



University of Arts in Belgrade

# Digital Performing Arts

Participatory Practices in a Digital Age

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## **Digital Performing Arts - Participatory Practices in a Digital Age**

Edited collection of themed essays

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/ Digital  
performing arts  
between academic  
and artistic context

Prof. Mirjana Nikolić, PhD  
rector of the  
University of Arts in Belgrade

Since 1957, when it was founded as an association of four art Faculties - Faculty of Music, Faculty of Fine Arts, Faculty of Applied Arts and Faculty of Dramatic Arts, the University of Arts has been a space where traditional and innovative educational practices in the field of art are successfully combined. With the exception of the classic forms of teaching - lectures, exercises and practical work, the University of Arts strongly insists on interactive and project-based teaching, organizing masterclasses, symposiums and conferences as spaces for the exchange of knowledge, experience and artistic practices.

Guided by these commitments, the University of Arts was the initiator and organizer of the International Conference *Digital Performing Arts - Participatory Practices in a Digital Age* in a hybrid form, from April 6<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> 2022. The main aim of the conference was to gather significant foreign and domestic professionals from the field of performing arts, creative industries, digital media and art in general. It attracted a lot of attention not only because of the topic and innovative concept but also because of the circumstances related to the Covid-19 pandemic.

The University of Arts hosted the project, but the credit for its realization belongs to colleagues Professor Aleksandar Dundjerovic PhD from the Royal Birmingham Conservatoire and Professor D.A. Ivan Pravdic from the Academy of Arts in Novi Sad, who enthusiastically led the whole project. And they didn't stop there. Summarizing the quality of the discussions and debates, the decision was made to prepare a publication with the works of the conference participants,



in order to ensure wider availability of the most modern theoretical considerations in the field of performing and digital performing arts. The papers selected for the edited book *Digital Performing Arts – Participatory Practices in Digital Age* came out of an international conference that brought together 40 participants, researchers and practitioners from various disciplines and different countries to explore interdisciplinary research practice in performing arts. Colleagues as editors and our University are very proud to be involved in supporting the cutting-edge global discussion on new developments in performing arts: from post-pandemic digital performing arts and politics as represented in digital media using performance as a communication tool, to practice research in interdisciplinary performance education and the embodiment of the physical, intermedial and virtual in creative processes.

Building on earlier research in the IFTR Interdisciplinary Performative Pedagogies working group, this book focuses more on performance digital practices in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It does not attempt to categorize or historicize digital performance practice. Still, it offers a comprehensive mapping of different applicability of digital performance and performance in the digital age within this interdisciplinary field. The edited book aims to examine the developments of research methodologies and investigate other forms of practices within digital performing arts in the present moment, where artists are working individually and collectively. Scholars and practitioners across the board of interdisciplinary performing arts are challenging and provoking the debate about participatory practice within the scope of digital media culture.

A thematic collection, this book is composed of 13 texts. The first paper that opens publication is a keynote paper *War as a Digital Media Performance in a Post-truth era* by prof. Aleksandar Dundjerović. In the text, he is examining how performance is shaped through the digital media perception of a war that is

played out in public consciousness following the rules of construction of image / narrative and influencers and comments to social media channels. Dundjerovic associates the structure of performance in contemporary digital media culture as interventionist; as the deliberate formation of mythology that interfaces manufactured narrative with the audience in a highly emotional way, reflecting Žižek's concept of post-truth.

In the paper *Hashtag #battleofUkraine*, Marija Barna Lipkovski analyzes the complexity of the system of connecting phenomena in technological and anthropological domains. The phenomenon of technology is analyzed from the theoretical aspect and the war in Ukraine is viewed from the specific angle of technology and the media, as indicators of how conflicts in the world are part of a systematic montage.

Persephone Sextou as the author of the text *Digital Solutions to Applied Theater in Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic* from the angle of art therapy sees interdisciplinarity as an opportunity for complex works of art in the digital sphere with a significant contribution to the healing of children in hospital conditions. She approaches the content and form of expression in an extremely high-quality way for this extremely sensitive group of viewers and participants in this work about content creation of the project involving both children and artists.

*Zoom, Camera, Action - The Creation of Action Choreography for Online Theater using Isolated Actors* analyzes online theater that expresses itself through movement. Given that this form of theater was created because of isolation during the pandemic, it did not meet with an appropriate critical judgment in the media. Lizzie Conrad Hughes decided to make up for what was missed with her analysis. The author precisely explains the realization of stage actions that are performed through the movement of performers such as a handshake, a hug, a

kiss on the hand, a kiss, a capture, a suffocation ... which is a challenge in circumstances where the performers are in different locations. With this kind of work, the creators of these scenes established an authentic stage language that was choreographed in a specific way through the Zoom theater scene.

*Interactive Digital Live Art from China* presents the online performance “Love in the Time of Corona” which deals with limitations as creative stimuli and refers to the lifestyle during the lockdown period due to the Covid-19 virus pandemic. This paper describes the processes of preparation and creation of the “online” performance that brought together seven participants from different countries and continents who had the task of using the space in which they live in a creative way and in communication with each other. The special feature of this work is the challenge in terms of researching the relationship between the performer and the viewer, because these two important segments of the performing arts were equal, not in the stage space but in the virtual space. Bill Aitchison examines the concept not only with his performers and at the same time with the audience for six weeks of rehearsals. In this way, he raised important questions for all cultures, as well as for the Chinese community where the director lives, even though he is from Great Britain. The topics that were imposed significantly moved project participants through participation, namely: feminism, problems in mutual relations, disability, conflict of generations, etc.

*In the paper Gamification in Art - Implementation of Elements of Video Games in Works of Art by the method of Augmented Reality*, several interesting topics are raised and presented in their interaction within media and technologies as well as with the audience. Miljan Stevanović together with Jelena and Petar Pejić describe the dynamics of video games as performing arts, text, graphics, visuals, moving images and sound in combination with the digital environment, especially with opening possibilities of augmented reality.

In the second key note text *EnterActive in Re:Public - Digital and Live Sphere of Mass Time Design*, Ivan Pravdić examines the possibilities of software ideology as a function of a work of art or a driving force of personal and social visibility. In this work, the causes and intentions that enable social activities are presented. Also, a view is given of how art moves in the context of new technologies of public events. Remembering ritual as a social but also an artistic discipline enables a new approach to this phenomenon. Ivan Pravdić presents a new network of cities through EnterActive as a possible way to apply art and technology in public life. Seen this way, art has the ability to influence public life.

The work *Kilometers in Cyberspace - Performativity of Appropriating Land-art and Conceptual Artworks into 21st Century Internet Art Practices* is a presentation of a specific approach to an artwork such as appropriation, adoption and reinterpretation of the work of art, for which the author presented appropriate examples from practice. In the sphere of land-art, this, in earlier periods, spatial approach, has been replaced by electronic formats. Thus, according to the interpretation of the author Sonja Jankov, land-art has taken the form of net-art.

In the text *Jewellery Multiplicity - Digital Architectures*, Maria Jose Martinez Sanchez problematizes the relationship between spatial architecture and digital access in the context of pedagogical work, as well as the advantages of interdisciplinarity in the learning process. The author presents the joint work of students: jewelry design, architecture, interior design and landscape architecture, who explored possibilities in interdisciplinary online work process using augmented reality; enabling changes in the relationship between the audience and the work and the relationship of shamanism and materialism with the aim of researching the possibility of architectural spatial transformation.

Polly Hudson's *We Reap What We Sow: Eco-Somatics, Embodiment and Urban Allotment. Gardening. Part II: spring - late summer. February - August* is a testimony of a period of the author's life related to the Covid-19 pandemic. It is written in the form of a diary with quoted parts from the diary and indicates the importance of connection with nature through physical work which with dance, or in the absence of dance, enabled the author to reflect on existential challenges before with whom she found herself.

*Participatory Feminist Performance Practices in Digital Age - A Critical View on Digitalization Approach, or What Cannot Be Replaced Regarding the Public Space and the Presence: The Case of the 'Mis(s)placed Women?' Project (2009-2022)* by Tanja Ostojić is a work that refers to discrimination in the social context. She proposes and describes art as the methodology by which it is possible to invoke tools for creating awareness and a space of freedom. The author applied several different analyses to the field of work with different groups in the pandemic period and analyzes the difference between real and digital space for work.

In the work entitled *Homo Arbitr Formae - Decision-maker and Brainworker* author Venelin Shurelov considers the role of the human in the formation of awareness of the process of the creative act. Then he analyzes the role of the artist in the collective as an actor of evaluation, construction and regeneration of that collective. In this sense, the author highlights the relationship between the artist and form, that is, technology; a key factor in every artistic act. Venelin Shurelov also lists several important projects that correspond to his analysis of the relationship between form and the construction of form through decisions.

Uroš Z. Đurković is the author of the work *Björk's Biophilia in the Light of the Performing Arts - A Step Towards a New Paradigm* which analyzes the artist Björk's interdisciplinary approach to the relationship between performer and

viewer as participants of the music event. This artist uses digital possibilities to introduce the listener to a creative approach to music and to become a movers themselves, showing various aspects of the presence of both the artist and viewer in different contexts, including educational contexts.

In Svetlana Volic's research paper, the focus is on art practice that examines the transformative possibilities of performing digital images. Through the presentation of several site-specific installations within her project *NON-FINITO – Performance of Spatial Narratives*, she shows how the fluid context of performing in digital theatre can be used as the philosophical and conceptual foundation of an artistic project. The work is based on the fact that digital technology and installation (as an art form) enable various manifestations of the same content. Images are not fixedly defined because they acquire their meaning only through a temporary visualisation in a certain medium and performance within the special-temporal contexts of the installation. The paper investigates the contextual differences when the same images are performed within a gallery space or a video installation in a theatre performance when intermediality is connected with all other constitutive elements of production.

The article *Aerodynamics – multimedia performance* written by Ljubinka Stojanović explores the phenomenon of body movement in literal (physical) and figurative (symbolic) meaning. Movement from Physical to the Political Bodies. A physical body that moves, and in that movement becomes a political body. In all its mechanics, the motion also reveals the mechanics of historical action. So the direction from the individual to the general, as Aristotle refers in *The Poetics*. As a starting point, the author takes the definition of the aerodynamics concept and implements it within the site-specific performance in the video work. This project exists on three levels, using VHS material from the family archive



from 1992, site-specific performance recorded in 2022 at the exact location and current media content that the author presents at the moment of performing in a digital online context. Given that the third part is transient, the article examines the existence only at a given moment of performance - that segment remains open exclusively for the ephemerality of the performance event itself.

Based on a brief review of the texts and their authors contained in this thematic publication, it is clear that this is an interdisciplinary and unique approach to digital performing arts in the broadest context. We hope that this publication will find its way to academic staff, students, artists and professionals in the field of performing arts, but also that the general public will be inspired by the texts that have been selected and published in the thematic collection, book *Digital Performing Arts – Participatory Practices in a Digital Age*.





/ War as a digital  
performance  
in a post-truth era

Prof. Dr Aleksandar Dundjerović  
Royal Birmingham Conservatoire  
UK

The image on the left is the central one, encapsulating the victory in the Second World War dating from the end of February 1945. It is considered one of the most iconic images of the 2nd WW. The photo was taken on the island of Iwo Jima, with the American marine corps and navy capturing the island from the Japanese army.<sup>1</sup> The image of putting up a flag symbolised the Allied victory in the Second World War. On the left is the image staged for cameras or redacted for clarity of visual expression, symbolising victory. Some historians disagree with that assertion, but in our presentation, we will accept to look at it as a performative sculptural site-specific event, a creation of an iconic image. The idea is sculptural and physically expressive, an artistic photo that is brilliantly visually composed. It represents a struggle, an effort to put up the US flag as a symbol of victory in the war, by a group of soldiers supporting each other in lifting a pole with a flag. It must have been a very heavy pole that needed five soldiers to lift it, considering that the average military flag would weigh just under 1 kg. Now the image on the right is said to be the raising of the first US flag on Iwo Jima and represents a moment of placing a flag. This image, for me, is more real representative of lifting a flag, with a soldier at the front keeping a watchful eye as the conflict is not over. Both images represent an actual event but were taken at different times. However, the one on the left is prepared to carry the message; it is an image with a media narrative. It became an iconic image of the US victory, seen everywhere, firmly engraved in the public consciousness. The beauty of the representative image is in interpretation; who is to know what the actual depiction is because no one was there but the photographer who captured the moment in time as authentication of self within the constructed narrative for the viewers - a moment of US victory.

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 1 See Raising the flag on Iwo Jima: Here's the story behind that iconic World War II photo | Live Science

*The black and white images of raising the American flag by American marines at the summit of Mount Suribachi on Iwo Jima. (The image on the left credit - Joe Rosenthal / Public Domain; and on the right credit -Staff Sergeant Louis R.Lowery / USMC/Public Domain)*





In the contemporary representation of war in digital media, the social construction of an image makes images carriers of meaning, a symbol, a message. It also makes images into a media narrative. This paper will look into ideas within media narratives and influencers to promote war in digital media and its applicability as a digital performance. As a digital media narrative performed to audiences, we will investigate examples of the US wars in Yugoslavia (Kosovo), Iraq and Ukraine. We will situate this examination in discourses of Wittgenstein's *communication of information*, Barthes's notion of *mythologies*, and the contemporary political context of Žižek's *post-truth*. It is important to note that his paper is not a deliberation that takes sides; there is no prejudice. It is an attempt to offer an analytical view and if not successful, an observation of the situation and the phenomenon or how dominant media narrative is being created, constructed as digital media performance, a phenomenon that creates its own reality. How is image communication presenting narratives straightforwardly and effectively to an audience? Giving complex ideas effectively is essential in representing difficult subjects, and communicating about war would be at the top of the list of complex issues.

### The Images

Roland Barthes, an influential French social and literary critic whose most important work on photography, *Camera Lucida*, sets up photography as constitutive of the self.<sup>2</sup> Barthes points out that a photograph exists while the photo materially corresponds with what is photographed and the personal fictional account of the image within the constructed narrative. As an event that is reproduced, photography cannot be captured after the fact and the event is over; it is

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2 Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1981)

a moment simultaneously set in the past and present. In the 21st century, digital technology mastering virtual computer-generated new simulations of reality, according to Jean Baudrillard, is an act of 'simulation' that refers to no specific origin or allusion to fact. Baudrillard points out, "Simulation is no longer that of a territory, are referential Being, or a substance. It is the generation by models of real without origin or reality: a hyperreal"<sup>3</sup>. In digital performance, the captured image represents hyperreal, it has the same quality as a photo in capturing events, but it can be an event of its own making. A digital image is now in time; depending on the fictional narrative frame of a viewer, it creates and depends on the context for its understanding. The viewers need to be prepared to contextualise the image within an existing narrative, the US marines emblematic of the American military victory over the Japanese army. If that story is not established, the viewer has nothing to connect with, and the image itself would not make a symbolic representation. In digital storytelling, liveness is essential to communicating with an audience about personal experiences and subjective positions, which reconfirm the status of hyperreal.

With the growing impact of the digital media world on our visual culture in theatre performance new book emerged in 1999 by Philip Auslander, *Liveness*, established before online production started, fast internet and virtual reality, the debate around live vs media presence in performance, alluding to media culture where live underpins mediatised and mediatised uses live to materialise itself. Auslander observes, "Live performance now often incorporates mediation to the degree that the live event itself is a product of media technologies."<sup>4</sup> Auslander understands liveness as the binary opposition between live and

3 Baudrillard, Jean. 'The Process of Simulacra'. *Simulacra and Simulation* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press) p 1.

4 Auslander, Philip. *Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture*. Taylor & Francis Group, 2008. p.25



mediatised only in a historical and cultural context, not aesthetic or creative, as mediatised had to be first live to provide a basis before it could become a mediatised experience. The division is the result of the commodification of the production of art and the cultural economy. However, in contemporary live performances, live and mediatised complement each other, working from opposite ends of a spectrum, and their duality supports one another. This becomes relevant in a different way in live online production. Live online production as a representative model simulates live as a hyperreal. Digital performance is live, even recorded; it has a presence of being live with the participatory effect of being there and now.

