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A European View**

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# Governments and Theatres: What Next after Covid? A European View

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## Abstract

The pandemic that has affected the whole world since March 2020 is shaking up our ways of living, working and being together. In Europe, cultural and creative sectors are among the most severely impacted by the pandemic crisis and according to preliminary estimates by Eurostat, the COVID-19 crisis may affect about 7.3 million cultural and creative jobs across the EU. Over 30% of the people affected are self-employed and lack adequate social protection. Among the cultural subsectors, the performing arts have suffered the most serious consequences with the suspension over many months of their establishments and even the definitive closure of some of them as well as the disappearing of many artists.

The fall of the live performances did not create a fall of all of the artistic practices and of their social and psychological positive impact. In general, people during the pandemic have recognized the wellbeing benefits of arts and cultural activities, and according to the data now available, more than 60% of European (and US) citizens believed that access to arts through creative activities, at home or on line, affected them positively. Both online and in-person formats were effective, indicating the potential for the intervention to reach larger audiences.

But the day after is not what many people expected, and the public policies aimed to overcome the health crisis have not made possible to find again the starting point. In fact, we can wonder if Covid 19 has not activated problems that already existed but were little visible or underestimated. Two more structural interpretations of the theatre crisis can be evoked here: the first one concerning the whole of the performing arts, and the second focused on the future of "dramatic" theatre as traditionally understood in Europe. It seems that the model began to run out of steam long before the Covid 19 crisis, this latter only accelerating ongoing changes. Then we have to enrich our point of view on the socio-economic model of the live arts in the post-pandemic world and put society back into culture if we want public policies more efficient.

**Key Words:** *Performing arts, Dramatic Theatre, Digital Theatre, Weakness of the economic chain*

The pandemic that has affected the whole world since March 2020 is shaking up our ways of living, working and being together. In Europe, cultural and creative sectors are among the most severely impacted by the pandemic crisis and according to preliminary estimates by Eurostat, the COVID-19 crisis may affect about 7.3 million cultural and creative jobs across the EU.<sup>2</sup> In Netherland for example, Following a by Ernst & Young Report<sup>3</sup>, the creative and cultural industry (CCI) was, after the air transport sector, the hardest hit in terms of loss of turnover

(loss of 31% relative to its 2019 turnover). Yet, while airlines have been supported by national governments – in the case of the Dutch airline KLM with 3.4 billion euros – the creative and cultural sectors in the Netherlands received only 1.7 billion euros.<sup>4</sup> Over 30% of the people affected are self-employed and lack adequate social protection. Among the sectors of activity most impacted, the cultural sector, and more particularly the performing arts, have suffered the most serious consequences with the suspension over

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<sup>2</sup> www.culturalfoundation.eu

<sup>3</sup> Ernst & Young (2021). *Rebuilding Europe: The cultural and creative economy before and after the COVID-19 crisis*. [online] [Accessed 19 Oct. 2022].

<sup>4</sup> European Waves, Opinion. 2022. *A cultural pandemic: Covid-19 and the cultural sector*, by Esther Eumann. 5/22

many months of their establishments and even the definitive closure of some of them as well as the disappearing of many artists.

But theaters matter in European countries since Greek tragedies, medieval carnivals, Siècle des lumières and its plea for “aesthetical education”, and the welfare state creating both national and local theatres. The Dresden Declaration of the 2020 European Theatre Forum identifies the unique value of theatre and performing arts as the following: Fostering democracy; Enhancing social cohesion; Stimulating critical thinking; Nourishing empathy and imagination; Promoting intercultural dialogue. This does not mean that participation in theatrical activities is equal across the EU. Ten years ago, a significant Eurobarometer on Cultural Access and Participation (2013) revealed important geographical, demographic and socio-economic differences among Europeans determining their participation. According to the survey, 28% of respondents had been to the theatre once or more in the last year, and 18% had been to see a ballet, dance performance or opera. If theatrical activities are leading cultural activities attended in a specific venue, they are much less popular than other relatively inexpensive cultural activities at home, such as reading or watching/listening to a cultural program on the TV or radio (72%); or attending movie theatres (60%.) Anyway, it is still recognized that its venues are important public spaces for an open society, sharing experiences and making communities.

But it should be stressed too that the fall of the live performances did not create a fall of all of the artistic practices and of their social and psychological positive impact. In general, people during the pandemic have recognized the wellbeing benefits of arts and cultural activities, and according to the data now available, more than 60% of European (and US) citizens believed that access to arts through creative activities, at home or on line, affected them positively. These benefits also appear to have extended to particular patient populations as well. For example, a US study has found that a drawing intervention for people with chronic pain led to improvements in pain, depression and anxiety before and during the first three months of the pandemic. Both online and in-

person formats were effective, indicating the potential for the intervention to reach larger audiences.<sup>5</sup> (49). Small charities and cultural organizations have also encouraged people to take part in arts activities online or in person to protect their health and wellbeing during the pandemic (50).

