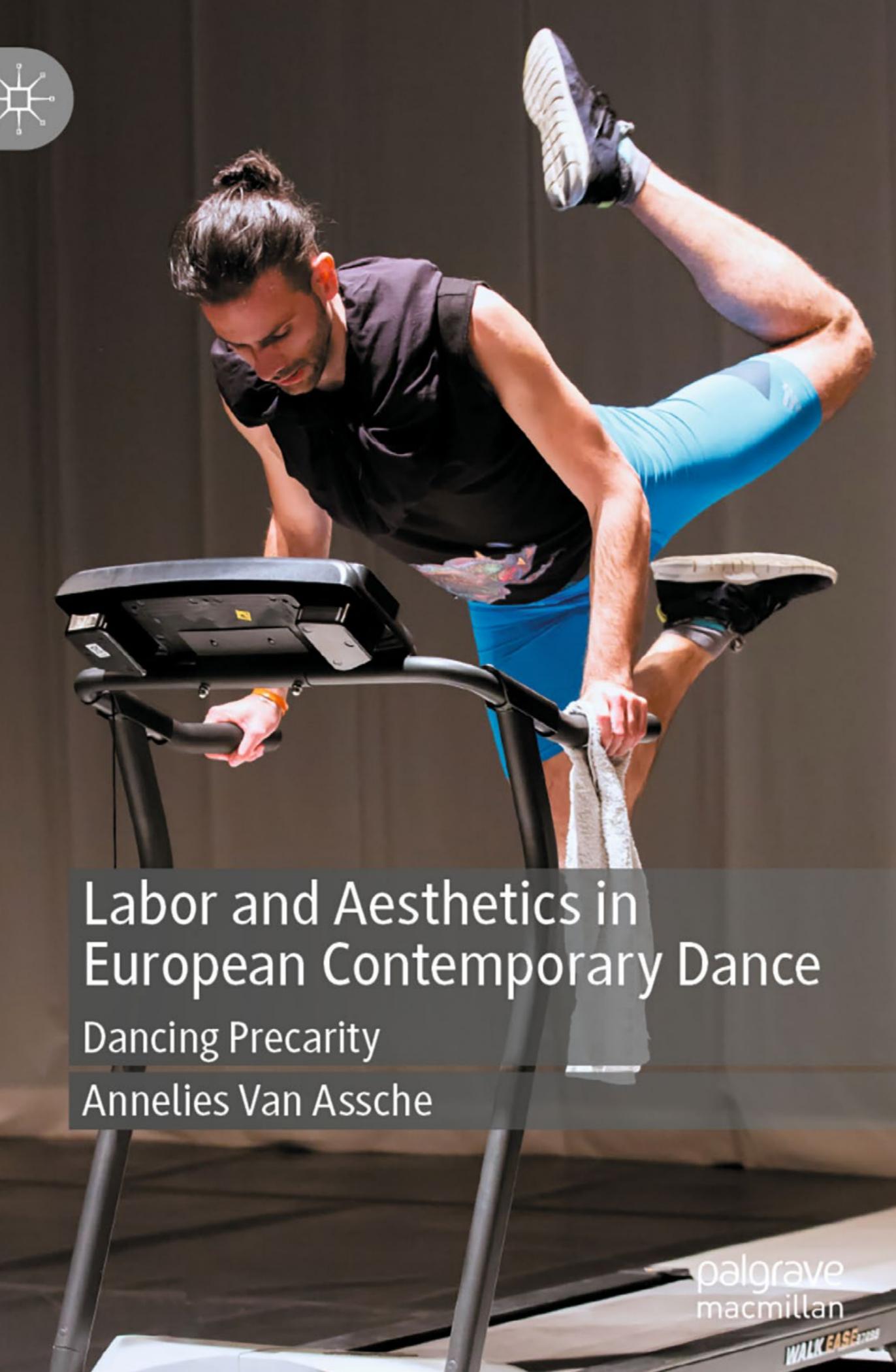
Annelies Van Assche

Palgrave Macmillan (CH), 2020, 293 pp.
ISBN: 978-3-030-40692-9

review by

KINGA JACZEWSKA

Independent artist/ scholar



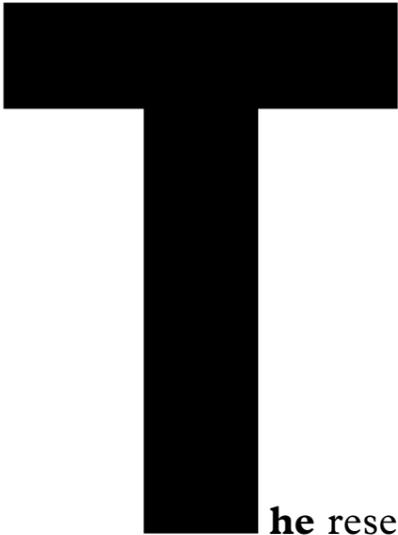
Labor and Aesthetics in
European Contemporary Dance

Dancing Precarity

Annelies Van Assche

palgrave
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WALK EASE



The research for this book began with the author's interest in the project-based *modi operandi* in which contemporary dancers operate today. By tracing the main features of how contemporary dance artists organise both their work and life, Annelies Van Assche investigates the precarious conditions of dancers in relation to our current neoliberal society at large. This book examines to what extent individual (or entrepreneurial) freedom, competition, deregulation, and privatization as characteristics of late capitalism affect not only the living conditions of artists but also the aesthetics and quality of their artistic work. This inquiry is based on quantitative and qualitative data that Van Assche gathered through comparative fieldwork and a series of interviews with dancers active within the dance scenes of Berlin and Brussels.

In 'Probing Precarity', the book's first chapter which may be seen as an extensive introduction, Van Assche provides readers with a broad yet necessary elaboration of the term 'precarious', outlining her own understanding and approach to this notion specifically in relation to the arts. She describes precarious labour as 'involving work that is carried out in a variety of economically and legally insecure circumstances such as absence of long-term contracts and career prospects, low wages, poor working conditions and only minimal or no social protection' (p. 8). Laying out her 'Field of Inquiry and Methodology' in the third chapter of the book, Van Assche identifies the multitude of tasks and functions

that contemporary dancers have to fulfil aside of their profession as a dancer. Precisely for this reason, Van Assche decides to address them as *contemporary dance artists* instead of using what she calls 'slash-identities' such as 'dancer/choreographer/performance artist/...' (p. 43). The flexibility required from contemporary dance artists means that they may need to occupy all these roles depending on the opportunities for work. Van Assche examines these different roles, as well as their impact on the work and life conditions of artists, through a fairly unique interdisciplinary approach that combines 'conventional dance studies tools with sociological research methods' (p. 46).