According to Steve Dixon, digital performance has its roots in performance art and the development of computer technology that introduced digital into arts making process.<sup>5</sup> Performance art, since its inscription, was a rebellious commentary on everyday reality, attacking power structures. Theatre, mainly applied theatre, became a method to address social issues and talk to the community about their problems. One of the crucial elements that developed applied theatre and performance was what is referred to in the scholarship as 'social theatre,' or political theatre activism, understanding theatre as having an important social function as engaging with problematic issues in own global community. Namely, Theatre in Education and Community Theatre used applied performance pedagogy as a collective vehicle to address social pressures and themes relevant to the issues of their local community. If we extend the concept of community gathering or agora to *the digital agora*, we signify the awareness of global gathering through live online theatre. Due to the pandemic, the community migrated from local to international. Shifting the creative practices of applied theatre into live digital theatre created conditions for applied

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5 Dixon, Steve *Digital Performance* ( MIT, 2007) p.65

global performance. A digital agora is a form that demonstrated its relevance in applied performance during the Covid 19 pandemic lockdown. As online performances for community theatre became a digital agora, live digital theatre started to bring people together to assemble as an international community connected through the internet and digital platforms. Zoom Live Theatre became a practical, affordable, and user-friendly way of replacing live physical with live digital. Digital live communication replaced community physical communication. Digital platforms allowed gathering and provided a model for community theatre that would operate under applied performance as the companies needed to keep connections with their audiences throughout the pandemic. The use of Zoom as a platform for live digital theatre was a cure for the collective separation and distancing between people in a lockdown that, in the beginning, amounted to house arrest imposed upon communities by governments worldwide. The physical life merged with the digital and even replaced it as hyperreal that viewers accept as a new reality.

Moving on to the beginning of the 21st century, a host of live images within digital performance, a screen, and computer-generated images that are presenting interactive content to an audience, are showing a phenomenon that Gabriella Giannachi has described as offering a perception of the world that the viewer is experiencing as if being there, and the ability to interpret the images on the screen as truthful. Even though what is presented on the screen may not be a recording of actual or even a reconstruction of someone's interpretation of reality, technologies create environments that appear realistic to our senses Giannachi observes that "the viewer is still reading the screen as if it were presenting an objective view of the world"<sup>6</sup>. In her essential book from 2004, Giannachi opens the debate around liveness and truthfulness within a digital performance.

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Gabriella Giannachi, *Virtual Theatres*, (Routledge, 2004) p9.

In theatre performance believing in truthfulness is very important; it is equal to the quality theatre. The same applies to digital performance. It has to be believable. The viewer reads the screen as something objective; However, we know that everything visual can be digitally manipulated, we know there is photoshop, and we know that you can do whatever with a body in front of a green screen using advanced CGI. And those who work professionally in performance and video practice know the technical abilities of image manipulation to a point where they can create an alternative reality. However, there is still a belief that what is on the screen represents truth.

Slavoj Žižek, professor at the University of Ljubljana, philosopher and cultural theorist from former Yugoslavia and since 1991 from Slovenia, very precisely explains under the term ‘rupture’ an event which “can be an occurrence that shatters ordinary life, a radical political rupture, or a transformation of reality”.<sup>7</sup> Žižek’s example is September 11, 2001, attacks on New York ruptured ordinary and set up a ‘post-truth era’. Over the last twenty-some years, post-truth promoted circumstances shaping public opinion through emotional appeal and beliefs and much less relying on objective facts. The social rupture caused by the Corona-19 pandemic, where the emotional response to breaking in live communication with family and friends, fear of infection and death created a new reality, a transformation in which the answer to the closure of live human contact was to migrate into the live online platforms and apps for communication. Žižek points out, “We are in the midst of a transition from a society based on facts to one based on data, which promises to sense shifts in public sentiments.”<sup>8</sup>

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7 Garcia, Luz Paola, “Slavoj Žižek’s Concept of Rupture—and Post-Truth” *Merion West*, 04/29/2019. Accessed on web site: Slavoj Žižek’s Concept of Rupture—and Post-Truth | Merion West

8 Ibid. Garcia, “Slavoj Žižek’s” 04/29/2019.

The concept of the rapture is quite essential, which was put forward after September 11, 2001, events, which validated US foreign policy under the promotional slogan 'war on terror, which allowed the US military to take over Afghanistan, and Iraq and destroy a good part of Syria almost taking the country over using ISIS if it was not stopped by Russian military direct military support in fighting ISIS terrorist network. Now rapture can also be directly linked to pandemic C19 because it's also a social and cultural rapture. Post-truth in the pandemic transitioned society based on facts to one of sentiments and emotions, using digital performance that can deliver emotionally charged content that does not have to be understood as facts but can generate a response of existential fear for survival and general uncertainty for the future. Nobody understood Corona 19 contexts; only that one has to vaccinate, keep social distance, and stay away from their family and friends. Otherwise, they will be punished. And in the UK, on 24 February 2022, it was miraculously proclaimed as the end of domestic restrictions since C19 was over. The government of Boris Johnson declared there is no more coronavirus. However, another global event was starting around the same time, replacing Corona's public focus, a war in Ukraine. It was titled a 'special operation' by the Russian side and in the West as a military invasion, not as a local conflict but as a war on European Union and a peaceful military alliance that protects democracy NATO. The new post-truth event – global war has replaced the older narrative of the global pandemic. The facts were unimportant, just emotional content that soon took over all media, mainly focusing on digital media with personal stories, observations, and comments; short homemade films flooded social networks and the internet. It was essential for the centre of power, the USA, under the puppet figure of Joe Biden's presidency, to use the global mass media and establish the dominant narrative, simply presenting it as the way the world should be. As Barthes positions in *Mythologies*, by entering popular culture through a set of images and repurposing it, a dominant state power (or deep state shadow power) narrative is instrumentalised by controlling the power of images reconfirming as

the only truth to be believed which is their ideology.<sup>9</sup> Most recently, the digital performance of conflict in Ukraine created another rapture, shattering ordinary life by imposing a new reality through the dominant narrative of paying very high electric, gas and food prices, continuing on Pandemic social contexts of invoking group fear and mass anxiety of something terrible happening in the future. For example, in the UK, the slogan of options that ordinary citizens who must pay a 100% increase in energy bills is *eat or heat*. The notion of establishing a dominant narrative has to be promoted through various sources showing narrative through background emotional stories and images, all supporting the same message that must be repeated and constantly presented in different media outlets and reinforced in other voices on social platforms. As they say - repeat a lie 100 times, and it becomes a truth.

### **The Influencers**

The role of Influencers in establishing a digital media narrative in the world and particularly in digital performance on YouTube, TikTok, Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, and another platform, is to teach, promote and excite the audience into specific meanings and beliefs by establishing and validating what is already known, building on that and promoting new ideas or products / objects. The influencers are performers who create images in the mind of others that would communicate the message in the best way possible. It is helpful to bring here Ludwig Wittgenstein's engagement with communication problems. His first big question was about how we communicate with each other, and the answer was that language triggers within our pictures of how the world is, to which we respond based on what we know about that world. As he proclaimed in his work *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, "all I know is what I have words for"

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9 See Barthes, Roland *Mythologies* 1<sup>st</sup> published in 1957 (Vintage Classic, 2009)

words allow us to make images of facts. In communicating meaning with others, clarity of what we mean is essential for how others can receive the messages being conveyed. Wittgenstein proclaimed, "I can only know what I know; I cannot know what I don't know!"<sup>10</sup> Therefore, knowing and understanding the context of what is being communicated through the psychological use of language and pictures is essential to convey the emotional content of post-truth to others through constructing media narratives.<sup>11</sup>

As the definition goes by RAND corporation, which specialises in various aspects of analysis and solutions to world's challenges, "Psychological warfare involves the planned use of propaganda and other psychological operations to influence the opinions, emotions, attitudes, and behaviour of opposition groups."<sup>12</sup> It is also used to influence domestic population to support the war even if it is not their own and in a far away location.

The focus will be on an example of the political influencer's work on constructing a media narrative that establishes what is known and accepted as truth in the public consciousness. And one of the best political influencers to promote a war with Yugoslavia in 1999 in media and effectively communicate reasons for the US intervention to the audience was ex-US president Bill Clinton. It is essential to refer to a Hollywood movie that precedes Clinton's address and the background context. In 1997, two years before the NATO war with Yugoslavia and the occupation of the Serbian province of Kosovo, Barry Levinson's film *Wag the Dog* with

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10 Wittgenstein, Ludwig *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, 1<sup>st</sup> published in 1921, (Chiron Academic Press, 2016) p48

11 The US military, since the II WW and particularly in the Vietnam war has been perfecting the use of psychological warfare. See Operation Wandering Soul: The US Military's Use of Psychological Warfare in Vietnam ([warhistoryonline.com](http://warhistoryonline.com));

12 See Psychological Warfare | RAND

Robert De Niro and Dustin Hofman showed the staging of war by Washington fixer (De Niro) in a film studio by hiring Hollywood producer (Hofman) to create digital images and footage of a fake war and suffering of civilians under military prosecution in Albania. The US involvement helped Albanians to divert public attention from a political sex scandal. The parallel with the Clinton - Lewinsky political sex scandal that exploded controls is more than evident. The relationship was ongoing (1995-97) when the film was far away and was generally part of rumours of Clinton's sexually predatory nature and inclinations towards White House interim. However, the film also foreshadowed another scenario that would take place soon after the war in Kosovo between the Albanian KLA paramilitary and Serbian police forces that were used as a pretext for American military intervention. It was as the film exposed a constructed narrative that will take place shortly.

On the 18th of March 1999, Bill Clinton appeared on CNN and later, on March 24, for the second night, announced the strikes on Yugoslavia. There is a whole transcript of very effective communication where he explains why the US needed to go to war, using a school-type map that he held in his hands, not a giant projection but a domestic household like in geography books map, an object that everyone would be familiar with to situate Kosovo.<sup>13</sup>

He announced that American armed forces joined (not initiated or led but only joined) NATO allies in airstrikes against Serbian forces. It is done to prevent wider war, unite with partners to advance peace, and uphold their values. As an influencer, he needed to teach and demonstrate the importance of war by creating the knowledge required to contextualise the Kosovo conflict with familiar geographical references "Kosovo is a province of Serbia, in the middle of south-

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13 See Transcript: Clinton addresses nation on Yugoslavia strike - March 24, 1999 / [cnn.com](http://cnn.com)

eastern Europe and about 160 miles east of Italy. That's less than the distance between Washington and New York and only about 70 miles north of Greece." Italy and Greece would be familiar reference points for the average American; the atrocities, according to Clinton, were associated with culturally relevant and part of what is known to the audience in Wittgenstein's notion of language that evokes a familiar image. He explains that oppressed Albanians consist of mainly Muslim populations and brings in the constructed evil man 'Slobodan Milosevic' established in the Western popular culture as the "Butcher of Balkan" within the context of the war atrocities in Bosnia and Croatia. He tells an emotional story in Zizek's post-truth: "Kosovar men dragged from their families, fathers and sons together, lined up, and shot in cold blood. This is not war in the traditional sense. It is an attack by tanks and artillery on a largely defenceless people, whose leaders already have agreed to peace."<sup>14</sup> He finalises his address by restating the importance of joining allies as a moral imperative in strikes (not war, strikes to help defenceless people) - "Ending this tragedy is a moral imperative. It is also important to America's national interests. Take a look at this map. Kosovo is small, but it sits on a major fault line between Europe, Asia, and the Middle East, at the meeting place of Islam. Both the Western and Orthodox branches of Christianity."<sup>15</sup> Clinton directly used a straightforward narrative of already established evil in Western public consciousness destroying innocent Muslim civilians in an almost YouTube or Tik Tok direct address on a homemade video. The way of talking and the method of addressing is straightforward and evoke truthfulness. They are protecting the values of NATO allies and Europe and stopping danger from Milosevic. We can stop atrocities and killing people, which is why we are acting now with our armed forces.

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14 Ibid. Transcript of Clinton speech

15 Ibid. Transcript of Clinton speech



Another example of an effective digital media influencer is George W Bush junior. What he had to build on in the US-led war on terror campaign was a collaboratively created narrative around the terrorist destruction on September 11, 2001, of the World Trade Centre known as the Twin Towers in New York. Having an event that caused the death of over 3000 people and incredible images of the destruction of civilian life in the heart of an urban metropolis when passengers' aeroplanes crashed into a skyscraper created emotional content that would justify any further military actions under the banner 'war on terror. The image of Bin Laden, who supposedly orchestrated the most significant terrorist act on American soil from the caves deep in Afghanistan, with a group of Saudis who learned in Texas to fly on a duster cropper plain a few weeks before they hijacked huge passenger jets Boeing 767 and crash them using visual navigation, was an easy media target as a typecast of evil terrorist. The US military taking over Afghanistan was straightforward, pushing the Taliban to the mountains and interior of the country, leaving a corrupt puppet government controlling only Kabul.

However, with the war in Iraq, it was necessary to create a live digital performance. It was about providing an image and narrative that supports it. The report that needed to be communicated is that another established evil in the Western public consciousness - Saddam Hussein - now called the butcher of Bagdad, wanted to destroy Europe with his weapons of mass destruction that could reach capitals such as Rome, Paris, and London in under 45 min. As there was no sign of WMD on the ground in Iraq, the evidence presented to United Nations by Bush Jr. appointed influencer, a media star and trusted general Colin Powel created a significant performative event. He gave a set of digital images as web-based photos, evidence of some dots on a grey background in the desert that reconnected with the established myth of evil wanting to destroy human lives. To apply the philosophy of Barthes, Bush W. created his dominant narrative by repurposing

popular culture by taking James Bond film scenario-like circumstances. Powell was showing what could have been digitally mastered satellite photos of locations in a desert that are believed to be the site of chemical factories and rocket launchers. The images were contextualised in an interpretation; by themselves, they represent nothing. Iraq was destroyed, robbed of natural resources, money, and future, and up to now (2022), is not recovered as a functional country. WMDs were never found, but they were not supposed to be seen as they were part of a narrative in digital performance that was used to set up a war.

With the advancement of technology digital media world has become a complex web of human interactions. We cannot separate social - political - cultural - economic life from activities and events in social networking, shaping our way of thinking, influencing how we behave and what course of action humanity will take. The power of TikTok, Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube as some of the key platforms in communication is immeasurable. Commentators are pointing out that the 2016 victory of Donald Trump is due to the effective use of social networking and combating the negativity of biased US mainstream TV and newspapers through his clever use of Twitter. The conflict in Ukraine, described as a hybrid war, is an advanced example of war as a digital performance. This is not to say that the war is not taking place. There are civilian casualties and an enormous destruction cost to human life, and it's not to undermine the suffering of the Ukrainian and Russian people living in Ukraine; it is to point to the fact that the presentation of the conflict in the West is entirely governed the narratives represented in digital media influencing popular opinion where Russia is an aggressor on a European, NATO friendly western democracy. Before the Russian 'special operation'/aggression, Ukraine was the second poorest country in Europe, with very highest levels of corruption, high levels of immigration and low levels of demographic numbers; Ukraine was a country in depopulation. It is also a country with significant energy potential and a place for future invest-

ments, as recognised by various UN forums. However, it was a 'no name club', not a member of NATO, nor on any list to join the EU, and it generally lingered on the outskirts of interests' spheres. At least, that was the understanding that shaped public awareness before the Russian invasion and was centralised in the Western media and everyday public life as a cause to support and help Ukraine's people.

The critical influencer and media constructed image of a military leader, politician, and voice of freedom, former cabaret actor Ukrainian president Zelensky, in the presentation of war, became very influential. In a media reality, he is a cross between a computer game background character from the 2019 game *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare* and a symbol of freedom fighter and resistance, the new Che Guevara for the Western Davos club and the left-leaning Western neo-liberal wealthy elite.<sup>16</sup> At least that was a narrative to which Zelensky was supposed to perform, although family images from the cover of the *Vogue* in war-suffering Ukraine and unconfirmed rumours about villas in luxury destinations somewhat tarnish the ascetic image of his selfless dedication of the 'god' of war, fighting Russia for the freedom of Ukraine, Europe and the World. Similarly, in the context of the film *Wag, the Dog*, Zelensky looked like a character prompted by the CIA, acting out lines from a pre-ordered scripted text, improvising on given situations and acting his role in digital performance and doing it very convincingly. However, he is an effective influencer who represents truth and authenticity in a recognisable green outfit, slightly unshaven, with Zoom and

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16 In *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare*, the Russian military, alongside Islamic militants, are 'bad guys' that are fought by an avatar that the player chooses from 'good guys' characters represented by the US and UK special forces. As in Hollywood mainstream films that have shaped for decades the Western public consciousness, Russians are always represented as 'bad guys' – warmongers, criminals, prostitutes after money, a dictatorship that oppressed people, corrupt, generally on the other side of what Western self-perception of high – moral values would project into media reality.

YouTube direct address to the world. As a performer, he is at the location at the moment of crisis and can also be on Zoom live performance with an audience of politicians and bureaucrats from Brussels.