## **1. Covid 19 and its first supports: The show must not go on...**

Since theaters are generally a dedicated space where and when people and artists meet, they were among the first public spaces to be closed by the Covid 19. Due to the restrictions, many theatres, museums, concert halls, etc. had to suspend their activities and many festivals and events were cancelled. This explains that the performing arts have suffered most from the crisis, losing around 90% of turnover. p.40. The number and income of artists collapsed also but significant measures were rapidly taken, mostly by central governments.<sup>6</sup>

Immediately during Spring 2020 and following the decision to close Live Performances – that will only partially start again during the winter of 2021, after almost a year of interruption – many governments decided to set up two major aid schemes:

- A guarantee of the loss of turnover of the enterprises relatively to the previous period turnover (T-1), minus the savings of expenses disappeared due to the closure of the theatres (For France it was up to 70%.) This was a general disposal whatever the activity and from this view point any enterprises or cultural institution was eligible as far as it existed already one year before and presented rough business data. But the scale of this reduction changed according to the country and, as expected, the state of their own public finance. This guarantee was totally funded on the national budget.
- An extension of the of the unemployment benefits system including the registered artists, but with very strong variations according to the member states. This was financed by the social

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<sup>5</sup> How culture and creativity have been supporting people in health, care and other institutions during the Covid-19 pandemic [Internet]. Culture, Health & Wellbeing Alliance; 2021

<sup>6</sup> For France, according to a study by the Ministry of Culture, the economic activity of the cultural field was profoundly affected during the first confinement. Over the first 9 months of 2020, the loss of turnover of the cultural field would be 15% compared to the first 9 months of 2019. According to one estimate, we can envisage in 2020 only a decrease in turnover for the entire cultural field of 16% compared to 2019. However, these figures hide discrepancies between sectors: the most affected were film projection (-65%) and Live Performance (-46%).

More specifically, the turnover of the performing arts alone would have decreased by 39% in the first 9 months of 2020 compared to the first 9 months of 2019, and by 46% for the whole year. However, this estimate does not take into account all the activities of the performing arts, in particular that of small independent companies which would represent 61% of the activity of the performing arts. If indeed the subsidized structures should survive, the question remains open for these small independent companies.

budget, which means mainly on the contribution of social partners.

- If we consider here the supports so created, almost 70% were given on behalf of the guarantee of the loss of turnovers, and 30% on behalf of the extension of unemployment benefits.

In addition, other types of measures have been considered and implemented here, with a significant role of local governments:

- Specific supports or funding for alleviating the suppression for summer festivals, but under restrictive conditions;
- Additional interventions to support on-line transmission of the backstage repertoires.
- As soon as artists could visit hospitals, house for old people, prisons, etc., subsidies to support these activities. For example, Ghent in Belgium brought recordings of cultural productions to residents in seniors' facilities Prague in the Czech Republic, and Aarhus in Denmark set up programs for music lovers that allowed them to book outdoor concerts by local musicians outside private homes, hospitals, and nursing homes (Montalto et al., 2020a, 2020b, 2020c, 2020d). Municipal libraries in Prague, Turin and Gothenburg (Sweden) launched services for clients in isolation, such as book packages to be picked up or delivered and book readings over the phone
- As soon as the situation could change and allow the reopening of the theaters, support for limiting the cost due to the limitation of the number of seats.

But if we consider the supports benefited by theatres, 93% of collected measures were issued at national level and 7% only at the regional level.

Nevertheless, these measures have proved to be less effective over time than expected, and three factors explain this.

- The theatre sector merges together recognized institutions, often national or regional, which have statutes and funding that enable them not only to face difficulties but to be the first to receive almost mechanically exceptional aid. But other structures do not benefit from this capacity for resilience, especially those that intervene episodically during the year or during festivals. It

has been found that national aid mainly benefited the formers not the others. As a result, these ones become very sensitive to aid from local governments and their relative funding capacities. Even between formal well recognized institutions, there has been a difference in treatment between public and private institutions. A report by the French Unemployment benefits management organization (UNEDIC), published in March 2021, goes in this direction by showing that the activity of private performing arts in 2020 represented 50% of its activity from 2019, against 73% for subsidized entertainment. Resources would thus have halved for the private sector compared to a quarter for the subsidized sector.<sup>7</sup>