After the introductory chapters, the book is structured in three major parts, the first of which is titled 'Lifestyle and Survival Artists'. This part presents us with various motives, approaches, and tactics that contemporary dance artists may choose to (or have to?) follow within the field. Van Assche exposes the high value that immaterial capital, such as artistic pleasure or life-long learning, carry for contemporary dance artists. In this respect, self-development and increased autonomy often seem to act as a currency to compensate for the shortages of material benefits within the dance sector. These tendencies are critically questioned by Van Assche, who demonstrates how they can lead to a distinct type of self-precarisation, the continuous interweaving of work and life, and the confusion of personal and professional relationships. Van Assche casts doubt on so-called artistic autonomy by showing how, more often than not, artists appear to make choices influenced by their work's marketability as opposed to their artistic vision. The very same focus on marketability, Van Assche contends, tends to put artists in competition and can thus be linked to the disappearing sense of community that seems to be happening within the dance field.

In the following part, 'The Fast, The Mobile, The Flexible', the reader encounters what may be considered to be the most important segment

of the book. Here Van Assche interweaves her own writing with at times uncomfortably honest testimonies of her informants, presenting a dynamic and very engaging dialogue between researcher and artists. For example, in this part's first chapter, entitled 'The Fast' (which is chapter six in the book), Van Assche elucidates how artists, in order to pursue their art-making as well as to simply earn their living, are pushed to chase funding and programmers and to do a lot of paperwork. She exposes the problematics of the external subsidy system and the (power) relations between artists and 'gatekeepers' (as she calls programmers), showing how easily the subjective nature of such relations can corrupt the creative process.