*The Star Wars* actors promote fundraising for drones to help Ukraine fight the evil empire linking it with the cross-generational popular film sequels; Ukraine's struggle is made to be part of popular cultural mythology. Zelensky instructs the Western audience on how to behave, think, and shame our morals if we do not support the world's no1 cause – the defence of Ukraine. Obviously, in digital performance, following a logic of a computer game, the only active narrative is the one being played now; the game's focus is on a subjective playing field. Hence, numerous other deadly conflicts are irrelevant – Iraq (post-US liberation), Libya (post-dictatorship area), Afghanistan (post-US/UK withdrawal without achieving any starting objectives), or ongoing crises in Yemen, Armenia, Sudan, Palestine, etc... The list is long and exhaustive, they are not established as media narratives and are therefore irrelevant, and there is no promotional image or influencer to set up digital media performance for those in crisis locations. If not in the Western media narrative, they are invisible. Nevertheless, there is an obstacle the influencer Zelenskiy is facing, not a small one. The conflict in Ukraine has to be represented to the Western audience as something that concerns their lives and, above all, their existence. To use taxpayers' money for the military industry, as before for big pharma and tech, have to be justified by a post-truth story, and this time it is justification through a war in Ukraine. The second poorest country in Europe before the war, it became essential for the well-being of the Western world, and the exitance of taxpayers. At least, that is what governments are promoting through emotionally charged stories. And people are suspicious as after social experiments with the pandemic lockdown; the trust in politicians is eroded.

What is greatly helping influencer Zelensky is the lack of other medianarratives, as Russia's non-existent narrative and nonrepresentational in Western media. Russia is presenting the conflict as a defence of Russian territory and ethnic Russians in Ukraine, as denazification and demilitarisation - doing an authentic Second World War story of the fight against the Nazis without understanding that there is no context, particularly in the US , no knowledge that can respond to that story. In social media, in humorous Tik Tok and Instagram video clips, we can see a number of interviews with Americans who cannot even point out on the map Ukraine, although they support the US military involvement. In the opinion of the Western general public, no one knows about the Ukrainian neo-Nazis, and no one knows about the Kyiv war since 2014 on the Russian population living in the eastern part of Ukraine. If any information is passed on, it is dismissed as propaganda. There is only one truth and that is of Globalist West. Within a few weeks of the competition in the UK, all Russian media were banned and proclaimed to be Putin's evil propaganda. In war as a digital media performance, Western control of the dominant narrative has been fully established.<sup>17</sup> From the start, establishing the Russian narrative on the Ukrainian conflict was dismissed as fake news and propaganda. The context in which Russia is bad is already part of popular culture, Western mythology and communication of knowledge. It is there firmly in the mind of Western audiences.

Without media representation and own digital performance, the conflict in Ukraine will be prolonged and private companies will continue to be paid billions from taxpayers' money to sustain the war as long as there is financial profit to be made.

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<sup>17</sup> See <https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/uk-makes-14-additions-russia-sanctions-list-2022-03-31/>



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Dr Aleksandar Dundjerovic is Professor of Performing Arts, theatre director and author. He is Principal Fellow of Higher Education Academy and Fellow of Royal Society of Arts, UK.

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/ Hashtag  
*#battleofUkraine*

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**Summary:** This article analyzes digital tools' usage and digital media coverage of the ongoing Russian-Ukrainian conflict. Based on the hypothesis that contemporary society can be best described as performative, the war is observed as a para-dramatic situation. The analysis is interdisciplinary, and it utilizes approaches and concepts developed in the phenomenology of technology, cultural anthropology, gender studies, social theories, studies of performance and performativity, and historical case studies.

This war has attracted more public attention than any other armed conflict in the past few decades. Most of this attention has been both provoked and framed by digital media. The article focuses on the digital aspect of conflict's performativity. It suggests that specific reactions to the war situation are arising due to the algorithmic and interface design of the technology we use to communicate.

The article is divided into three sections. The first, the 'Theoretical framework,' will set out a theoretical frame of reference that will be used to analyze the war as a digital media performance. The second, 'The #hashtag battle,' consists of a short overview of more recent international conflicts and their respective media representations. This will lead to the analysis of four different yet interconnected observable phenomena in the current conflict between Russia and Ukraine.

The general goal of the author is to bring attention to the special place performing arts can and should have in the critical act and thought of today. Digital performance is at the beat of the performative power/knowledge system. A system that encompasses all aspects of human being-in-the-world: from our personal identities and work conditions to wars affecting millions.



# BattleOfUkraine

See, for example an article in the Guardian: *'US says China's support for Russia over Ukraine puts it on 'wrong side of history'* (The Guardian, 2022)



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## 1. Introduction

“No one can say what will be ‘real’ for people when the wars which are now beginning come to an end.” (Heisenberg, as cited in Virilio, 2000, p. 1)

On the 24th of February, 2022 the Russian army invaded Ukraine. This steep escalation of a conflict which had been evolving since the Maidan Revolution in 2014 resulted in about six million Ukrainians fleeing the country and international sanctions being imposed on Russia. This article presents an interdisciplinary analysis of the performative aspects of the conflict itself, its media representation, and the reactions it provoked in the international community. By the time this article reaches the reader, the current armed conflict will hopefully be over. The underlying phenomena I hope to expose will remain with us. At least until a time for a reconceptualization of digital media arrives.

As this ongoing conflict directly affects millions, I am aware of the subject’s sensitivity. As an argument in defense of this insensitive approach to human suffering, I will quote Paul Virilio: “The careful framing of the screen and the moment of the broadcast today reorganize the narrative of a conflict too quickly to be publicly analyzed. As for those who still believe you should wait before writing history, they are living in the wrong century.” (Virilio, 2000, p. 25).

This analysis utilizes approaches and concepts developed in the phenomenology of technology, cultural anthropology, gender studies, social theories, and studies of performance and performativity.<sup>1</sup> Even though geopolitical judgments will be avoided, a brief historical background of the conflict is inevitable.

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1 The difference between what I call studies of performance and what is usually referred to as “Performance studies,” as envisioned by Richard Schechner, will be explained in the section *Society of performers*.

The current Russian-Ukrainian conflict has attracted more public attention than any other armed conflict in the past few decades. Most of this attention has been both provoked and framed by digital media. I am interested in how the specific framework of digital media and platforms raises a certain kind of reaction and a particular way of performing. This is to suggest that specific traits of contemporary, digitally networked society are occurring due to the algorithmic and interface design of the technology we use to communicate.

The article is divided into three sections. In the first one, 'Theoretical framework,' I will set out a theoretical frame of reference which I will use to analyze the Russian-Ukrainian conflict as a digital media performance. The second one, 'The #hashtag battle,' consists of a short overview of more recent international conflicts and their respective media representations, which will lead to the analysis of four different yet interconnected observable phenomena in the current conflict between Russia and Ukraine.

## **2. Theoretical framework**

### 2.1. Phenomenology of technology

*"Humans and the world are inseparably bound to each other and constitute each other in this bondage."* (Velbeek, 2001, p. 120)

In phenomenological terminology, this bond is anointed 'intentionality,' and this formulation sublimates the essence of the phenomenological approach to philosophy. There is no consciousness-in-itself or perception-in-itself, as it is always a consciousness-of-something and perception-of-something. Consequently, there is no such thing as a thing-in-itself, only things as they surface in our experience within a specific context of interpretation or praxis. That is 'phenomena.'

This article relies on the phenomenological approach to technology articulated by Don Ihde, most notably in his work *Technology and the Lifeworld* (Ihde, 1990). In some aspects, Don Ihde's approach builds on Heidegger's concepts, but it primarily develops in contrast to Heidegger's approach to "Technology" with a capital T.

Heidegger identified technology as the primary way the present epoch discloses the world. Technology gives the contemporary being the necessary apparatus to interpret and relate to the world. According to him, the way humans relate to the non-technological world disclosure always involves a moment of transcendence: an awareness that the "being" of beings cannot be reduced to humans. The specific trait of the technological world disclosure is the *absence of the awareness of the moment of transcendence*. The technological approach sees the world as a 'Bestand' – an immobile duration, a compilation of things rather than beings. Therefore, reality is what can be summoned, made, and manipulated.

Heidegger tends to reify 'Technology' as a compact and unified force. As opposed to this, Ihde is more concerned with technology as a means of experiencing the world and, consequently, how technology structures human-world relations. He relies on Heidegger's views of the nature of a tool – a tool is best at being a tool when it is not an object of our experience but a means of experiencing. Therefore, it is not surprising that Ihde is not concerned with "the essence of technology" but rather with its various manifestations. These different manifestations have different ways of altering our perception of reality. "Naked perception and perception via artifacts are never completely identical. In this transformational character of technological mediation lies an important aspect of the non-neutrality of technology." (Verbeer, 2001, p. 130) However, according to phenomenology, there is neither a thing-in-itself nor a perception-in-itself.

Therefore, it is not just how we see things altered by technological mediation. Changes are in how we and things, subjectivity, and objectivity, are constituted. This process becomes even more relevant in a world where every human action, especially human-to-human interactions, is increasingly digitally represented and mediated.

## 2.2. Society of performers

Jon McKenzie sets out on a journey to give a general theory of performance in his seminal work *Perform or else: From discipline to performance* (2001). He starts his book with the notion that ‘performance’ encloses in itself two opposing tendencies: it is both a liminal and a normative process. This insight is developed in opposition to the academic tradition of ‘Performance Studies’ founded by Richard Schechner (Schechner, 1988), which favors the liminal aspect of the performative. Nevertheless, it is vital to mention Schechner’s notion of performance as ‘restored behavior’ or ‘twice-behaved behavior,’ that is to say behavior that is by definition repeated, reproduced (Schechner 1985, pp. 3-150).

‘Performance’ in the sense of Jon McKenzie shares a lot with an older concept of ‘simulacra’ as introduced by Jean Baudrillard. While ‘simulation’ has a negative connotation, ‘performance’ is a more neutral concept. Simulacra is a copy without an original and simulation is a process that annihilates any difference between the real and its representation (Baudrillard 1981). To perform does not necessarily mean to fake, but the performative knowledge/power does not acknowledge real/fake as a legitimate value. Jean-Francois Lyotard also recognizes the connection between the way that knowledge and power are legitimated in contemporary society and the technological view of the world: “Technology is therefore a game pertaining not to the true, the just, or the beautiful, etc., but to efficiency-, a technical “move” is “good” when it does better and/or expends less energy than another.” (Lyotard, 1979, p. 44)

McKenzie identifies three main paradigms of performance, each with its reading machine, set of presumptions, and infrastructures, each with its valorimeters, all of which develop and seal particular collections of discourses and practices. The three paradigms McKenzie identifies are organizational, cultural, and technological performance. This article is mainly concerned with the final one, but each are increasingly coming into contact; their citational networks are becoming hyperlinked. (McKenzie, 2001, p. 194). McKenzie identifies two metamodels of technological performance: a digital computer and a guided missile (McKenzie, 2001, pp. 111-113). The interconnection between these two metamodels becomes apparent in the Russian-Ukrainian conflict: digital media is used to acquire missiles.

“Performatives and performances are our system and our style, our ways of saying and seeing.” (McKenzie, 2001, p. 176). Every action or statement can be seen and treated as performative or a performance and measured against the value system of performative power.

Scrutinizing the implications of this performative power on a more personal or intimate level, it is helpful to look at the works of Judith Butler and her views of gender identity as ‘performative.’ As said by Butler, there is no fixed or given gender identity, but rather gender identity is acquired by constant acts of quotation of prescribed societal norms (Butler, 1999). Her theory can be generalized into a broader theory of identity: we are continuously constructing and managing our Selves through repetition of prescribed actions and utterances, and by doing so, we are bound to measure ourselves against the values of the performative society.

The danger of performing identity in the context of digital media has been long proclaimed by more conservative parts of society. In his famous and

often quoted essay “Is Google making us stupid?”<sup>2</sup> (2008) American writer and journalist Nicholas Carr writes: “Media are not just passive channels of information. They supply the stuff of thought, but they also shape the process of thought.” Nevertheless, critical thought is also rising within the academic tech community. Wendy Hui Kyong Chun, research chair in New Media at Simon Fraser University Canada, has identified software as the functional analog of ideology in neoliberal society (Hui Kyong Chun, 2006, 2011, 2016). Software is a performative being by definition: it is a set of instructions, data, or programs designed to execute a given task.<sup>3</sup> As N. Katherina Hayles writes: “Code that runs on a machine is performative in a much stronger sense than that attributed to language.” (Hayles, 2005, 50.)

As we have shown, many thinkers have pointed out that anything in contemporary society can and will be measured as a ‘performance.’ However, we are yet to define this elusive term. Since we are primarily interested in the digital aspects of performing, we will borrow a definition from the photographer Dan Oki (Slobodan Jokic)<sup>4</sup>: “the introduction of the self into the space of one’s own environment with constant reflection related to the awareness of the possibility of (self) observation from outside and continuous adaptations to discursive assumptions” (Oki, 2020, p. 67). This formulation encompasses the crucial difference between performing in digital and performing in material reality, contained in the tiny word in the brackets – ‘self.’ In the digital, we are both the performers and the audience, both the ones who make and the ones who pay

2 This essay is a part of Carr’s book “The shallows: is the internet making us stupid?” published in 2011. This non-fiction book became a best-seller and was nominated for Pulitzer Prize.

3 Paraphrased from Techtargget.com.  
<https://www.techtargget.com/searchapparchitecture/definition/software>

4 Although he uses these words to describe what he calls the “ecological auto-medialization.”



for the content. That is what makes digital performance the perfect setting for hyperlinking all three paradigms McKenzie named: it is a cultural performance since it is mainly about communicating the trending `discursive assumptions`; it is organizational since you are measuring yourself against yourself, opting for better performance; and it is all framed by technological progress and limitations.

### **3. The #hashtag battle**

According to McKenzie, the shift from discipline to performance started with the Cold War and intensified in the post-Cold War, post-colonial era (McKenzie, 2001, pp. 12, 13, 101-103, 124, 194). The Cold War-era initiated the most significant arms race in history, with yet unseen capacities mobilized for its purpose. The imperative of technological development for political, economic, and military gain is inseparably interwoven with the shift in our concept of knowledge. As Foucault argues - power and knowledge are so intimately bound up that he coined the term 'power/knowledge' (Foucault, 1978). This gave birth to what Paul Virilio calls 'technoscience' - a human endeavor not concerned with 'truth' but rather with immediate effectiveness (Virilio, 2005, pp. 1-2) - a performative science. The Cold War supposedly ended in 1989 with the symbolic fall of the Berlin Wall, but the current situation in Ukraine renders it evident that the old geopolitical conflicts are far from resolved. One of the most important strategic goals of Russia, according to its officials, is the demilitarization of Ukraine, which means stopping Ukraine from getting close to or entering NATO - an alliance born in the Cold War as an opponent of the Soviet Union and its satellite states that formed the Eastern Bloc (Kirby, 2022).

### 3.1. Media wars (since the end of the Cold War)

Since we have already identified the current Russian-Ukrainian war as a continuation of the geopolitical struggles that were active during the Cold War, it is only natural to try and understand it in the context of other wars that took place since its' proclaimed end. This overview will focus on the Western media image and coverage of the conflicts that happened in the Middle East and were said to be, similarly to the present Russian-Ukrainian conflict, fights for freedom and democracy against dictatorship.

The Persian Gulf War (1990-1991) was the first war in human history televised hour-after-hour. The new satellite technology provided the necessary equipment for such extensive media coverage. According to American journalist Frazier Moore, instead of the 'war-in-your-living-room' narrative set during the Vietnamese war some quarter a century earlier, the media coverage of the Gulf War brought to life a 'you-are-there' narrative (Moore, 2001). The pixelated missiles falling from the sky and hitting invisible objects led to Baudrillard famously and controversially stating that "The Gulf War did not take place" (Baudrillard, 1991). In the aftermath, much criticism focused not only on censorship but also on the general possibility of the tele-visualized image to convey an understanding of such a complex process as a war. Reportedly, the Los Angeles Times journalist Tim Rutten formulated it this way: "much of the real-time electronic reporting has translated the fog of war into a fog of facts." (Moore, 2001, 2003). As we can see, in the next quarter of a century, the 'you-are-there' narrative and real-time electronic reporting have become an imperative in war journalism. The performative society embraces the "fog of facts" as the only possible media picture since performance is goal-orientated: a performative act is never measured as 'true' or 'false,' but only as 'effective' or 'not effective.'