- A fairly general characteristic in European countries, with the exception of the few federal countries, is that local aid is often given on the occasion of one-off events, whereas national aid is more linked to permanent inactivity. Thus, when theatres are closed, local authorities rarely help theatres, especially since the need for local solidarity leads rather focusing their aid on the most disadvantaged local groups, regardless of their professional affiliation.
- Another difficulty comes from the fact that artists are far from being bound by permanent contracts to their companies. At least 60% of those who make a living from their artistic activity are self-employed and belong to the *gig economy*. Artists were the first gig workers, as the word “gig” itself shows—from “engagement”, it comes precisely from the performing arts, and indicates a performance associated with a single contract and therefore unique and occasional. Working in the entertainment and artistic field means dealing with multiple clients, discontinuity in employment relationships, fragmentation of the work activity, the impossibility to perform, or work in the same show in the same place for long periods.<sup>8</sup>
- As a result, they can only benefit from a general aid to combat poverty, since many of them are

<sup>7</sup> Impact of the health crisis on intermittent employment in the performing arts in 2020

<sup>8</sup> Howes, S.A. 2016. Artists, The Original Gig Economy Workers, Have More Rights Than They Think. In: Center for Cultural Innovation for National Endowment for The Arts, ed., Creativity Connects: Trends and Conditions Affecting U.S. Artists.

not eligible to substantial unemployment benefits. The German Association of Scenographers, for example, revealed that only 1.23% of the 227 scenographers who participated in their survey had been paid. This resulted in considerable difficulties and many artists were led to seek other sources of activity, even if it meant reconverting. Especially since, unlike other workers, they are often isolated from any professional network.

- An example of this difficulty for making artists eligible to national supports is given by Italy. This is due to the fact that the Italian government established rigid thresholds which did not fully account for the reality of entertainment work. Entertainment workers claimed to be excluded because of legal technicalities, because they had not worked enough days in 2019, or because their incomes were considered to be too high, even if in lockdown this income decreased to zero.<sup>9</sup>

Therefore, it is difficult to say that financial aid, as significant as it was in some countries, made the artists go through this difficult period. For such activities synonymous with encounters, sharing and exchanges between actors and spectators this was a very strong challenge. For other cultural sectors, such as books and video this was different, but they fell too some impacts. If Member States tried to develop aid instruments culturally Creative Industries, it did not cover all of the artists. Many of them, due to the type of employment, had problems with proving their artistic work, or were simply excluded from support systems.

79 Interviewees pointed out that the closure of theatres resulted in the termination of many contracts and leaving the artists destitute, forcing them to seek alternative sources of income. It often happened that aid programs were not direct support but a competition for innovative projects that could be implemented in times of a pandemic. If such a support was offered, it was rather short term and financial, not covering the whole duration of the pandemic.

As lockdowns began to be lifted during summer and autumn 2020, many restrictions on gatherings of

unrelated people were maintained, and many cultural institutions and activities were not yet able to resume in their normal manner. New types of alternatives bridging presential and relative isolation started for generating more communality, with the support of local governments. Milano organized a bike version of the drive-in format, staging concerts and other cultural events in open spaces where both culture and nature could be safely enjoyed. Vilnius in Lithuania launched an Aero cinema”, which staged its annual film festival in an airport drive-in. But balcony concerts fitted more with the European context.

## **2.The Unexpected ‘Year After’: When the Artists are Leaving...**

For many actors in the theater world, Covid 19 initially appeared as a violent but temporary interruption. Everyone waited for the ‘next day’, which was not long in coming, and actually theaters began to reopen on average a year later and with a limited capacity to neutralize contact between people.

Probably the peak period of Covid 19 led to many interesting initiatives. The most institutionalized companies and their own artists frequently adapted their work to online platforms, reporting mixed feelings about how well this worked as a substitute for in-person artistic pursuits, and the difficulty to create anything out of presential audience. Small companies and independent artists underlined many obstacles or barriers, including internet connection issues; lack of appropriate technological skills; difficulties finding the time or space to participate from home and the absence of a sustainable new business model.

Anyway, all the companies and artists were more confident that with the 'day-after' everything would start again as usual. And indeed, we witnessed at the end of 2020 - beginning of 2021 the reopening of theaters and an audience coming back. Many people could go out of their homes and companies could perform gain. But the ‘following year’ did not look as expected: the audience was not really there, and many artists disappeared, following a chain of successive events, such as in live music.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Martinelli, Francesca. 2021 « The reaction of entertainment workers to the Covid 190. “7th Conference of the Regulating for Decent Work Network” Virtual Conference, International Labour. July 6-9.