The seventh chapter, 'The Mobile', unravels the causes and effects of dance artists' mobility between various work contexts and locations as well as the short-term nature of such arrangements. Here we get a closer look at the residency system, which provides artists with a studio space and — in the best cases — with financial and technical support for the development of their work. As we learn how dance artists often rely on this system as 'a form of indirect funding that compensates the lack of direct funding' (p. 170), we discover numerous issues caused by the nomadic and temporary modes of working (and living) which such residencies encourage. More specifically, Van Assche's fieldwork reveals how the sector itself often fails to recognise the working conditions of dance artists that at times basically consist of accommodation for the duration of a residency, a heated dance studio, or uninterrupted working time. This leads her to question the necessity and sustainability of such residency-based ways of working. In the eighth chapter, 'The Flexible', Van Assche uncovers yet another set of characteristics that immaterial workers within neoliberal society must display in order to remain employable, including polyvalence, flexibility, and adaptability. Interestingly, her analysis shows how these characteristics do not only relate to an artist's ability to adapt to various working conditions, but also

extend to the corporeal level: dancers' bodies must remain flexible and be able to incorporate various movement vocabularies and techniques whilst simultaneously maintaining their unique stage personality.

In the third and final major part of the book, entitled 'Burning Out and Slowing Down', Van Assche discusses the effects of fast, mobile, and flexible modes of working on dance artists themselves as well as their artistic work. Van Assche points to the vulnerability and fragility of the human body that, while trying to sustain the speed of today's neoliberal machine, is constantly being pushed to its limits. We learn that burnout is not only a looming risk that contemporary dancers struggle with but that it actually also applies to their artistic projects. Performance pieces tend to burn out shortly after their premiere due to little if any touring opportunities. Once again, we are made aware of the impossibility of drawing a firm line between the work and life of a creative worker in today's neoliberal society.

As Van Assche situates her book at the interdisciplinary crossing of dance studies and sociology, she accordingly complements her quantitative and qualitative research with performance analyses. Thus, besides from being presented with some of the real-life testimonies of various dancer-informants, readers are introduced to a few carefully selected performances that in their subject matter or performed contexts may be seen to embody and highlight the questions and problematics that arise from working as a contemporary dance artist in today's neoliberal society. This approach allows the author to connect the languages of both performance and academia into a remarkably accessible, integrated, and well-functioning marriage.

Labor and Aesthetics in European Contemporary Dance: Dancing Precarity brings to visibility the vicious circle in which contemporary dance artists seem to be functioning. As much as Van Assche's field study

reveals various modes in which artists try to operate, the question remains whether it is actually possible to escape from these precarious, nomadic, often opportunistic, and highly individualised ways of working. As the author herself admits in her conclusion, the book also leaves us wondering whether the current working and living conditions of dance artists are their individual choices or rather an effect caused by a lack of alternatives to neoliberal logic and its competitive dynamic. Van Assche does not offer a conclusive answer to this question — she never promised to. However, by unravelling a range of telling facts that are otherwise kept silent about the working and living conditions of contemporary dance artists, she does make a convincing case for the urgent necessity to re-evaluate the structures within which contemporary dance artists are working today. Hoping to resist the tendency of dance and art in general to turn into a solitary and lonesome process, Van Assche's book could or even should be read as a critical and timely call for more sharing and caring, and — most importantly — for more sustainability and less precarity in the field of contemporary dance. •



THEATRES OF CONTAGION TRANSMITTING EARLY MODERN TO CONTEMPORARY PERFORMANCE

Fintan Walsh (ed.)