Much has been written about the Iraq war (2003-2011) and its successor, the War in Iraq (2013-2017). The invasion of Iraq was visualized to the highest degree, materializing the victory of neo-colonial, neo-liberal powers in the iconic staged image of a US marine covering Saddam Hussein's statue with an American flag. It is necessary to point out that it was marked by WikiLeaks uncovering a lot of hidden data of the US Military in 2006, thus exposing the overall media coverage as biased, furthering general mistrust in traditional media. Furthermore, in 2016 Bell Pottinger Private, a British multinational public relations company was reported by The Bureau of Investigative Journalism to have received over \$500 million from the Pentagon for creating fake terrorist and propaganda videos and fake news articles for Arab news channels. It is the largest "fake news" contract in history to have been exposed as such. This war has also given rise to non-professional media coverage, like videos shot by soldiers on both sides. It is precisely these videos that Bell Pottinger Private was hired to reproduce.

The role of digital media in the Syrian uprising and subsequently the war (2011-present) has been analyzed with great insight by the writer Donatella Della Ratta, especially in her book *Shooting a Revolution. Visual media and warfare in Syria* (2018). Unlike the wars mentioned previously, "Syria is the first fully developed networked battleground in which technological infrastructure supporting uploading, sharing and remixing, together with the human network of individuals engaged in those practices, have become dramatically implicated in the production and reproduction of violence," (Della Ratta, 2018) since the social networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube were launched only after 2003. Della Ratta, living in Syria at the time of the uprising, reports about the difference in the media reality of the educated Syrian youth working in and around tech gatherings, participative democracy, and civil disobedience trainings and the media reality of the rest of the Syrian citizens. In the uprising,

it was these libertarian Syrians that pointed their mobile phones to shoot while being shot at, using digital media to show the world what was happening to them. Della Ratta brings to our attention the importance of the young, English-speaking, tech-savvy Arab as the main point of interest for a broader Western audience these videos were aimed at. She calls this phenomenon a 'like-us activist.' This brings us into an even more immersive setting than the 'you-are-there' narrative of the non-stop televised war – it brings us to the performative 'if-it-would-be-you' narrative of social media. As pointed out by Peter Snowdon in his article *Playing a revolution* (2020), as Gulf war shots reminded us of the video games of the early nineties, non-professional social media war coverage resembles a first-person shooter. Media mimics the military, and the military mimics the media because both answer to the performance imperative.

Over the last ten years, the Syrian war has faded out of the public eye. With too many interests at stake and too many actors involved, it got too hard to tell who the 'like-us' party was. The prolonged struggle started to lack the clarity necessary for the identification process to take place, a clarity that now seems to have been achieved in the Russian-Ukrainian conflict.

### 3.2. Phenomena analysis

In order to analyze the current Russian-Ukrainian armed conflict from a performative perspective, I will present four observable phenomena using the theoretical and historical reference frame discussed above.

#### 3.2.1. Russia vs. Meta

*“Social media are neither a matter of taste or lifestyle as in a consumer choice; they are our technological mode of the social.”* (Lovink, 2019, p. 32)

The short but intensive history of the war between the state of Russia and the US-based Internet social media giant Meta Platforms Inc. shows us just how fragile

the concept of freedom of speech is. Especially while our communicational tools or, even worse, our ‘technological modes of the social,’ as digital media theorist Geert Lovink called them, are in the hands of private companies.

Just four days after the start of the invasion, Meta banned Russian state media outlets like Sputnik and RT from posting on its Facebook and Instagram platforms. Such a swift move is probably due to Facebook not wanting to go through another Russia-related scandal like the one in 2016.<sup>5</sup>

As a response, four days later, on the 4<sup>th</sup> of March, Russia banned Facebook from Russia, and nine days later Instagram. In this way, Russian citizens have been effectively deprived of their prominent ‘technological modes of the social’ and cut off from almost 3 billion users of Facebook. Of course, this is not the responsibility of the CEOs of Meta Platforms, but their monopoly on digital communication makes such a move possible.

On the 10<sup>th</sup> of March, Reuters reported that Meta Platforms Inc. made temporary changes to its hate speech policies: “As a result of the Russian invasion of Ukraine we have temporarily made allowances for forms of political expression that would normally violate our rules like violent speech such as ‘death to the Russian invaders.’ We still won’t allow credible calls for violence against Russian civilians,” a Meta spokesperson said (Reuters, 2022). Meta has done so because they are “focused on protecting people’s rights to speech as an expression of self-defense in reaction to a military invasion of their country”, according to Meta Platforms Inc.’s head of global affairs Nick Clegg (the former Deputy Prime

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5 In 2016 there were many allegations of Russian interference in the United States elections over social media. Facebook CEOs showed extreme unwillingness and slowness in dealing with the situation. This was probably due to the accusations of Russian manipulations of public opinion being in favor of Donald Trump, who was still an active president and avid user of the platforms.

Minister of United Kingdom). In the social media terminology, self-defense is something that is being expressed, not enacted, which is pointing us to the much broader problem of the question of 'doing' on social media, but this problem cannot be further discussed within the frame of this article.

### 3.2.2. Acting president

In light of the performative being the primary stratum of power/knowledge formation in contemporary society, it is not by accident that the Ukrainian president is a professional performer. This is not the first time in history that actors became high-ranking government officials, even presidents.<sup>6</sup> The most (in)famous one is the 40<sup>th</sup> US president Ronald Reagan, whose presidency marked the end of the Cold War, which is, as we saw in the section Society of Performers, the cradle of performative power. It is not just the author of this article but also the German magazine 'Deutsche Welle' that draws the parallel between presidents Zelenskyy and Reagan: "Cold War looms again. Incidentally, by the late 1970s, Ronald Reagan was seen as yesterday's man. He had twice failed to win selection as the Republican presidential candidate, losing to Richard Nixon in 1968 and Gerald Ford in 1976. But then, in 1979, the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan, the Cold War flared up again, and a year later Reagan won the US election against incumbent Jimmy Carter. More than four decades later, after Russia's attack on Ukraine, the world is facing a new version of the Cold War. And Volodymyr Zelenskyy's role in it is yet to be determined" (Deutsche Welle, 2022).

However, President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's biography indicates more than just a change of profession from acting roles of different people to acting as the will of

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<sup>6</sup> It is worth mentioning that this trend has originated in the USA, which is also the country where the performative imperative was born.

a nation. His biography unmistakably reminds us of Baudrillard's *Simulacrum and Simulacra*: reality and fiction implode into each other in ways yet unknown to human culture. President Zelenskyy's victory in the 2019 election came as a direct result of his role in a movie where he played a part of an honest, small-town history professor becoming the president of Ukraine. Furthermore, V. Zelenskyy did not just star in this movie; he was also the movie's producer. At the time *Servant of the People* premiered in 2014, Zelenskyy was the artistic director of its production house 'Kvartal 95', a production house he co-founded some ten years before, and that would become one of Ukraine's most successful and prolific entertainment studios. From the outset of the hostilities in Donbas, Volodymyr Zelenskyy and 'Kvartal 95' rendered support to the Armed Forces with funds, equipment, and arranged shows on the front line. The party, whose candidate was Zelenskyy, shares the name of the film – *Servant of the People*. As a young and popular entertainment and public figure, Zelenskyy's apt use of Social media has contributed immensely to his popularity. Most of his campaigning for the elections was done by delivering short, pointed, and entertaining YouTube and Instagram videos while he avoided traditional confrontations and debates with opponents. What proved to be an effective practice continued throughout the Russian invasion. Since the beginning of the invasion, 108 days ago on the day I write these lines, Zelenskyy has delivered 198 speeches, all available on his website.<sup>7</sup> These video addresses vary in length from a couple of minutes to around an hour, depending on the media platform and the audience they were meant for. He mostly addresses his people in short, social media and television format videos similar to the ones he used in his campaign. The longer ones are dedicated to world elites and are done through video conferencing tools that allow interaction. With video conferencing tools, president Zelenskyy has addressed officials of governmental institutions

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7 .....  
 Written on the 12th of May 2022.

(United Nations, The US Congress, European Council, etc.) but also gatherings of military and political elites (NATO Summit, Asian Security Summit, Copenhagen Democracy Summit, etc.), financial elites (World Economic Forum at Davos), academic elites (elite students of British or French Universities, Stanford University Community etc.) and artist elites (Cannes International Film Festival, Venice Biennale etc.)

It is impossible not to mention a drastic and highly symbolic change of costume – president Zelenskyy gave a speech at the Munich Security Summit on the 19<sup>th</sup> of February, five days prior to the beginning of the invasion; this was the last time his audience saw him in a suit, the traditional costume of politicians. Since then, he has been wearing only t-shirts and sports jumpsuits, mainly in the army's green tones. So, there was no change in the methods and tools of government, but rather a change within the given format, a subtle change within the role.

In the view of the war situation as a para-dramatic plot, it is necessary to observe also the main adversary of president Zelenskyy, the president of the Russian Federation, Vladimir Putin. As a former KGB (Comity for State Security) secret service agent during the Cold War and later as head of the FSB (Federal Security Service), Putin is an autocrat who has been effectively in power for more than twenty years, easily identified as a power of the old. His military intervention in Chechnya gained him immense popularity at the beginning of his rule, a popularity that has since turned into a highly oppressive, disciplinary system with tens of thousands of political adversaries convicted of treason.

Thus, the figure of president Zelenskyy unites the well-known 'everyman,' the a-good-guy-like-me-but-superhero of the classical cinema, with the born-digital and networked like-me-but-Arab-dying-while-shooting-activist.



### 3.2.3. If you are not with us...

Currently, if we consider whether traditional or social media representative of public opinion, most of the Western audience seems united in their certainty about who is “on the right side of history.”<sup>8</sup> This binary view of the world is not new, and we can look for its roots even beyond Cartesian Christianity. Surprising though, is the magnitude of the uniformity of opinions amongst mid- or highly educated people, no matter which side they pick as theirs, and the apparent obligation to declare this side publicly. A possible explanation for this is what Hyong Chun identified as the ideological function of software – the system does not accept ambivalence. Any kind of uncertainty and doubt is coming back as a system error. The basis of digital computing is two-fold: it is binary, requiring an either-or procedure, and it necessitates a predetermined user action – the so-called ‘input’ – to be functional. This means that every individual is prompted to choose one of the distinct, pre-set options to engage and therefore be acknowledged and legitimated by the system. You are when, and only when, you interact; you are when you perform.

It is not only the physical proximity of the conflict that makes Europeans so eager to express their solidarity with the Ukrainian people. Ukrainians are even more ‘like-us’ than the Syrian youths, no matter how liberal and tech-savvy the Arabs were. This is not due only to their skin color or the fact that they are not Muslim. They have been fighting very hard in the last few decades, most notably

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<sup>8</sup> See, for example an article in the Guardian: ‘US says China’s support for Russia over Ukraine puts it on ‘wrong side of history’ (The Guardian, 2022)

in and since the Euromaidan revolution,<sup>9</sup> to be a part of the ‘European family.’ This validates the European and Western values even more than the vague pleas for democracy and neoliberal capitalism in the Middle East. Ukrainians are dying to come near the candidate list of the European Union – what an excellent patch for the crisis of the European identity, a crisis that can be observed in the rise of nationalist movements all across the EU and, most notably, the UK’s secession in 2020, so-called ‘Brexit.’ Finally, Europeans are ‘united’ again; if united means posting and reposting content on social media.

The empathy and solidarity shown on social media do very little to benefit the people affected by the conflict. As all ‘slacktivism’<sup>10</sup> attempts, it exhausts itself in ‘raising awareness’ about an issue already widely represented in the media. Nevertheless, the digital empathy and digital activism are not aimed at the suffering ones – like all ‘actions’ on social media, it is done with an acute ‘awareness of the possibility of (self) observation from outside,’ and it presents a ‘continuous adaptation to discursive assumptions’ (Oki, 2019, p. 67). It is done for the audience, whether this audience is Ukrainian refugees or potential customers or buyers of your product. That is why we can observe such severe misuse of the #standwithukraine and similar hashtags: they are lined up next to products and services to advertise them and make them reach and appeal to a wider pool of potential customers, while they are supposedly an expression of solidarity and empathy. Sometimes the sellers of these goods and products claim

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 9 Euromaidan, lit ‘Euro Square,’ or the Maidan Uprising, was a wave of demonstrations and civil unrest in Ukraine, which began on the 21st of November 2013 with large protests in Maidan Nezalezhnosti (Independence Square) in Kyiv. The protests were sparked by the Ukrainian government’s sudden decision not to sign the European Union-Ukraine Association Agreement, instead choosing closer ties to Russia and the Eurasian Economic Union, and eventually led to the overthrow of the pro-Russian president Yanukovich.  
 From: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Euromaidan>

10 Slacktivism – digital activism, activism that exhausts itself in social media.

that a portion of the profits will be donated to the people of Ukraine' without offering evidence of these transactions. Usually, not even that. This is a direct result of the confusion between an economic and social system in which liberal capitalism became a European value.

#### 3.2.4. The ghost of Kyiv - hashtag power

*"Rather than meaning circulation is in fact what creates value on the network."* (Della Ratta)

A hashtag is a metadata tag. Hashtags are used on microblogging and photo-sharing services as user-generated tagging that enables cross-referencing content by topic or theme. The use of hashtags was first proposed by American blogger and product consultant Chris Messina in a 2007 tweet. Messina did not attempt to patent the use because he felt that "they were born of the internet, and owned by no one." Hashtags became immensely popular on Twitter and soon emerged across other social media websites like Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube. (Wikipedia). According to Messina, Twitter was skeptical about wider audiences accepting hashtags, but they were soon proven wrong. One of the events that played a significant role in hashtags being recognized as a valid user-generated content categorization were the protests in Iran in 2009, often dubbed the Twitter revolution. This title, perpetuated by Twitter owners and stakeholders, has come under severe criticism from the Iranian protestors themselves.

The phenomenon dubbed *the ghost of Kyiv* presents the dangers of remix and repost culture in wartime and exposes digital culture's hypocrisy and double standards. It is hard to tell where the story originates when it comes to social

media because untraceability of the source is one of its key features, but one of the first posts about it is CGI footage from a 2013 PC video game, *Digital Combat Simulator: World*. The ‘simulacra’ strikes again. It is not that actual war footage looks like video games – the real war footage is video games. Furthermore, what makes it real is precisely the power of hashtags – the user-generated metadata. The original post might or might not have stated clearly that the video is rendered from a video game, but through numerous reposts and remixes without any accountability or traceability of the source, the story acquires the quality of truth. That is why I argue that the hashtag concept is more important than the image concept in today’s digital media warfare.

In the old days of professional media, the traceability of the source made it credible. The journalist or the media outlet vouched for the truthfulness of the images. This mirrors the centralized power model of discipline society – an identifiable center is spreading, omitting specific images, and can be held responsible for their reliability. The digital media, which is said to be more ‘democratic’ and in which power and responsibility do not seem to have such an obvious center, does not have a source, but hashtags. The hashtag creates the polyvocality of the image, the illusion of many witnessing the same, of many people confirming the credibility simply by believing in it. It is the best and the worst representation of what the rule of the majority means in terms of media warfare. If you look at the comments section below these videos, many of them confirm the performative valorimeters: it is not important if the ghost of Kyiev is real or fake; it “represents the fighting spirit of the Ukrainians.” The problem is that we live in the century traumatized by photographic image, which has, according to Andre Bazin, “radically affected our psychology of the image. The objective nature of photography confers on it a quality of credibility absent from

all other picture-making. In spite of any objections our critical spirit may offer, we are forced to accept as real the existence of the object reproduced, actually represented, set before us, that is to say, in time and space".<sup>11</sup>

It should not be surprising that those with reliable information withhold it as long as they find it suitable. When the Ukrainian officials disclosed that the ghost of Kyiv was fake two months later, the story was said to have been a part of the 'information war'. The opposite side also had many fake videos of bombings, but these videos are rendered 'fake news'. So, what is a 'morale booster' for those we support is 'fake news' for those we do not.

#### 4. Conclusion

*"In the networked environment, media messages circulate rather than communicate."* (Della Rotta)

This article is just one way of looking at a very complex process. A way that indeed brings nothing to the countless people affected by the war. In this matter, it is not any better than the acts of digital empathy and social media solidarity its criticism is aimed at. However, it is not meant to be read by refugees, army officials, soldiers, or politicians. Its audience is performing artists, theorists, and managers with interest and experience in the digital.