<sup>10</sup> For France, this question seems particularly sensitive especially for the musical show which not only has experienced "a calamitous year 2020", but which also expected "a new black year in 2021": <sup>10</sup> Thus a study by the National Center of Music was published on October 4, 2021 announcing that "Ticketing revenues will fall from 75% to 82%, compared to 2019 (€317 million or €223 million). "Concert halls with gauges exceeding 5,000 seats should be the most violently affected with a drop of 85% to 89% of their activity in 2021 compared to 2019. » More specifically three facts may be distilled:<sup>10</sup>

- "The three main activities on which the first sequence of the crisis had an impact are not surprising: the broadcasting of shows (91%), production/rehearsals (72%) and cultural action projects (63%);

## *Less audience*

Actually, the comeback of the spectators was more difficult than expected. In average only but 70% of the inter-nauts interviewed answered that they will go less often than before at theatre (23% will reduce their attendance and 48% did not consider really this opportunity.) We could expect something different but in fact only but the restaurants benefited from the suspension of sanitary regulations, and other forms of entertainment dropped also such as the movie theaters. May be the negative heritage of the health regulations due to the limited number of places to maintain empty spaces between spectators and the mandatory presentation of the health passport at the entrance of the theatres, could have explained this disappointment. But this was not significant 70% of more than 20 years old population had vaccinate, and in autumn 2022, almost two years after the beginning of the Covid 19, the audience is far to attain again its previous levels with significant differences between types of theaters. For example, in a city as Paris the rate of occupation of the National Theatres capacity is almost the same as before (80%) it has strongly declined from 90 to 55% for the private companies.

Three factors may explain this attitude.

- The price of the tickets rocketed. For many observers, theater, and more broadly performing arts, including concerts, operas, were subject to entrance fees that were already too high for a large part of the population. The big national theaters do not know this problem since their venues are fully occupied, and the seats largely subsidized (up to 60% for the Opera). For many smaller, lesser-known institutions, the price of admission is more and more a barrier. One of the references often put forward is the price of a cinema ticket. But if this last one has recently increased, reducing actually the rate of audience in the movie theaters the price of a place in the theater is sloping upward even more upward sloping in recent years. Moreover, the generalization of movie streaming during Covid 19 made their
- The fact that people do not manage their entertainment activities as they use to do before Covid 19. In parallel to the pursuit of teleworking after Covid we can say that we have now have ow tele entertainment. People started to organize differently their daily life at home learning better how to organize this entertainment and caring more in terms of economic alternatives. Moreover, we rapidly discovered that even when they intend to entertain outside, they decided themselves at the last moment. They want to master totally their agenda, which will create important difficulties for the supply side of entertainment.
- The age of the audience. It is recognized that the traditional audience for theater in Europe is relatively aged. Whatever the country the majority of audience is over 50 years, considering theater as a quality entertainment. But 30% of the students and high school attendants consider this form of entertainment as boring, music excepted. Naturally young people come and attend theatres, and there is a strong correlation in Europe between the spatial distribution of universities and theatres. But the capacity of theatres to renew their audience has always been argued, and this explains why many governments support theater at the school level in order to acclimate their young people to this form of artistic expression both as actors or/and attendants. After the Covid 19 a new phenomenon has been considered: not only ado's and young people neglect theatres but they neglect television and are

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- [there has been] a massive postponement of productions, including for those at the end of the year;

- [we witnessed] a drastic drop in broadcasting in 2020 (-42%) and margins (gap between revenues and broadcasting expenses) have considerably reduced (-83%), which greatly weakens future creations;

- postponement strategies will create traffic jams in future programming;

- [we have seen] a massive cancellation of participation in festivals (in particular for street arts, musical ensembles and dance) and only 55% of the teams surveyed said they had been able to negotiate the cancellation or postponement conditions with the distribution structures, 55% of the teams surveyed said they had to cancel cultural actions, which would represent a volume of 47,941 hours cancelled and 2,282 artists concerned".<sup>10</sup>

more or less enthusiast about streaming. A recent UK study shows that the larger majority of entertainment time of the 16-34 years old is now captured by Google, YouTube, and for younger ones by TikTok.<sup>11</sup> Considering the nature of the corresponding programs, we can expect an audience more acclimated to very short formats and less attracted by formats too long and boring.