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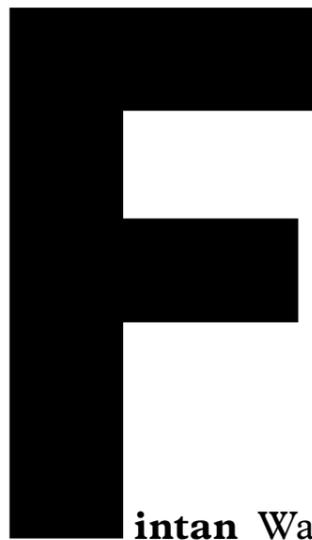
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THEATRES OF CONTAGION

Transmitting Early Modern to
Contemporary Performance

Edited by
Fintan Walsh



Fintan Walsh's *Theatres of Contagion: Transmitting Early Modern to Contemporary Performance* appears in the middle of a pandemic when the anxiety of contagion has become humanity's biggest unifier. Drawing from a wide range of theoretical frameworks including affect theory, Renaissance medicine, and Early Modern psychology, this book convincingly suggests that theatre has historically been a locus for such anxieties to be transubstantiated into hope. The text is organised around three themes — 'Infections Bodies and Behaviours', 'Sites of Contamination and Containment', and 'Conducting Emotions, Moods and Minds' — which roughly move from the early modern to the contemporary period. Walsh along with contributors Marcus Cheng Chye Tan, Rebecca McCutcheon, Kristen E. Shepherd-Ban, Julius Green, Lynne Mc Carthy, Liam Jarvis, Mark Pizzato and Ana Pais discuss theatre's status as a contagious cultural practice by questioning its role in the spread and control of medical, psychological, and affective practices.

Walsh's introductory chapter (*Contagious Performance: Between Illness and Ambience*) and first chapter (*Viral Hamlet: History, Memory, Kinship*) set the tone of the volume by boldly bringing together the debates around the status of theatre as a contagious cultural practice and recent queer theories of kinship construction through the exchange of viral loads. Through an analysis of Dickie Beau's *Remember Me* (2017) as an evocation of a séance in which the voices of dead leading actors who

played Hamlet in the UK theatre are conjured in the present to query the compulsory invocation of the past, Walsh suggests that theatre can be a crucial agent of kinship building that does not represent social relations but produces them in the present connecting the living with the dead and those to come. He pays particular attention to Ian Charleson (1949-1990), an actor who played Hamlet's own prospect of death while going through chemotherapy for Kaposi's sarcoma in 1989. By collapsing representation (the past) and the possibility of a life beyond death (the future), Walsh elegantly circumvents the more pedestrian take on contagion as contagion through affect (in the present).

From the point of view of queer sociality, Walsh places his discussion closer to the alternative queer futures suggested by Jose Estebán Muñoz's seminal *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (2009) than to the type of anti-social position represented by Leo Bersani's *Homos* (1995). From the point of view of how queer contagion has been performed in theatres, Walsh's work follows in the steps of David Román who in his book *Acts of Intervention: Performance, Gay Culture and AIDS* (1998) echoes Douglas Crimp's rejection of AIDS represented as tragedy in favour of viewing art as presenting ways to cope with catastrophe.¹ Drawing from Tim Dean's *Unlimited Intimacy: Reflections on the Subculture of Barebacking* (2008) where the wilful acquisition of HIV via unprotected sex is discussed as a form of kinship creation across bodily and generational divides, Walsh invites us to imagine an erotic as well as a theatric of contagion. This is to see contagion not just as dramaturgical form but as a way in which bodies, subjectivities, affects, and histories intermingle across time, creating a communion between the living and the dead. The significance of Walsh's intervention is that, according to him, queer futurity can only be achieved in communion with our queer ghosts.

1. Román, David. 1998. *Acts of Intervention: Performance, Gay Culture and AIDS*. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press), p.68.