It wants to make you think not just about how can we use the digital tools to reach new audiences or become recognized on the international market but also about how can we use the paradigmatic tools of a performative power/

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<sup>11</sup> Bazin, A. (1967). *What is cinema? Vol.1*. Berkley/Los Angeles/London: University of California Press. In text: (Bazin, 1967, pp. 13-14)

knowledge strata to subvert it? If the liberation of the Self, the sex, the gender, the private, and the intimate was the subversive act in the historical moment of the end of the transition from discipline to performance, as suggested by the subtitle of Butler's seminal work "Gender trouble: Feminism and the subversion of identity," what could it be today, in the moment of ripe performative power/knowledge? How do we regain the performative? How do we rediscover the connection between acting and doing? How do we relink performance to meaning and value? Or have we abandoned these as concepts altogether? What do we have instead? The corporate slogans of 'network' and 'outputs'? The NGO slogans of 'impact' and 'empowerment'? The social media slogans of 'reach' and 'engagement'?

This article's general goal is to bring attention to the special place performing arts can and should have in the critical act and thought of today. Digital performance is placed right at the beating heart of the performative power/knowledge system. A system that encompasses all aspects of human being-in-the-world: from our personal identities and work conditions to wars affecting millions.

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/ Digital solutions  
to applied theatre  
in response to the  
COVID-19  
pandemic

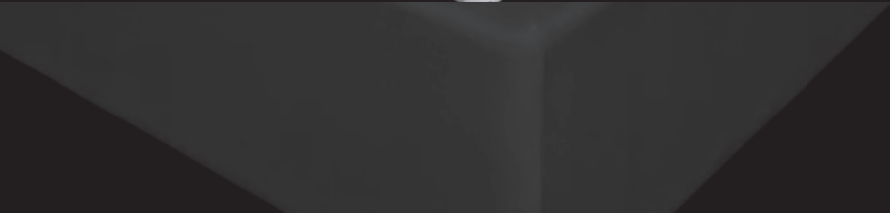
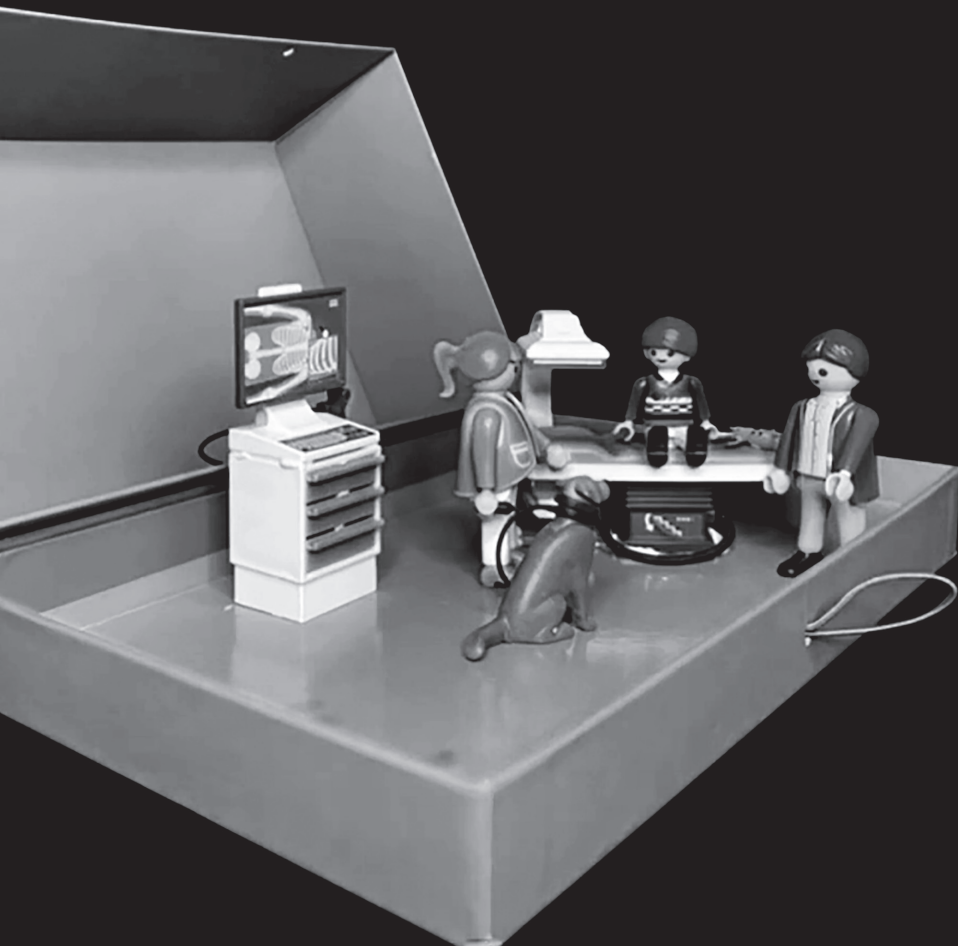
Prof. Dr Persephone Sextou  
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UK

The COVID-19 has become an unpopular term, one that is associated with shattered happiness and wellbeing, loss, pain, grief and isolation. The pandemic separated us of our loved ones, isolated us from our neighbours and alienated us from our communities. Artists such as actors, storytellers, puppeteers, musicians, singers, giggling (clown) doctors, and magicians for children were not allowed to visit hospitals at that time (unfortunately this is still the case here in the UK) due to strict, but understandable, hospital controls. As a result, the facilitation of bedside interactive and participatory arts-based activities in hospitals became impossible. Loneliness increased and life had to pause, for a while. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the mental and emotional health of children and young people is of serious concern (Meherali et al. 2021). The pandemic has created an increased demand for new tools and methods of accessing and supporting vulnerable children's emotional needs such as anxiety and depression. Ciara Conlon et al. (2021) argue that the pandemic and public health restrictions have had an adverse impact on children's health and psychosocial wellbeing, particularly for those with chronic conditions. As pandemics and epidemics continue around the world, it is important to develop an understanding of how to support children's emotional wellbeing during times of crisis.

*'Here I am flying!'* a film for  
hospitalised children

Persephone Sextou - YouTube  
(Sextou 2020)  
<https://youtu.be/azF6HIIOr2w>





This paper is to illustrate arguments and debates within applied theatre and digital arts in healthcare rather than providing answers, as part of my sense of critical interrogation before making judgments about practice. The experimental digital arts works that grew out of my experimentation with forms and techniques during the pandemic manifest the notion of applied theatre as an ongoing, organically evolving, practice that is in a constant interaction with the environment, people, artists, audiences and crisis around us. Thus, my thoughts as expressed below inevitably may be opening the 'pandora's box', metaphorically speaking, one that is full of unresolved questions that need to be addressed in future studies. I prefer the idea of contributing to unfixed cultures of knowing in opposition to presenting fixed views about applied theatre alternatives. As James Thompson (2012: xx1) says "We must be constantly aware that the *act of applying* is an unfinished process that encounters situations that are themselves evolving and not fixed examples of social practice".

In my own practice, I followed news developments relating to the Covid-19 pandemic and having closely followed advice and guidance from the government, the World Health Organisation and Public Health England and the National Health System performances on the wards had to pause. The 'Rocket-Arts' bedside theatre project for sick and injured children was discontinued from March 2020 until June 2020. Creative ways and alternative modes of delivering the arts needed to be implemented to outreach sick children during unprecedented times. I was interested in whether art-based digital resources for hospitalised children can help us 'meet' them remotely and how digital films could stand in for live performance. With a small team of artists, we experimented with animation cartoon software and stop-motion techniques to produce short toy-based image footage and use it into digital films. The aim was to enable children's transition from what was a distressful reality to a relaxing fantasy during their hospitalisation, as well as create a gateway for sick children, an escapism

to imagined worlds, moments, and experiences. At that time of the project's life, the focus was diverted from physical bedside performance on the wards to digital films that children could watch on the hospital teachers' electronic devices in absence of artists in hospital. While not without challenges or limitations, the 'transfer' of 'Rocket-Arts' from an intimate performance to an online experience revealed a need to gain a sense of professional solidarity and brotherhood in difficulty.

### **Eudaimonia through the arts at times of crisis**

My philosophy about using the arts in healthcare is rooted in Aristotle's theory of wellbeing and happiness, known as 'eudaimonia' (the demon of good actions), which grows from one's well-intended activities that produce good results for the community and the society (Gallagher, Lopez and Preacher 2009). Eudaimonia embraces elements of discovery into how individuals can reach their own potential in their private lives but in interaction with others. In Aristotle's eudaimonic model of wellbeing, goodness is recognised as a process and outcome of kindness, respect and sharing of knowledge and experience with others in a constant interaction with the environment. A special quality of happiness, a much more advanced sense of fulfilment, then can be earned from creating experiences through theatre with a caring, empathetic, and compassionate interest for ill children. That makes a life worth living.

From this perspective, arts-based activities in child healthcare incorporate eudaimonia in that they happen in interaction between children and artists in which sick and injured children are recognised as participants in the arts rather than patients. For the artist to cooperate with children who are unwell as in telling a story together it takes courage because the artist has to accept the audience as capable participants in their professional act when children experience incapability. It is important to remember that the arts create paths of communica-

tion and experiences of being together in the moment with joy and compassion that help people connect and develop relationships through a collective process. Through the arts in hospital the artist learns to invite children in the centre of their world, creating opportunities for making meaning of what it feels to be a child in illness and what can be done to improve children's circumstances and learning through the arts (Sextou 2021). The child and the artist when get involved in synergistic performance bedside, they connect, share stories and emotions, and play within the fictional conditions of the arts as witnesses of a eudaimonic phenomenon. They are not alone anymore at times of struggle. Having said that, we should not confuse the role of the arts for health and wellbeing with art therapies. At times of crisis, the arts are often employed as ways of healing and restoring traumatic experiences. Then, an inevitable confusion between arts for health and arts therapies is experienced. However, the emphasis of my research is not on the arts as therapy for the work I pursue is not clinical. Rather, I focus on the application of bedside theatre to improve hospitalised children's wellbeing. I will illustrate this with the example of 'Here I am flying' (Sextou 2020) a film that is a product of this transition from live to film, which is representative of my experimental work during Covid-19.

Over the course of two months during the first wave of lockdowns in England, we co-produced this film amongst others with support from a digital incubator company helping us drive innovation and develop ideas and solutions for the films. Films targeted children in three age groups (5-6, 7-8, 9-11) and lasted for approximately 5 minutes each. We used theatre and performance principles, as well as digital media examples, as tools for telling stories about Simba, a therapy dog, who travelled in space with his little from who stayed in hospital. We shared ideas and potential cartoon images with family friends who have children in the targeted age groups. Their preferences were encountered in the materials we gathered. We explored a variety of potential assets, such as pictures of Simba, digital backgrounds or music, before choosing an aesthetic for each film.

The types of animation of the 'Here I am flying!' film varied. We worked in many types of animation, including 2D and 3D animation, motion graphics, collage and stop motion techniques. For example, in the film 'Here I am flying!' we had to physically move playmobil toys as objects, take photographs of each new position, and created an illusion of movement when the series of photographs was played in sequence (Sextou 2020). To imagine Simba in space with astronauts and robots in motion, we set up 'tableau' frozen scenes with the same space rocket that toured on the wards and the same set of miniature toys (playmobil) and puppets that children animated. We took pictures of the 'tableaux' scene-by-scene and used them in the film to create a storyline. This choice aimed to establish a connection between the two phases of the project and, to produce films based on toys that children are familiar with.

As an active researcher rooted in applied theatre practice and pedagogy, I am particularly interested in the process of transition from participatory performance to digital resources, as well as the inquiry about my identity as a researcher. My commitment to the provision of opportunities for normalising the hospital experience in paediatrics through arts-based applied theatre and non-applied theatre (digital) events is revealed. This is not to say something clichéd such as 'my digital films are applied' but rather make the claim that the principles of participatory theatre can be employed by digital artists with an appetite to work in healthcare. My own principles of making applied theatre include connecting with individuals and communities, tackling inequalities and inequities, addressing social concerns, creating possibilities for creative and powerful advocacies, engaging with empathetic and compassionate practices and transforming places and spaces into a just society.

As Megan Alrutz states in exploring possibilities of knowing between digital storytelling and applied theatre (2015:78), "we all benefit from seeing how our



identity matters and understanding that identity power are concepts worthy of attention". I agree that the powers of freedom in research, and education, requires opportunities to take in and improvise realities in our lives. COVID-19 was that opportunity for me, despite all the burden, the pain, and the loss that brought to my life. Because of COVID-19 I felt an overwhelming urge to find alternative ways of telling children stories during their hospitalisation. I was fighting against hospital restrictions but mainly everyone's fear for the unknown. My well-established relationships with hospital staff and the flexibility of my funders helped me to face the chaos that the pandemic caused to my project when artists were banished from hospitals. I engaged my personal understanding of applied theatre in paediatrics and the context of child healthcare to envision how digital stories, when aesthetically presented, might offer children as an audience entertaining, relaxing and educational activities. Under the pressure of the pandemic to change the delivery mode of 'Rocket-Arts', opportunities were created for imagining a new process of outreaching children in hospital and working across disciplines to capture and share what I know and create possibilities for hospitalised children to benefit from the arts during unprecedented times. It felt to me that by doing this, by stretching my comfort zone and working more cross-disciplinarily, I would increase the chances to make a small contribution to a better society, a eudaimonic outcome. Furthermore, disrupting professional identity-based biases where a researcher is targeted based on aspects of a researcher's expertise, which may include subject-specific knowledge, theory, language, and practice, requires a desire to explore associations between applied theatre pedagogy and new ways of knowing. The production of films was an experiment that moved me beyond the experience of applied theatre; as understandings about the role of that combined art forms develop, as well as my own research identity and related powers.

## Reflections

In reflection from the practitioner's point of view, the production of the film went largely according to plan regardless the extreme circumstances of the pandemic. Of course, there are always hiccups, changes, and less-than-satisfactory moments. We had to experiment with new technologies, tools, software while maintain the artistic quality of the product. There is nothing worse than compromising the quality of artistic activities for vulnerable people. And still it was a new domain for me and my team because we were thrown into the unknown with knowing very little about what to expect from the process of producing a digital film. There were moments when we had to run ideas and test them in practice again and again with no success, which was frustrating. However, in my experience of leading the project, we battled with the fear of technology successfully and we managed to produce online activities that were both progressed well and perceived well by children, their families and hospital staff. The child-artist interaction in performance, the child-teacher engagement in watching films with the child and the synergies of ideas and emotions played an important part in the process.

The value of using digital technology and the need to provide an alternative mode of delivery for online resources in hospitals, when necessary, are surely axiomatic but the best way of achieving them is yet to be explored. One reason for this is the complexity of synergies between art forms. The 'Here I am flying!' film is one example of collaboration between digital arts, object-theatre, music, and visual arts. We attempted to offer children the opportunity to look at something attractive, creative, entertaining and child friendly. For the needs of 'Here I am flying!' we digital art through photography and scanning images of original aquarelle paintings on silk fabric with views of space (glittering galaxies and space valleys) and fantasy animals (a green cat in a field of daisies).

The emphasis on digital art aimed to increase the possibility of enjoying the arts through the film, and the benefits derived from both contact with art and things that can happen in imagined worlds such as paintings. By 'benefit's I mean the use of the arts as a stimulus to engage children's imagination during the film, relax them and divert their minds from clinical stress and physical pain. The element of an artistic environment in the film aimed to add value to the digital product by drawing children's attention to such things as artistic components in the story. It may be of interest to artists to commission arts students as part of their training courses to produce artworks that could be used in digital films for hospitalised children.

Questions remain about the long-term impact of the digital culture in arts-based projects for children in healthcare. These are questions to research given the opportunity in the future. What is remained from the theatrical experience when the child returns home? How the replaced identity of an ill child by the identity of a healthy child could affect the long-lasting benefits of the performance for that child? Improved moods, relaxation, creativity, social interaction, engagement with learning and emotional expression were not properties that once possessed could be taken away from the child wherever they went after their discharge from the hospital? Are those wellbeing and educational benefits context-specific, space-related, and illness-associated? Do the benefits melt away when the performance ends or when the child leaves the hospital? Are there ways to make those benefits for the children who experience them more sustainable for when the children need them? Perhaps the connection of the child to the artist during performance and their humble interaction through objects and stories is something that can leave a mark of an experience on the child's memory, something to carry with them everywhere they go. Thus, the quality of the experience is so important to the child, especially if the

memory of performance can be transferred to other experiences in their personal, family and school lives. How can the positive impact of a bedside performance or film be carried forward to impact on the development of the child?

I can only hope that the human kindness that the arts in paediatrics aims to achieve can be recalled when life gets tough and complex. I can only hope that the child can retrieve a particular moment of connection with an artist in hospital to strengthen and encourage them when they feel weak and vulnerable. And I can only hope that, metaphorically speaking, the 'aroma' of a positive experience through the arts during their hospitalisation can warm the child's heart, relax them, and give them a sense of safety and good care whenever they need them. Arts-based digital arts in paediatrics in this context may build memories, relationships, and meanings. And yet, we cannot ignore the possibility that the arts in paediatrics are rooted in the present, offering ephemeral experiences of enjoyment, creativity, relaxation, and control of difficult situations that fade away when things go back to normal. And this is perfectly acceptable.