### *Less performances*

Less demand implies within time less supply. Many factors have supported this increase: the need to maintain or adapt the venues in a new sanitary context; the pending inflation; the reduction of many kinds of subsidies, both at the central and local government levels. The fact also that the argument on the essential nature of the cultural consumption – very present during the Covid 19 and justifying the rapid re-opening of bookstores and libraries did not benefit from the same interest of the discourse on ecology and environment. But there is more. Many theaters have faced a radical collapse of seasonal-tickets (for example, five per year), and the fact that spectators prefer to buy shows on a case-by-case basis at the last time. This had the double effect of making scheduling performance more difficult and cash management more hazardous. This increasing uncertainty is lethal for many theaters, end the more if they are little subsidizes. Then we see an increasing cancelation of performances and even of small theatres. Only the festival is preserved since here the argument of the local development due to the attractivity of tourists is very strong. We can even say that this becomes main support now of the local governments.

The current situation both reflects and causes an outflow of workers from the theatre sector. As upper said many artists have dropped this artistic activity due to their loneliness during Covid 19; their need to find more permanent and guaranteed resources; and a disappointment when they discovered that their art was not considered as essential as expected. The Covid 19 pandemic and associated lockdowns and social restrictions led to substantial losses in work and income for many artists and led participants to worry about their futures and that of the industry in general. They led also to feelings of loneliness and isolation due to social restrictions. Many French interviewees have highlighted the bottleneck effect the

rescheduling of 2020 and 2021 performances will have on access to market for less established, younger, artists, and the previsions are as pessimistic for 2022. Naturally we can here expect that other people will come and benefit from the fact that there is no direct barrier to their entries into this activity.

Facing this uncertain panorama, some positive but restricted initiatives developed as in Italy. Some entertainment workers choose to practice cooperation to obtain professional recognition and more constant contracts.<sup>12</sup> Artists' cooperatives focus on some specific needs: sharing of resources, legal recognition for non-standard work and access to social protection mechanisms, opportunities for cooperation among professionals, autonomy in the management of personal activities, the introduction of technology to redistribute wealth and, in some cases, representation of their needs in front of institutions. In the cooperative, artists obtain the double status of worker-member: as workers, they become employees of the collective organization and access the typical rights of employees, such as health insurance, pension, family leave, sick pay, and unemployment, and have the certainty of working safely and legally; as members, they become entrepreneurs of the cooperative and, through the democratic management, they can choose how to orient the business to achieve the goals that they would not achieve alone.

Considering the technicians, the situation is different but, in a sense, riskier. Their skills are crucial for the well-functioning of the sector, however, the past and current situation forced them to look for jobs in other sectors, where there find often better wages. This outflow of specialists will result in the loss of many skills and knowledge in the market and at the best the need to educate a new generation of specialists, which will take a long time.

### **3. New Interpretations**

The day after is not what many people expected, and the public policies aimed to overcome the health crisis have not made possible to find again the starting point. In fact, we can wonder if Covid 19 has not activated problems that already existed but were little

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<sup>11</sup> OfCom. 2022. MediaNations Interactive Report. August 17th.

<sup>12</sup> <https://docservizi.retedoc.net/en/>.

visible or underestimated. Two more structural interpretations of the theatre crisis can be evoked here: the first one concerning the whole of the performing arts, and the second focused on the future of "dramatic" theatre as traditionally understood in Europe;

- For a growing number of observers, our culture is driven by digital images, offered in an unlimited way, and at best (or at the worst) commented or arbitrated by social networks and influencers. To say that the image takes precedence over the written and even the oral in our artistic activities as in our daily lives becomes a commonplace. In the United States as of 2018, the average time spent each day in front of the different types of screens at our disposal is 9 hours forty-five, already an hour and a half more than five years ago. This attention is mainly related to mobile phones, because we seem to look at them more than 225 times a day, which will represent a daily duration of about 3 hours 30, and even in theaters!

Concerning the United States, Nicholas Carr highlights the paradox offered by the largest pictorial event in this country, the broadcast of the Superbowl in front of nearly two hundred million viewers. Numerous commercial advertisements dot the final of the American football championship and thus allow a competition between the news commercial advertisements of the coming year. And the audience is much higher at the time when these spots pass than in front of the very sport event!<sup>1314</sup>

Then, the value of narratives, messages and statements depends more and more on the images used to illustrate them. As well in our professional as domestic activities, images imprint our minds, unless they are exceeded by other images. In the theater this results in a massive import of images and also mirrors, often starting from the intention, which may be good, to force us to distance ourselves from a subject that is too precise, but above all leading to letting ourselves go to their flow, hardly taking the time to implement the necessary critical distance. Another risk is the capture of our data on our behaviors in front of the flow of images become a mine for analyzing our behaviors, and make others driving our consumption of entertainment.