Many chapters in this book broach the issue of theatrical contagion by linking the present to the Elizabethan past as a continuum. Shani Bans' chapter explores the place of the body as porous and the place of the stage as a locus of anxiety in an illuminating way. Drawing from medical theories of vision prevalent in Elizabethan times mainly in northern Europe, Bans suggests that actors and spectators were actively participating in the creation of a theatre of visual contagion. Her exclusive focus on vernacular theories prevents her from addressing the influence of Italian Neo-Platonism that, according to Ioan Couliano's *Eros and Magic in the Renaissance* (1987), was brought by Giordano Bruno to the Elizabethan court when they were exiled to London. Bans' discussion of the influence of medicine in Early Modern English theatre could benefit from these debates that may enable broader questions regarding the place of art in the manipulation of memory as magic through theatrical imagery as in Francesco Colonna's *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* (1467) and Giulio Camillo's *L'Idea del Teatro* (1550).

The use of affect theory is more traditional in Rebecca McCutcheon's practice-based research on affective contagion as a site-based performance in a former church in Dilston Grove, London, through which mob behaviour is conceptualised. By attempting to revert the negative connotations attached to ideas of affective contagion after their appropriation by the intellectual right, McCutcheon helps prove Walsh's point that contagious performance helps prevent historical and aesthetic closure through an infectious flow of voices, images, and ghosts. Meanwhile, Marcus Cheng Chye Tan approaches musical affect through a discussion of sonicity and sonority as a way of bringing audiences and characters together. Kirsten E. Shepherd-Barr explores the transition between nineteenth-century theatrical representation of biological transmission to more recent approaches to infection as transmitted from mind to mind such as within contagion-based gaming. Julius Green examines purportedly fear-induced responses amongst theatre

audiences and specifically the phenomenon of fainting as a contagious reaction at the Parisian *Théâtre du Grand-Guignol* (1897-19632) and at Lucy Bailey's notoriously bloody production of *Titus Andronicus* at Shakespeare's Globe in 2014. These are convincingly presented as examples of how a medical condition could be passed from the stage to the audience. Molly McPhee analyses two plays by UK-based *Clean Break Theatre Company* where pre/conceptions of social contagion are activated through sites of textual infection and emotional contagion. By pushing sex trafficked children out of the role of helpless victims, the play does not provide any easy object on which to hook a quick judgement of the situation. Lynne McCarthy discusses how metaphors of contagions are transformed into reality in an unauthorised Irish Traveler settlement at Dale Farm, Essex which was located nearby polluted sites in 2011. She convincingly shows how the State uses infrastructure as stagecraft to dramatize physical space and enact what she considers to be environmental racism. Linked to Tan's approach to affect through sound, Ana Pais situates Punchdrunk's *Sleep No More* (2011) as an example of how immersive theatre can paradoxically invite the roaming spectator to follow his or her instinct within a contagious atmosphere of threat and tension propagated by soundscape and other devices such as masks and self-absorbed performers. This allows her to effectively counter recent critical approaches to participation, spectatorship, and labour in immersive theatre as ideologically neoliberal and 'entrepreneurial'. The last chapter is one of the most thought provoking. Drawing from neurology, Mark Pizzato offers a detailed anatomisation of how the brains of those representing characters' minds on stage connect with the brains of those in the audience, complementing Green's chapter on clinical suggestion through stagecraft.

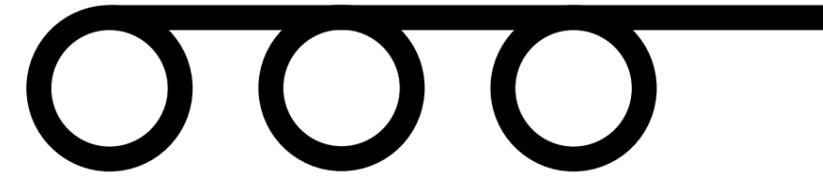
From an academic point of view, this book brilliantly situates current debates of performance and theatre studies into a wider critical context where neurology, alternative visual cultures, queer studies, and

art history interact to bring much needed light to stagnant disciplinary discussions. As a political intervention, this book makes a very strong case for theatre as a locus for critically approaching contagion as something deeply implicated in the discourse and practices of socio-political formation. Indeed, as we have all experienced during recent times, contagion is often weaponised in language, imagery, and law. •

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