We must be open to challenges and brave to use combinations of performative and digital art forms to increase the potential of the arts in child healthcare at times when vulnerable children need to be listened to, respected, and supported. 'Rocket-Arts' developed online approaches towards engaging children with stories and offering them opportunities to express ideas and feelings. It is envisaged that toy-based and artistic digital films could compensate face-to-face performance on hospital wards when restrictions for artists on the hospital wards are lifted. Further investigations are needed to examine if and how digital films can provide children with stimuli for multiple benefits such as relaxation, self-expression, creativity, and hospital education during their stay in hospital. How the films translate can only be determined by the special circumstances of the children

who told them. And yet, this requires a much more empathetic understanding of the children's hospital experience and their life experiences, including family, school, and wider relationships, rather than an analysis of the story alone.

The potential for an accurate evaluation between the cause (digital stories) and effect (children's lives) therefore needs to be judged in context. It is worth exploring further how arts-based participatory online activities could normalise the children's hospital experience. I suggest the development of closer synergies between artists and groups of patients with their families to increase their involvement in the artistic process. Such synergies would aim to give voice to the children's needs and preferences, help artist to learn from children's recommendations, and get a sense of what would be suitable for their age groups and ability. By exploring digital art-making ideas with children we can develop a better understanding of children's internal 'self'. Digital resources therefore foreground the potential of narrative and art-making be a response to the external world involving the 'remix' of ready-made content (Sakr, Connelly and Wild 2015). Therefore, working with children on digital films can become an important process of collaborative art-making, as well as a tool of communication and mutual understanding.

Furthermore, the involvement of patients in the design of digital films will aim to integrate their multiple needs as personalities that are not necessarily defined by illness. "Any sense of wholeness in their treatment of patients can only be achieved by the integration of their spiritual, psychological, social and cultural needs with their requirements for medical and nursing attention" (Haldane and Loppert 1999:25). Audiences, in this way, will participate in their own hospital entertainment as active, respected and valued co-producers of the films rather than passive spectators of 'pre-cooked' products. Likewise, artists should work

cross disciplinary with digital producers, psychologists, hospital teachers, creative therapists, and healthcare professionals to provide beneficiary, respectful and ethical digital environments for the patients. This is, perhaps, another claim that as a hybrid of knowledge, expertise and experience digital arts in healthcare could introduce new complementary roles between art forms and disciplines, which can create rich interdisciplinary arts-based and scientific-based events in paediatrics.

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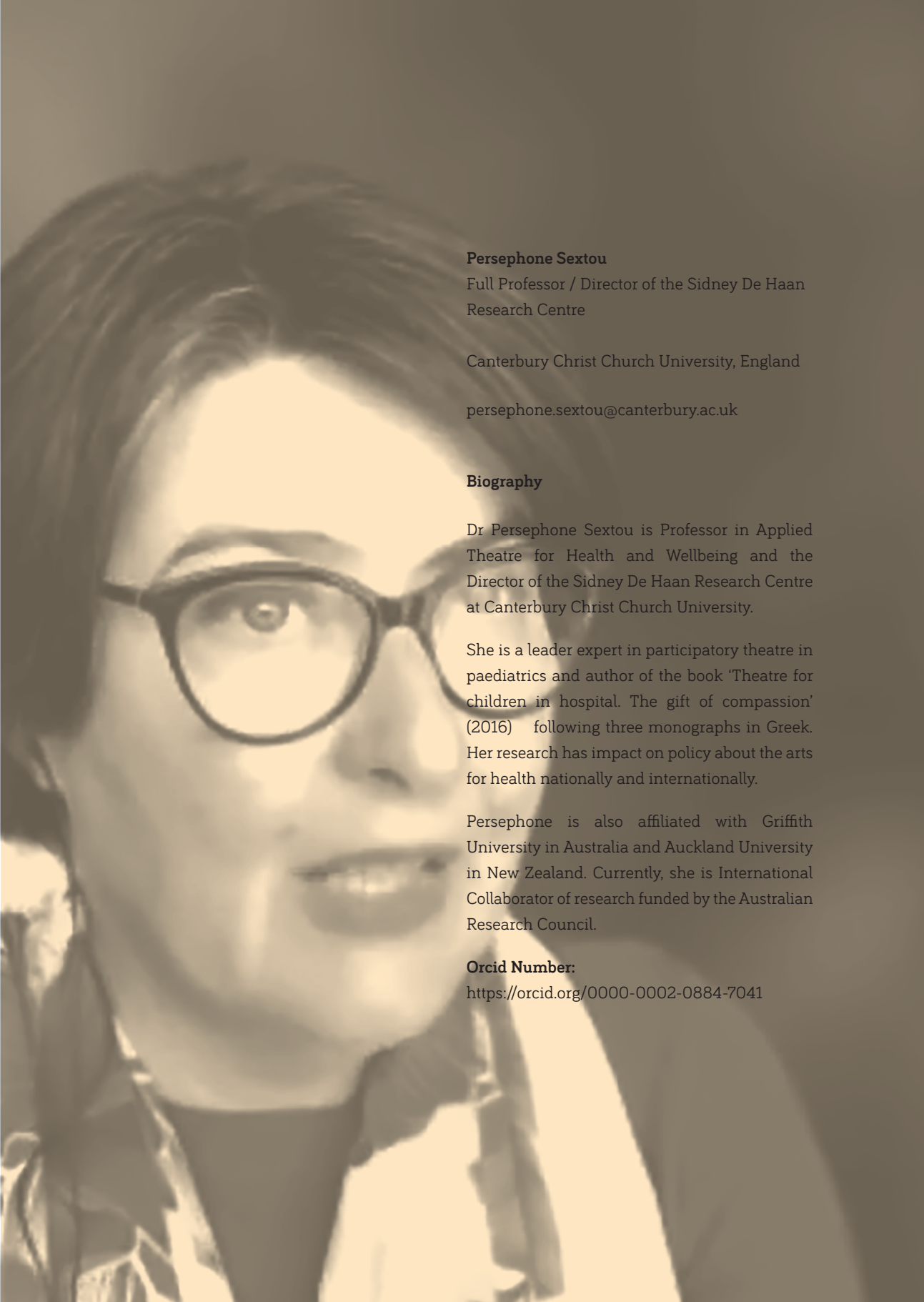
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*/ Zoom, Camera,  
Action - The Creation of  
Action Choreography  
for Online Theatre using  
Isolated Actors*

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**Summary:** The new artform of online theatre performance created by isolated actors, which emerged during the COVID19 lockdowns beginning in March 2020, is a new performance medium and creative artform, with a new theatrical discipline for Online Action Choreography. This new art form and its attendant specialist discipline deserve their place in the theatre industry and theatre history. The article focuses on the experience of one UK theatre company, Shake-Scene Shakespeare, and their Online Action Choreographer: Alexandra Kataigida. The emergence of online performance is outlined, with its attendant opportunities and challenges, and the soon-identified need for online action choreography. Different categories of action choreography are detailed: individual and shared actions, changing perspective, prop passes, combat sequences and dances.

**Keywords:** Online theatre, Physical choreography, Inclusivity, Innovation



Alexandra Kataigida  
in a Shake-Scene company  
workshop

Photographer:  
Nikki Wills



### **Introduction: The Unexpected Artform**

During the COVID19 global lockdowns, a new artform appeared: live online theatre performed by isolated actors. This then created a new discipline of theatrical choreography: Online Action Choreography.

This new artform and its associated expert specialism have been acknowledged neither by the UK theatre industry nor theatre press<sup>1</sup>. This essay will seek to redress this omission by recording the arrival of Zoom theatre, development of its attendant skills, the growth of online action choreography, its contribution to performance, and its composition. Not to acknowledge the presence of a new artform, and the immeasurable contribution of a new line of specialist physical choreographers, leaves theatre history incomplete.

This essay will refer specifically to the online performance experience of Shake-Scene Shakespeare (Shake-Scene), a UK-based theatre company specialising in performing Shakespeare from cued parts, which began performing live online on March 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2020. It will outline and celebrate the creative decisions taken by online action choreographer Alexandra Kataigida, and the new choreography discipline she helped create.

Writing as the Artistic Director for Shake-Scene Shakespeare and concerned purely with the practice of performing online, I will employ the lexical field of theatrical practice.

### **The Emergence of “Zoom Theatre”**

The creation of live online theatre has direct parallels with the explosion of Renaissance playhouse culture: an entire artform was built around those per-

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1 For example, the 2022 Stage Awards gave one award for Digital Theatre performance, for which only one online company (The Show Must Go Online) made the shortlist. The award was given to the National Theatre’s recorded streaming of their *Romeo and Juliet* – not an example of the new performance with isolated actors.

forming it; both changed and developed in line with technological developments; neither was initially given its true status and value.

In March 2020 with the start of the global COVID 19 pandemic, in the UK, theatres and filming shut down. Everyone was required to stay at home in a prevailing atmosphere of fear. The blocked energy of the locked-down creatives found an outlet in an unexpected new artform: live online performance.

This new art form is distinct from pre-recorded or live-streamed performances. It is performed sometimes live, sometimes recorded, sometimes combining live and recorded action, but always by actors physically isolated from each other. A popular method is to have the cast on a Zoom call which is streamed live to YouTube; this method is used by Shake-Scene, with no recorded action interleaved. Some online companies used virtual backgrounds to unite their performers. Shake-Scene explored this, but swiftly decided against; Zoom accommodates static images of people in conference, not moving images, and hands, swords, etc, vanished into the virtual background.<sup>2</sup> Shake-Scene embraced individuality, rather than a uniform “look” or background. This apparent disconnection between players was not disadvantageous; no audience feedback ever criticised performances for this.

Shake-Scene’s performances were free to view, requesting but not requiring donations from their audiences. This enabled these all those who wanted to, to watch, wherever they were<sup>3</sup>. The performances were a contribution by the performers to good mental wellbeing among locked-down audience members looking for new, live entertainment. Working together live, if remotely, also supported the mental wellbeing of the casts, who regularly had new acting challenges to

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 2 Other online companies (for example, The Show Must Go Online) utilised this tendency of backgrounds to absorb performers in creating disappearances and invisibility effects.

3 For example, appreciation was received from the USA, in an email from an enthusiastic audience member on 30<sup>th</sup> August 2020, taking the company’s reach beyond established mailing list, friends and family

face, and who were able to feel they were making an important contribution to the wellbeing of others.

Acting companies were also free from the restrictions of geographical location, performing together online across oceans and continents. Shake-Scene has regular performers in all parts of the UK, continental Europe and the USA, creating time-spans as great as ten hours between those on screen<sup>4</sup>. This freedom to connect was an unexpected creative unity during the physical restrictions of lockdown.

This form of “performing from home” was also accessible for company members with physical disabilities, health issues (chronic and occasionally COVID19), and family commitments, with no invest of time and energy travelling, or at a performance venue. Shake-Scene was able to work regularly with one actor with multiple sclerosis, and another with myalgic encephalomyelitis, who is a wheelchair user. Company members also included a mother with a toddler, who was available to her family while performing. Another unexpected bonus of online performance was the equity of perception it provided, with actors of all heights appearing of equal height – except for occasional deliberate visual trickery suggesting size or proximity.

As a performance medium, online theatre's main requirement is a Wi-Fi connection stable and fast enough for clear communication, as well as a device able to join video calls. These are necessary for effective participation by actors and audience alike. While this is still more open and inclusive than the ticket costs and ability to travel that in-person theatre requires, it still inevitably excludes some.

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4 Alik Chapple (Greece) and Oliver Hewett (USA) in scenes together in *A Comedy of Errors*, performed live online 19<sup>th</sup> December 2021.

With every art form, there must be those behind the scenes that make it work – and they are least likely to be recorded. It is necessary for the online company to have at least one person with the knowledge to run live streaming technology, and the technology to support it. For Shake-Scene, that is provided by Valentina Vinci, with support from Dewi Hughes and Siegfried Loew-Walker. The traditional role of stage management is fulfilled by a combination of the sound operator and Book-holder. Online offstage tasks include cutting cameras or mics, renaming characters<sup>5</sup> (pre-planned and urgent), and swinging for anyone cut off by their internet unexpectedly.

### **Offstage Processes**

Actors managed their own technological arrangements. As lockdowns continued in the UK through 2020 into 2021, technology and home spaces changed. Some actors invested in more home streaming equipment (lights, tripods, extra screens); others did not, keeping a sense of individuality. As plays were produced quickly, lines were not learned but read. Some working on laptops or PCs could arrange their screen to read their lines and simultaneously watch the Zoom call. Others printed their lines out and had them beside or below the camera, or pinned them around their screen – whatever made performing possible.

Sound effects were initially created by the actors live<sup>6</sup>, but quickly switched to foley sound via Zoom sound-share to bypass Zoom’s tendency to eliminate what it perceived as background interference. This included “knaps” during combat sequences, and music for songs; music became mostly acapella as a result. Where

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5 Shake-Scene adopted the convention of character name in capitals, a hyphen then the actor’s name.

6 Sounds of combat made by rattling spoons with pencils in *Richard III*, performed live online 19<sup>th</sup> July 2020



dialogue was required over a sound effect, a pre-performance sound check avoided complications in performance.

Actors were also in control of their own on-screen settings, lighting effects (on occasion<sup>7</sup>), props and costume. To keep within bounds of what was easily accessible during lockdowns, a general policy of using what you have directed many creative choices on “look”.

The Zoom “chat” stream became live audience feedback as the cast commented on each other’s performances<sup>8</sup>, asked questions, and accessed running order information. Stage management also communicated via the chat, replacing off-stage “cans” and mics.

The discipline of entering and leaving the stage was a simple one for Shake-Scene: putting on your mic and camera brought you on stage; turning them off was your exit. Actors played directly to camera, as if the audience were the person they were addressing. This was popularly received by audience with hearing difficulties: they could reliably see the face of the speaker and lip-read where necessary.

Naming of characters did become uniform. The Zoom name box was used for the character name in capitals, a hyphen and then the performer’s name. It also gradually emerged that, online, naming a character MESSENGER, or CROWD 2, was unsatisfactory. As a result, part of script preparation became naming unnamed characters – with some names becoming a running joke between plays<sup>9</sup>.

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7 The three Witches in *Macbeth* (performed live online on 8<sup>th</sup> November 2020) agreed a stylised lighting for their characters, bringing a flaring light (a torch) in front of the camera to give the effect of a glowing cauldron below the frame.

8 Shake-Scene never invited audience inside the performers’ Zoom link during a public performance

9 For example, Roman soldiers designated “1”, “2” etc, became Primus, Secundus etc, and appeared in several plays, including *Cymbeline*

### **The Illusion of Contact**

In order to produce fully embodied performances, Shake-Scene needed to create the realistic illusion of interaction between isolated performers. If a line read “I will kiss your hand, and so leave you”, the company wanted that to happen.

Shake-Scene never chose a play that would be simple to stage online: they chose plays they wanted to do, then worked out how to do them.

Thus, this new form of live online performance demanded a new performance skill to create the realistic illusion of interaction between isolated performers. This made not only fights (both armed and unarmed) possible, but also handshakes and hand kisses, and grew into coffin- and corpse- carrying, sitting on laps, crowds mobbing angrily, and Egyptian revels.

### **Prop Passes**

All the magic required to create the illusion of one object being handled by two (sometimes more) people, was created by Alexandra Kataigida in her action choreography.

Hampered by the lockdown difficulties the actors of the company faced with many shops closed, and online ordering initially very unreliable, Shake-Scene experimented at first with stylised or representative props. In *The Taming of the Shrew*<sup>10</sup>, props which were required to exist in more than one actor’s space, such as the clothes made for Kate, were represented by A4 paper, landscape, with the word “CAP” or “GOWN” typed large enough to fill the page. Even this did not achieve uniformity, as different printers printed the fonts differently, and some actors without printers had to hand write. The technique was repeated in

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10 Performed live online 12<sup>th</sup> April 2020

*Merchant of Venice*<sup>11</sup>, with the three caskets being represented by papers reading GOLD, SILVER and LEAD.

It was felt by the company that this, while being enjoyable and effective, was not the level of embodiment that they wanted to achieve. The decision was taken to attempt to create a new physical discipline, which could be learned by the company and applied in the same way as dance and fight choreography. The aim was to have a set form for passing props and physical interactions, which would become a part of the company's acting skills in the same way as a dance and fight choreography.