- In Europe, an interpretation of the disease of the

theatres starts from an opposition between dramatic and post-dramatic theater.<sup>15</sup>

*Dramatic theatre* is characterized by the dominance of a text or narrative, regardless of the effects that are added to it, both scenic and mechanical effects. Of course, theatre takes various forms according to the periods of time, and at each of them a 'new theatre' appears, but without changing a common logic: reading a text and making it appear in the corresponding actions.

The main characteristic of *post-dramatic theatre* is to relativize the importance given to the text or the narrative, to multiply images and videos; gestures and performances of the actors, variations (or deletion) of the texts, transposition in time; immersing the spectator into a state of rapture. This post-dramatic theatre can be compared to happens in visual arts, or even bio-art, where gestures prevail over any other form of expression. It can be said in a way that sensuality prevails over meaning; or that the interpretation of the text is so open that it will be up to the viewer to choose its own interpretation; or again, that the grammar of the image and the gesture now prevails over the grammar of the written or even the oral. Theatre is now part of the society of entertainment, or even part of an event-race.

This distinction generates has a twofold consequence. On the one hand, the osmosis between a text and those who listen to it is disappearing, which means that the spectators are now left to their own thoughts. It will be up to them to interpret the show, or even to interpret nothing at all. Audience gets passive and the aims sought by the theater disappear. On the other hand, the theater, which has become an event or entertainment, finds itself in competition with many other forms of expression, the most dangerous being for obvious price reasons that of movie theatres, or even the metaverse where one makes one's own theater.

#### 4. New challenges

Then, it seems that the model began to run out of steam long before the Covid19 crisis, this crisis only accelerating ongoing changes. We have to enrich our point of view on the socio-economic model of the live arts in the post-pandemic world and put society back into culture if we want public policies more efficient.

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<sup>13</sup> Carr (2019), p.226.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., pp.145-6.

<sup>15</sup> Lehmann, Hans-Thies. 1999. *Postdramatisches Theater*. Fancfort/Main. (*Postdramatic theatre*. 2003. Paris: L'arche. Translation by Philippe-Henri Ledru.)



Live Performance is indeed marked by the fact that a show takes place on a given text (or content), in a given place, joining artists and audiences. This link with the audience is essential and actors cannot consider performing on stage in front of an empty or passive room. These different points that today raise questions and three of them deserve to be underlined: The text, the place and the interactivity between audiences and artists.

### *The text*

If Live Performance institutions seek to get closer to the public and reach a new audience, it may be appropriate to think about the content that is offered to this new audience, starting by the beginning, i.e., a text.

The drastic reduction of a text- or the so-called adaptation - does not seem so relevant. It may discourage the traditional audience without making a new audience come. It was sometimes organized as a way to capture productivity gains but the prices of their retickets did not support this expected effect. And when the worst comes to the worst, it is actually destroying a literary heritage.

As upper seen, during the Covid 19 a number of authors, directors and artists have come into contact with listeners on the radio or viewers on television to talk about literary texts, staging, directing. Could we do the same, including also using the internet to reflect jointly on new texts more in tune with those who never come to the theater, by constraints but not by lack of interest.

A quasi-revolutionary idea is to talk about things that reason in for the forgotten audience and that correspond to their concerns. The participatory creation is therefore to create a text with a public by interviewing inhabitants, make them express themselves on a subject and thus create new plays. This participation does not limit to the writing of a new text. It goes on with the reflection on the way to present a show, which leans another round before the performance. These kinds of initiatives have been around for a number of years, but they have recently gained visibility with the closure of performance venues. Will actors and authors take more hold of these places and these scenic logics in the future? Will there be new aesthetic explorations?

### *The place*

Post-Covid time has demonstrated that very large and remote venues will not attract as many people as expected. A break-up of traditional performing places makes people more interested and blurs the effects of social or educational differences. Moreover,

the experience of outreaching underlines the fact that a significant part of the population will never have access to performing arts if these ones do not go and see them. Very likely this means that performances should be lighter and shorter, and that the audience should be prepared. What is important for many directors is not so much the official place of performance (the theater) but the place of life; you have to be alive first. An extreme situation that developed silently in many countries is theatre at home. It is in fact theater for the inhabitants of significant settlements., and the performance is given in a social space, a yard, an old warehouse. The specificity of this form of theater is that the company prepares a content in relationship with the interests and living conditions of these local people. Usually the event is short, and followed by a local social event. So, it is difficult to present a piece that would last from 2 to 3 hours, since with preparation and post-performance, a performance of one hour the manifestation may require between 3 and 4 hours ...

This fragmentation of places is also accompanied by the break-up of time, insofar as this implies harmonizing with the schedules of the places of reception. This is particularly true for cooperation with other social institutions, which face fairly rigid schedules. This burst of time can be less strict for places created in industrial areas, or wastelands... not subject to administrative constraints, but at the same time, if we want to attract new audiences who do not go to theaters, we must also take into account their personal constraints. This is particularly the case for company employees, who can live far from their place of work (suburb more or less distant from the cities centers) and who must add public transport time to their working day. In this case, we can think that advancing and relatively shortening the schedule of some performances would be an asset.

In addition to the schedules of the shows, there is also the question of the duration of the shows. Playing in outdoor places requires adapting to the time constraints of the host institution, and we can think that we will see the development of shorter pieces, which can more easily be represented in third places.

### *The interactivity: Can digital make theatre better?*

Liveliness means here that copresence in the same space must distillate in interactivity that makes theater more participating and reflexive. Through the actor on stage, we not only observe it but we are supposed to start knowing aspects of our selves. When we deal with the actor, we indirectly deal with ourselves according to the way we understand its own play. But in some famous debates, Walter Benjamin,

and Bertold Brecht argued about the fact that the actor may veil the reality by making its own personal play more important than the idea or the message he is supposed to deliver. Then we have to understand that there may be a distance between what he says and what can be understood. We can even fear that this idea will disappear since the emotions of the spectator will overcome its own reflexivity.<sup>16</sup>

Can digital devices prevent this difficulty? Yes, if digital devices can make the viewer see other positions of the actor at the very moment he acts, giving his words a dimension that goes beyond his own physical presence. By introducing these devices, two objectives are actually achieved:

- we give more universality to the message of the actor;
- we offer the viewer a critical distance that allows him to better grasp the message of the text and to appropriate it.

This can be implemented using images of the actor or his gestures projected on screens and which will change according to the position of the screen, the colors of the images, their enlargement or not. This digitized human being becomes something else. It is different from its origin, it can transform itself into a multitude of visions, it becomes a system unimpeded by any conceptual limits. An alternative device would be to design drawings and colors to change the costume of the actors when they play. But we can use other types of devices, for example Puppets. Actually, puppets were very likely the first and traditional form of non-human actors in many cultures, acting for centuries as conduits or devices for an indirect communication of ideas. Nowadays robots start to be used too. When these technologies create illuminated settings which immerse and enrapture the audience, it captures alternative senses of place and time, and it enriches our vision. In a sense liveliness and placelessness are intertwined.

So, four necessary conditions” have been traditionally defined for digital theatre to be both digital and theatre:

- A co-present audience and actor without reducing the “liveness” of the site
- The existence of digital technology, not as a management instrument, an aesthetic disposal or an archive but as a media chosen according to its intended effects do make texts and plays understood, and clearly explained to both actors and

audiences.

- The interactivity of message but not to the extent that their distinct roles between actors and audience’s dissolve
- The presence of verbal communication” Digital theatre works contain “either spoken language or text constituting a narrative or story.”

## 5. Why or How Governments still matter?

### *A logical architecture*

At the best governments around the world have responded to the Covid 19 crisis by implementing support programs for citizens who have lost their livelihoods during the pandemic, and in many countries, efforts were made to support payments that were suppressed on behalf of the show must not go on. In the same time, Governments started to do what they could to promote digital cultural content, alliances to maintain and disseminate cultural heritage, attain some very fragile parts of the population. From another perspective, the need to connect and participate with others in collective cultural settings appeared a driver behind many of the social initiatives that emerged during the pandemic. And while national governments were sometimes involved, local governments were the primary promoters and supporters of such activities.

Many recommendations have been made during the last year at the European Parliament in Strasbourg. It has to be remembered that according to the ‘subsidiary principle’ the European Union has no direct competencies on culture. Then, the way to act is to make some recommendations disseminated through all of the services of the European Commission.<sup>17</sup> The main one is to provide guidelines and principles to improve the situation and working conditions of artists and cultural workers in the EU, since structural inequities throughout the European cultural ecosystem imperil cultural diversity. This could be addressed through actions such as:

- Collecting information on the protections and support offered to artists and cultural workers during the Covid 19 pandemic and exchanging best practices among Member States in relation to policies aimed to support the socio-economic situation and professional status of artists and

<sup>16</sup> See : Boorstin , J, *The Image*,

<sup>17</sup> More information on Policy Department research for CULT: <https://research4committees.blog/cult/>

- cultural workers;<sup>18</sup>
- Making this knowledge available and easily accessible to artists and cultural workers, cultural organizations and policymakers through an online “one-stop shop”;
- Continuing the assessment of post-lockdown effects, identifying not only transversal needs of the cultural and creative ecosystem, but also specific needs of artists and cultural workers;
- Ensuring a level playing field for artists and cultural workers by establishing minimum standards and minimum requirements regarding their working conditions.