Alexandra Kataigida (actor, established company member, and fight director for Shake-Scene) was invited to create a new physical discipline to allow the company to suit the action to the word uniformly.

One basic rule governed shared actions and object passes: every object can only exist on one screen at a time. Once an object has left the screen of the first actor, only then can it appear in a second screen. Only when an object is understood to be being handled by more than one actor can it appear in both screens simultaneously. In this way, for example, Mistress Page and Mistress Ford can compare love letters from Falstaff<sup>12</sup>. If an object is offered but no pass is required by the dialogue, then the object is seen never to leave the space of the actor offering it, or only to leave it part way, but never to appear in another screen.

### **Action Choreography**

Alexandra initially ran online workshops to teach the new action techniques, then ran each piece of action with each participant individually before perfor-

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11 *Merchant of Venice*, performed live online on 17<sup>th</sup> May 2020

12 *Merry Wives of Windsor*, performed live online on 9<sup>th</sup> May 2021

mance, until the discipline was learned. Several actions and prop-making exercises Alexandra disseminated as videos, to reduce the need for repetition.

Online action directions break down into set units:

I. Defining distance parameters:

For physical flexibility in scenes, Alexandra defined three main positional distances between the performer and the camera, determined from a position of comfortable demi-lunge for flexibility (upright, weight on front foot): with arms fully extended, each actor ensured that two stacked fists occupied the full height of the camera view. Thus, a Rear Position for an “aside away”<sup>13</sup> from camera is achieved by shifting the weight on to the back foot; a Fore Position achieved by fully extended fingers being just out of reach of camera; and a Close-Up Position for “aside forwards” achieved as the fore position, but with torso leaning forward to get as close to camera as needful.

Other actions requiring perception of height were achieved through camera angulation. Kneeling, and scenes where characters were required to be “above”, were achieved in this way. Not all actors were physically able to kneel, or their physical space did not accommodate the movement, or their technology could not still see them if they lowered themselves physically. Alexandra solved this very simply, by instead raising the camera, phone or laptop, and thus achieve a difference in perspective. This was achieved for the first time in *Measure, For Measure*<sup>14</sup>.

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13 An “aside away” involves action or dialogue that the audience does not hear; “aside forwards” involves aside dialogue the audience does hear

14 *Measure, for Measure*, performed live online on the 31st of May 2020

This change of perspective also worked for one actor to sit on the lap of another<sup>15</sup>, forlooking down at someone who was either kneeling before them<sup>16</sup>, or lying dead<sup>17</sup>, or a floor below them (as if looking out of a window, or down from battlements or city gates)<sup>18</sup>.

All other actions required the co-ordinated actions of at least two actors in at least two different screens. For these, and for object passes, Alexandra devised a simple discipline: show the object clearly before initiating any action. In the dialogue surrounding almost all object passes and shared actions, the text often made it clear when the action began, but not always ended – some were ended by agreement between the actors during dialogue. In this respect, the Renaissance discipline of performing with very little group rehearsal, and thus writing actions and directions clearly into the text, supported the on-screen action process.

## II. Handshakes

To achieve a remote handshake, Actor One offers their hand clearly; the hand then moves down and forwards. This action is copied by Actor Two. Once the

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15 For example, Doll Tearsheet (Angela Bull) sat on Falstaff's (Matt Williams) lap in *Henry 4<sup>th</sup> Part 2*, performed live on-line on 11<sup>th</sup> April 2021

16 For example, Tamora (Ashleigh Harvey) looked callously down on Lavinia (Tamara Ritthaler) kneeling before her in *Titus Andronicus*, performed live online on the 6<sup>th</sup> March 2022. Tamara and Ashleigh also collaborated to allow Lavinia to reach up and grasp Tamora's dress, before being pushed away. In the final part of this illusion, Tamora raised Lavinia gently to her feet.

17 For example, Lawrence Carmichael as a Father who had accidentally killed his son during a civil war battle, used his laptop to simulate the perspective of the dead boy, playing the whole scene downwards and directly into camera (*Henry 6<sup>th</sup> Part 3*, performed live online 26<sup>th</sup> September 2021).

18 For example, in *A Comedy of Errors* (performed live online 19<sup>th</sup> December 2021), an entire sequence required characters inside a house to look out from a high window and speak to but not to see other characters in the street.

wrist of both actors has vanished, it can be accepted by the viewer that those hands have clasped. Both actors then raise and lower their arm from the shoulder, to suggest the action of a shake. Both actors keep eye contact and monitor dialogue to gage when the shake ends. Then both hands can be withdrawn and appear in their original screens. In the case of Mark Anthony (played by Eugenia Low)<sup>19</sup>, an added touch was given by her in contriving to bloody her own hand with every shake – a macabre detail which gave the sequence greater drama and believability.

### III. Embraces

Alexandra devised a simple embrace discipline: both actors were required to “lean in” to the right- or left-hand side of their screen (directions to be co-ordinated between the actors), and present the side of their neck and shoulder to the camera. This again was held for as long as the dialogue required, and both participants would watch to co-ordinate breaking the virtual contact.

### IV. Hand kisses

Hand kisses were more challenging, as there needed to be the illusion of the kissee’s hand arriving on the kisser’s screen. Alexandra achieved this illusion by asking the kisser to extend their hand downwards with the palm upwards. The kissee then put their hand out, with the palm downwards, and allowed it to leave their screen. The kisser then completed the illusion by curling their own hands together to mimic the kissee’s action, and drawing their face down to kiss the back of their own hand. The reactions of the kissee to the “kiss” completed the illusion. Care had to be taken that no sleeve or watch intruded, and that the hand was not brought into the kisser’s screen to reveal too much arm.

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<sup>19</sup> In *Julius Caesar*, performed live online on 16<sup>th</sup> August 2020, Eugenia Lowe as Mark Anthony achieved this effect.

V. Kisses

With a kiss on the lips, both actors would lean into the camera and bring their lips to below the level of their screen, where, as with a handshake, they could be believed to be meeting. Alexandra also required kissing sounds to be made, to make the action clear – it sounds comical, but it made a great difference to the believability of the action.

VI. Taking prisoner

This is a sequence of actions usually detailed in the dialogue by the imprisoners and the prisoner. The imprisoner “shows” an open hand to their camera before reaching their hand out of their screen (usually downwards). The prisoner can then react physically, depending on whether they are gripped by arm, shoulder, wrist, or throat.

VII. Choking or Grabbing by the Throat, and Gagging with Garments

This required a similar choreography to taking prisoner, with the choker showing their hand clearly before reaching. The choked person then needed to reach their own hand from below camera, and grab their own clothing around the throat, lifting or tightening. Reactions on both sides were co-ordinated to show muscular effort, fear and discomfort. Gagging was very similar: the gagger’s hand reached into the gaggee’s screen, grasped their clothing and lifted it over their mouth, apparently applying pressure. Again, the gagger and gaggee co-ordinated their reactions to complete the illusion<sup>20</sup>.

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20 A most impressive sequence of taking prisoner and gagging with clothing appeared in *Titus Andronicus* (6<sup>th</sup> March 2022), with Lavinia’s rough handling by Chiron (Thom Jackson-Wood) and Demetrius (Simon Balcon) requiring strictly choreographed actions from all three to coincide with the lines.

## VIII. Knighting

Knighting (a favourite History play activity, especially of Henry 6<sup>th</sup>) posed the extra challenge of co-ordinating an object apparently moving in two screens simultaneously. The knightee would kneel to create the perspective; the knight extended a sword on which he kept a visible grip, which would apparently appear (point first) about halfway into the knightee's screen – in fact, the knightee would be holding a sword off camera and pointing it downwards at themselves. Knighter and knightee would then co-ordinate the action of touching one shoulder, raising over the head and touching the other shoulder – including the challenge of “flipped” mirror images provided by Zoom and YouTube.

**Prop Co-ordination**

As part of such actions as knighting, for the illusion to be fully effective the props on both screens needed to match. For example, for *A Winter's Tale*<sup>21</sup> a specific pendant was required by baby Perdita, young Perdita, and Hermione. Alexandra developed a series of adaptable prop designs which could be made from cardboard, paper, glue, tinfoil, and coloured pens, to create the illusion of the same object in different spaces, and dispersed her designs as instructional videos. Alexandra's videos began with swords and daggers, for the first play Shake-Scene performed online: a shortened *Romeo and Juliet*<sup>22</sup>. Rings followed for the next, *Two Gentlemen of Verona*,<sup>23</sup> with its narrative-significant ring-passing manoeuvres.

Prop moments requiring clothes to pass from character to character required

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21 *A Winter's Tale*, performed online 17<sup>th</sup> January 2021

22 Performed online 5<sup>th</sup> April 2020

23 Performed online 20<sup>th</sup> April 2020



pre-performance wardrobe comparisons, and something satisfactorily similar identified or created. For example, in *Twelfth Night*<sup>24</sup> when Olivia required her veil from Maria, Olivia had made her own prop, which she placed over the camera and slid on to her own head as Maria reached both hands up and over the camera holding a piece of black fabric.

Babies were passed sufficiently frequently to make a standard “baby” prop worth creating: a rolled-up towel in a white pillowcase is effective and easy to match.

Letters and documents were required so frequently that the whole company became expert at letter folding, following Alexandra’s instructions, making letter passes extremely simple. Basic letters were mostly blank A4 paper, but love letters and official commissions had a red “ribbon” and “seal” – paper coloured red using marker pen - and had to follow a specific pattern of folding.

Coin passes were straightforward: those involved only needed to agree what they were using. As experience grew, direction as to what coin or note to use began to appear in the scripts, to help regulate the process<sup>25</sup>. Purses of money were achieved by putting a few coins in a black sock.

### **The Discipline of a Prop Pass**

Actor One presented the item to be passed, showing it clearly in their own screen. It was then “passed”, usually downwards and centrally; only once it had fully left the first screen could it begin to “appear” in the screen of Actor Two.

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24 *Twelfth Night*, performed online 6<sup>th</sup> December 2020

25 In *Twelfth Night*, Feste (Alexandra Kataigida) pre-set herself with a full array of possible coins and notes (and we incorporated a joke with her trying to blag money from the Book-holder, who offered contactless payment). Orsino, played by actor and magician Siegfried Lowe-Walker, incorporated a trick as a magical size-changing coin was passed between them (performed online 6<sup>th</sup> December 2020)

Passes could also be made above the camera if that were more convenient for the technological arrangement of those involved.

Where an action required an object to be taken from one person by another, very careful choreography was employed to ensure that the hand of the character doing the removing could be seen to leave their screen and then “appear” in the screen being reached into. This manoeuvre was achieved first as Puck removed Bottom’s donkey mask in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*<sup>26</sup> – a moment of magic for all those concerned.

### **The “Hollow Crown” Sequence**

During a sequence of History plays (beginning with *Richard 2<sup>nd</sup>* on 14<sup>th</sup> February 2021 and ending with *Henry 8<sup>th</sup>* on 21<sup>st</sup> November 2021), it was vital to maintain the appearance of one crown passing between hands to maintain the thread of the story. One unmissable moment was the passing of the crown between Richard and Bolingbroke (*Richard II*), which contrived the illusion of the weight of the crown going from Richard to Bolingbroke, while they both could be seen looking through the “hollow crown”<sup>27</sup>.

This sequence was reflected in the passing of the crown from dying Bolingbroke (then Henry 4<sup>th</sup>) to his son, Hal<sup>28</sup>. Alexandra was anxious to maintain the symbolic link between the moments that the crown passed between kings, and her artistry and expert guidance was very successful.

.....  
26 *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, performed live online on 21<sup>st</sup> June 2020

27 *Richard 2<sup>nd</sup>*, performed online on 14<sup>th</sup> February 2021

28 *Henry 4<sup>th</sup> Part 2*, performed online on 11<sup>th</sup> April 2021

## Fight Sequences

As already mentioned, sword fights were part of Shake-Scene's live online performances from the start. Alexandra always incorporated creative fight choreography: the fight between Tybalt and Mercutio included the illusion of a disarm and a sword passed between screens, as well as an exchange of armed and unarmed blows. Timing and co-ordination of reactions between the fighters, as with on-stage fight choreography, completed the illusion of a shared fight.

Essentially, the creation of online fights was a combination of on-stage and online practices. The dedication and artistry of all those involved made these sequences entertaining, frightening and surprising. Special examples are: the unarmed wrestling sequence in *As You Like It*<sup>29</sup>, the crowd that mobbed to death Cinna the Poet in *Julius Caesar*<sup>30</sup>, the brutal clubbing of Lady Macduff in *Macbeth*<sup>31</sup>, and virtuoso choreography in *Coriolanus*<sup>32</sup>, when the fight between Caius Martius and Aufidius included a thrown "rock" crossing three screens. This innovation is another example of Alexandra's creativity, and the dedication of the actors to working together using the new choreography discipline to create truly inspiring theatre.

## Script Preparation

Accommodating the new discipline of action choreography has produced a new form of script layout. As Shake-Scene's book-holder, I am responsible for pre-

.....  
29 *As You Like It* performed online 14<sup>th</sup> June 2021, in a joint production with the Cream Faced Loons Theatre Company

30 *Julius Caesar*, performed online 16<sup>th</sup> August 2020

31 *Macbeth*, performed online 8<sup>th</sup> November 2020

32 *Coriolanus*, performed online 6<sup>th</sup> February 2022

paring all the scripts and parts used in performance. As the discipline of online action choreography developed, so actions began to be specifically incorporated into scripts. Increasingly, physical sequences are described in terms that the company understands and will be most simple to achieve on screen. One example was the slapstick sequence between Antipholus of Ephesus and Dromio of Ephesus from *Comedy of Errors*<sup>33</sup>, where the directions “slap, slap, punch” were inserted and co-ordinated in with Antipholus’ lines.

### Dances

In *A Winter’s Tale*<sup>34</sup>, the shepherd community dance, with Perdita and Florizel at their centre. To achieve the illusion of this, Alexandra devised a simple hand-holding dance, creating the illusion that at a certain moment Perdita and Florizel joined hands and drew closer to each other, making them the focus – this was despite the fact that Perdita was in Ireland and Florizel in the USA<sup>35</sup>.

### Special Moments

Some very specific challenges have been met by online action choreography. Titus lost his hand in *Titus Andronicus*<sup>36</sup>, in an illusion supported by ketchup, bloody bandages and rubber gloves, and Lavinia caught blood from Chiron and Demetrius in a bowl, achieved dexterously with bandaged hands and red bubble bath. Every play presents a new challenge in this respect, so this is an area continually expanding.

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33 *Comedy of Errors*, performed online 19<sup>th</sup> December 2021

34 *A Winter’s Tale*, performed online 17<sup>th</sup> January 2021

35 Group dances also feature in *Anthony and Cleopatra* (14<sup>th</sup> January 2022), *Pericles Prince of Tyre* (3<sup>rd</sup> April 2022) and *Timon of Athens* (1<sup>st</sup> May 2022).