Another point is mapping existing definitions of ‘artist’ and ‘cultural’ workers across Member States and recommending that Member States expand the definitions used in their national frameworks and programs by aligning themselves with the abovementioned EU initiative.

A minimum standard regarding fair working conditions, among others should be tackled at the EU level by:

- Requiring proof of their fulfilment in EU direct grants and subsidies and/or by enforcing the application of relevant sectoral collective bargaining agreements therein and ensuring that social protection systems allow artists and cultural workers to access benefit schemes such as unemployment allowance and pensions;
- Updating and adapting funding for culture in line with the working patterns and needs of artists and cultural workers;
- Launching a pilot project introducing a European electronic social security card intended for highly mobile European artists and cultural workers. This is subject to the establishment of a minimum level of convergence between national systems.

Improving the capacity of artists and cultural workers to benefit financially from the Intellectual Property Rights attached to their creation and performance, by:

- Evaluating the impact of the transposition of the Copyright in the Digital Single Market Directive provision on appropriate and proportionate remuneration for authors, performers, and artists.
- A special attention should be given to the respect of these rights is not bypassed by third countries’ legislation through buy-out contracts such as the one-off purchase of a song – for instance – with

a lifetime license, meaning that no further royalties are paid to its author henceforth).

Other recommendations deal with: Providing access to lifelong education and training through policies; Addressing imbalances within the cultural and creative ecosystem in terms of gender, ethnicity, socio-economic background and other interrelated dimensions.

Considering the effect of the constitutional structure of the Member-states, a quite logical division of tasks appear logically between central and local governments. National government should focus on environment of the supply side, in terms of sustainability both of the cultural institutions and living sustainable conditions of the artist, without forgetting that their mobility should be enforced to benefit from any opportunity and partnership that are spatially disseminated. Local Governments should focus on the environment of the demand side, i.e., on the audiences and their connection with the artistic world in terms of matching, but also in terms of implementation of the excepted development effects, direct or indirect, artistic or aesthetic as well as economic. Here the proximity between the partners and a governmental entity must be as close as possible. Evidently, this division of the tasks does not worth a frontier and some themes evidently overlap the distinction between national and local, such as conservation heritage and artistic education. Moreover, if we consider the cultural economy as a major creative sector, it is normal to consider that national and local governments should cooperate.

### *The paradox*

Actually, we can explore this perspective but this is already an old discourse. Moreover, if this architecture had been established and fulfilled, the negative effects of the Covid 19 on Culture would have been smaller than what appeared during these pandemic years. Perhaps there is another message to unveil and take away from this period. It is less about what governments have to do now about how to do it. Throughout the Covid 19 a tension existed between the importance of the social value attributed to culture on the one hand and the fragility of the economic value chain. Cultural activities during the pandemic were highly valued despite the many obstacles faced by both creators and consumers. But once the crisis has passed, what next? What will be the “new normal” for the cultural sector? If the economic fragility

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<sup>18</sup> Joint Statement of the European social partners on the prime role of culture and art in society, February 2016

of culture is recognized since a long time, the importance of the social value of culture is much clearer since the pandemic isolated people from each other, made them many of them unoccupied and generated a strong demand for cultural. Many people underlined the paradox of closing bookstores or theaters at a time when hairdressers and restaurants were reopening as quickly as possible.

We experienced the impossibility to accept such a gap, and to suppress it is the very agenda for governments. This is not to say here that these values social and economic values must be equal since they obey to different determinants and benchmarks. But we must overcome the lousy discourse which, on the one hand, emphasizes the benefits of culture and, on the other hand, makes the economy of culture an economy of resourcefulness and unnormal remuneration. Perhaps the pandemic is behind us. But the challenge of the tension between face-to-face and digital; or between the grammar of digital images and that of writing and speaking; or between consciousnesses without memory and reflexive consciousness is more active every day.

Bringing our behaviors closer to our consciences is the unwritten agenda of any artistic practice, but in these articulations between face-to-face and digital financial interests often exacerbate the gap between the social value of culture and the fragility of its economic value chain. Our future is to consider that if we exit from a time when the gap between a recognized social value and a weakened economic value chain was recognized, we are now entering in a situation when this gap is opposite, between flattened and anonymized social values from one side and vibrant and powerful economic value chains of culture on the other side.

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