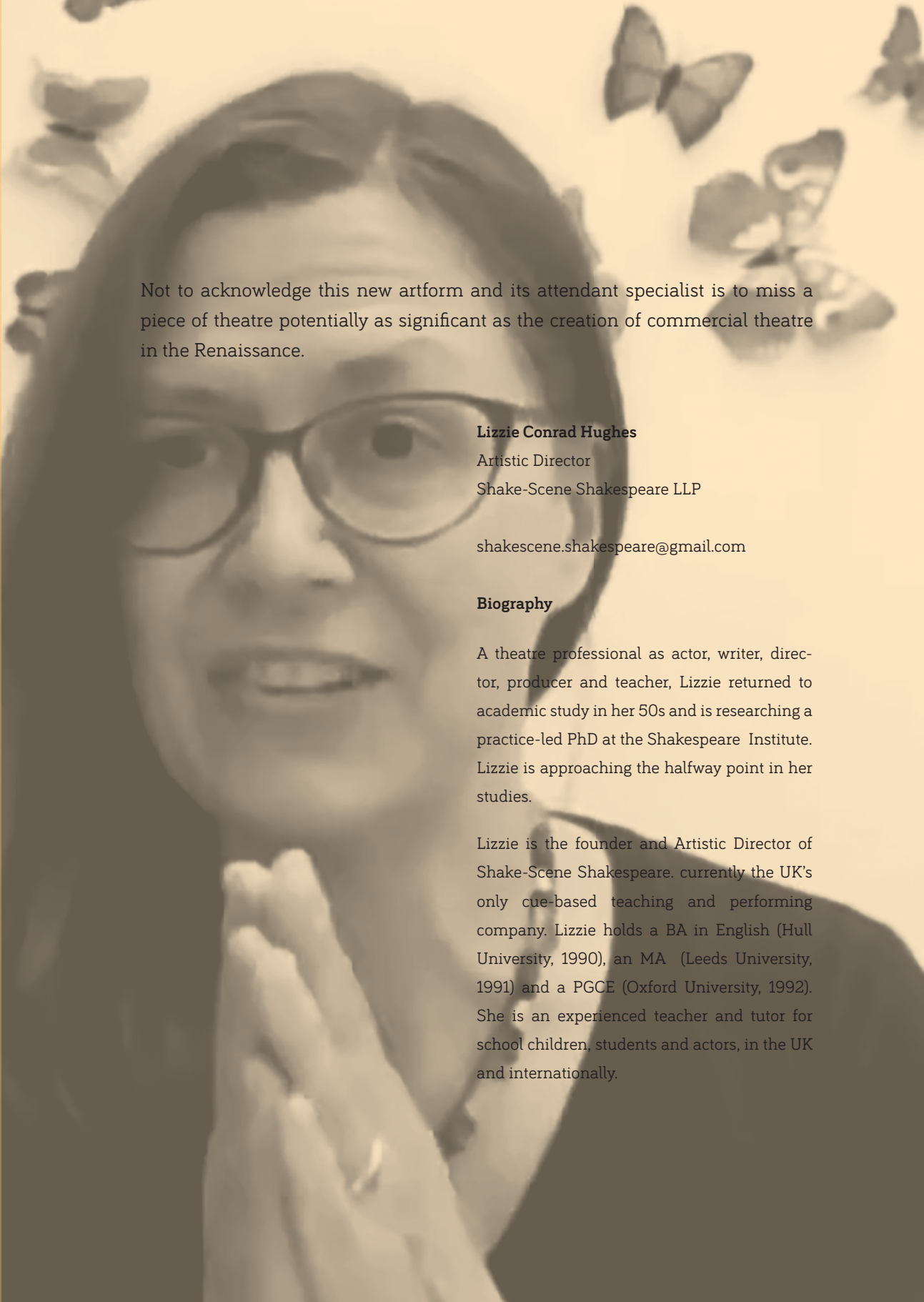
36 In *Titus Andronicus* performed live online on 6<sup>th</sup> March 2022, Titus (Jill Greenacre) extended her hand below camera and off her screen. Aaron (Linda Mathis) made the illusion of chopping with a large prop knife; Jill reacted with agony, and contrived to wrap her hand in a ketchup- daubed bandage to contrive a stump, all live on screen.

## Conclusion

After almost three years, if any actions are missed during script preparation, the company are now so skilled in the discipline of online action choreography that they do them extempore. Thus, the design behind creating these action conventions has been achieved: a shared physical language that the company can use, on a level with dance, combat and intimacy choreography. The technique has become part of their skill set, and thanks to the actors' dedication, and Alexandra's constant development, the acting industry has a new physical language. Alexandra also choreographed actions for other online performances, using elements of her own techniques and those of the company for which she was working. This further developed the discipline for the wider online performance companies.

The creation of online performance is the closest our generation has come to the experience of those who lived through the rise of the Renaissance playhouses, moving pictures, radio, and television. In each case, those involved developed their new craft around them as they went. We are honoured to have been part of this innovation process.

There are hundreds of hours of online performance footage from Shake-Scene, all created since March 2020, and all presenting fully embodied performances thanks to the vision of the expert specialist physical action choreographer: Alexandra Kataigida. Shake-Scene is still performing regularly live online, as they are passionately committed to the creative possibilities this new performance medium offers, as well as to the challenge of having performed each one of Shakespeare's plays from cues only. The freedom to connect, created by online performance during the enforced separation of lockdown, and made truly connected by the new discipline of action choreography, still has much to offer to actors, audiences, and the acting industry globally.



Not to acknowledge this new artform and its attendant specialist is to miss a piece of theatre potentially as significant as the creation of commercial theatre in the Renaissance.

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**Biography**

A theatre professional as actor, writer, director, producer and teacher, Lizzie returned to academic study in her 50s and is researching a practice-led PhD at the Shakespeare Institute. Lizzie is approaching the halfway point in her studies.

Lizzie is the founder and Artistic Director of Shake-Scene Shakespeare. currently the UK's only cue-based teaching and performing company. Lizzie holds a BA in English (Hull University, 1990), an MA (Leeds University, 1991) and a PGCE (Oxford University, 1992). She is an experienced teacher and tutor for school children, students and actors, in the UK and internationally.

/ Interactive Digital  
Live Art  
from China

Dr Bill Aitchison  
Xiamen University, China

**Summary:** *Love in the Time of Corona* was an experimental online performance made during the first stage of the Covid-19 pandemic. The performance was delivered as a series of seven, interactive one-to-one live video calls between audience members in their homes and performers in theirs. It was made in Chinese and English with a creative team spread across Asia, Europe, and America and performed to audiences worldwide. Thematically, it dealt with the emotional impact of the pandemic and the different solos addressed topics as diverse as feminism, relationship breakdowns, disability, the generational gap and forced intimacy. It used phone cameras to enable the mobility of both performer and audience and attempted to create a unstable performance situation where the boundaries of the work were shifting and the body of both performer and audience played a central role in the experience. The performance had its limitations, the principal ones being our freshness to the form, a lack of creative documentation that can extend the reach of the work and a mixed level of performer ability. The principal findings are that significant interactivity is possible and that even relatively small-scale arts groups can successfully put on ambitious, multi-national, online performances.

**Keywords:** China, live art, telematic performance, interactive, Covid-19



Video Submission  
*Love in the Time of Corona*

Research Context:  
(page 122)

Link:  
[https://www.youtube.com/  
watch?v=pjqFE6JoWoQ&t=4s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pjqFE6JoWoQ&t=4s)





## Introduction

*Love in the Time of Corona* (Aitchison 2020), which premiered April 25th 2020, was one of the first online performances created wholly during and in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. It was a project of Last Minute Live Art (LMLA), a group that promotes and presents live art and interdisciplinary performance in mainland China. LMLA typically make events that feature the works of emerging artists and this was the first time for the group to create a single piece with an overall director, even if the performers still retained considerable autonomy over their own material and shape of their performance. Intercultural, collaboratively devised performance is marginal within China, where a very different state sponsored aesthetic, dominates the performing arts. Indeed, the performing arts operate within a tightly regulated framework that governs both the education that students receive and the professional world in which they go on to work within. LMLA operates outside of that world in the small space allotted for independent non-commercial productions.

*Love in the Time of Corona* emerged from the group, which I act as curator of, holding social video chats to simply reconnect with one another during the early stages of the pandemic. The technology for making these video calls on phones was already familiar, inexpensive and efficient within China. This technology got an added significance once lockdowns and travel restrictions became widespread in late January and we used our phones much more than ever to connect with one another.

As the virus spread and lockdowns deepened in intensity, I came to realize that we were relating to one another in what seemed like a new way. We principally maintained our connections to one another through virtual communities of friends, family and colleagues. What's more, I also started to make some pandemic friends: people I met online, most typically through some virus related

groups. These communities were held together by group chats and online video calls. These video calls no longer just supplemented face to face interaction, for most of us they seemed to replace it. While the technology was not new, this reliance upon it was and thus our relationship to our phones, the apps that ran on them and to one another, had evolved.

Quite quickly, the LMLA video calls took a playful twist and we started to invite other people into them and play with relay structures whereby a person is passed from one chat to another. Within a week I started to sense there was something interesting going on and I looked closely at the calls to see if there was the seed of a show somewhere in them. What I most liked about the conversations was that there was an equality of status and not a sense of a performer and spectator. I also liked the fact that we played with moving around our apartments and doing things. At first this was simply drinking beer but we then added things like drinking beer by the window so that we were watching the sunset together and describing what we saw outside. In a simple way, the phone was not monopolizing our sensory experience but rather acting as an interchange between us while all of our senses were at play.

During the initial stages of the virus there was a tendency for large venues and companies to show videos of their back catalogue. When there were live-streamed performances, they were often shows which maintained a pre-Covid aesthetic and simply placed a camera in a central audience position or were the same multi-camera live video edited shows that the likes of the National Theatre (NT Live 2022) had become well know for. This was understandable but I was keen to step away from this familiar relationship and address the new ways we were relating to one another and to our environment in, for example, our LMLA group calls.

My previous experience of online performance had been watching pre-recorded or live-streamed performances on my laptop or telematic pieces that placed a screen on a stage, around which live action took place. What they had in common was that what happened in my own environment was invisible and irrelevant. Here I should admit that I had not previously explored this form too deeply, nor had I been interested in the more popular applications of the technology such as online hosts doing sales, talks, karaoke or sex shows.

I understand that artists had been making online performances long before the pandemic and many of the issues I was encountering were conceptually far from new. Chatzichristodoulou, M. and Zerihan R. (Ed.) (2012) and Giannachi, G (2004) describe and analyze many of the earlier online works. What was new, however, was the global situation we were making this performance in, the more advanced capacities of the technology and the extent of its popular usage. What this seemed to allow was mobility and an equality of visibility (and thus status) between all participants. In the direction we were pushing it, the meant the spectator was no longer the invisible voyeur on the other side of a screen, fixed to one spot; they experienced a sense of re-embodiment. Being already receptive to the notion of emancipated spectators who are, “active participants and not passive spectators” (Ranciere 2009: 4), it was time to extend this emancipation online.

### **Challenges**

I sensed that the way to liberate the spectator lay in returning the presence of the body and by that, I mean the spectator’s body as much as the performer’s body, back into the performance. How to go about doing this was not quite so evident so this was a first challenge that I saw the performance confronting. I also wanted the performance to generate a meaningful sense of live presence

and unpredictability, that is to say, I wanted the boundaries of the performance to be unclear and even shifting. This, too, was going to have to be found in rehearsal. The final and largest challenge, as I saw it, was finding the precise form of the show which would allow me to do everything I had set out to do while working within the constraints the pandemic had imposed.

I had had some experience working on one-to-one performances through workshops and performances I had done with the Shadowcasters group in Zagreb and Bologna (Shadowcasters 2001-2) and some years later also worked on another site-specific performance of Bakal's in Dubrovnik (Bakal 2013) which used a collaborative creative process and porto-situationist staging. These were useful reference points, as indeed is Templeton's *You the City* too, (Templeton 1988) as these works deliberately play with a porous boundary between the performer and their environment, and place the spectator at the centre of the performance.

One thing that was clearly going to make *Love in the Time of Corona* very different, however, was that it was going to be an online performance. Rather than dropping the site-specific side of the work, I wanted to reinvent it and imagine how a sense of location could function when performer and spectator were separated and interacting through the screen of a phone. Perec's essay *Reading: A Socio-physiological Outline* (1999: 174-185) was a useful prompt for in the essay he describes and analyses the physicality and site of reading. I wanted to see if it would be possible to do something analogous using the phone instead of the book. That is to say, explore the poetics of the domestic space using the phone as the tool.

A further novel element I introduced was derived from seduction technique. I had been researching the literature of pick-up artists for a separate project and discovered that there were some useful ideas and techniques within it when it came to quickly establishing and building a sense of connection with a stranger.

These techniques serve a very different purpose in pick-up art, but I sensed they may be able to help some of the performers deal with the novel experience of giving a one-to-one performance. What to use from there and what to discard, was a further issue I would have to deal with during rehearsals.

In terms of the technical infrastructure of our show, this was already all in place: both the artists and audience had phones and apps installed on them which enabled live video calls to take place. In China we used WeChat, the most popular app in the country, and internationally we used either Skype or Zoom. Because everything was already in place we could concentrate on the content and not the technology and thus avoid the trap of becoming a gadget show in which the demonstration of technology eclipses the content of the performance.

The other thing that remained to be done prior to starting rehearsals was finalizing the cast. Of the LMLA core group who set the process in motion with the group video calls, only one was able to fully commit to developing and performing an original online performance. We had already brought other people into our group calls by then and a number of them were able to go forward with the project. I advertised online (of course) and was able to add further people to our regular experimental group, two of whom went on to be part of the cast. The language and technology issues were such that the one performer based in the UK was always somewhat outside of the rest of the group as he did not use the same software or speak Chinese. That was not as big an issue as it could have been as the solos were all stand-alone performances and did not require the performers to collaborate between themselves.

The team of seven that I managed to assemble was very mixed in terms of backgrounds and level of experience. They were spread across four different time zones and located in Dalian, Shanghai, Nanjing, London, Syracuse and rural Oregon. None of them, as far as I am aware, had previously made an online

show and about half of them had little experience, even offline, as performers. Getting good performances from this diverse group was going to be my work as I committed myself to the role of director. I had never directed an online show before either, so *Love in the Time of Corona* was going to be a learning curve for us all.

### **Rehearsal**

While I saw a great many artists lamenting what they were no longer allowed to do, namely live shows with an audience sitting in front of them, it seemed far more fruitful to concentrate attention upon what was possible. We therefore embraced the restrictions that the virus induced lockdowns had imposed upon us. My feeling was, once you fully accept these limitations they stop acting as limitations and instead function as a creative frame.

For example, one of the lockdown rules was that I was not allowed to leave my apartment. It then became a rule of the performance that we should perform it entirely within the home with no stepping outside. Another restriction that we quickly accepted was that the performance should be given by one performer to a lone audience member. People asked if they could experience it in twos or threes, but that would then restrict what we were able to do with the experience and/or oblige us to make different versions of the piece for larger or smaller audiences. By fully embracing the severest of lockdown rules, we were sure to be able to continue with the show, regardless of what happened next with the virus. What's more, by working with these restrictions, something of the spirit of the new reality could more easily infuse the show.

The rehearsal process was informal at first but when LMLA secured a first public performance date, the process became a lot more formalized. As well as the cast list being fixed, a four time-zone rehearsal schedule was drawn up, and a much



more intensive creative period began. The performance was entirely directed online from my apartment in Nanjing with a significant amount of the work taking place during two fourteen-day quarantines. If I were not directing the show I would almost certainly have resented the hard quarantines but, the performance brought a sense of purpose to it. This was true for a number of the other participants too, who expressed similar sentiments.

The creative process was a deeply collaborative one between me, the director, and the individual performers. While we started with some general group rehearsals, we quickly moved on to develop each of the seven solos separately. I helped the performers find and then develop their material, though the process was slightly different with each of them as they not only were all distinct individuals who came from different places, they also had their own artistic backgrounds and differing levels of experience. One of them, for example, was an actor who was used to working with a script and director while another was a younger visual artist who was accustomed to a solo creative process. This brought some tensions later in the process as I wanted to direct and fix aspects of the performance to a greater extent than they were sometimes willing, or able, to accept.

The show as a whole was focussed upon how the experience of Covid impacted human relationships. We started by exploring the concept of love. Over the six weeks of rehearsals it became clear that love came to signify not only a range of emotions felt towards another person and persons, it also extended to animals, plants, places, artworks, ideas and principles. What's more, the absence of these was often just as much of an inspiration as their presence.

With such a wide range of meanings and nuances associated with the word love, there was some danger of the show, as a whole, becoming unfocussed. The way that this was avoided was by first ensuring the performers worked with

deeply felt emotions. This gave them stronger material to work with and, because it was drawn from their daily lives, they were for the most part able to channel these emotions into their performances even when they were not professional performers. Not only did they focus on intensity of emotion, however, they also looked for points of contradiction. I helped them identify and develop parts of the performance which brought out an alternative emotion or point of view. This inflected most of the solos with a mixed emotional tone which in turn produced a much greater degree of continuity between one another.

What's more, this mixed emotional register also made it easier to inscribe some sort of journey within each of the pieces as they could travel from one feeling or idea to another. For example, one piece brought together the loss of a pet cat with recovery from the breakup of a relationship. The piece was very playful at first and had something of the memory of the cat to it. The loss of the animal then introduced the dominant emotional tone with the cat acting as a proxy for the breakup of a marriage. The growing sense of pain and melancholy was, towards the end, tempered by a slow healing process and sense of growth and understanding.

### **Performance**

The performance began when the member of audience received a video call on their phone from one of the performers. The first thing that the performer typically did when they started interacting with the spectator was to reframe the nature of the video call and establish a clear social relationship between the two of them. This was necessary, as the performance was not taking place within a space, such as a theatre, where a relatively clear set of expectations regarding the rules and roles of the event govern the interaction. This resetting of the relationship was both relatively easy and welcome as it resolved, at least temporarily,

awkward questions the spectator might be asking themselves, namely “What is this? What should I do?”

One of the performances, that of Lee Ravitz in London, took this strategy of reframing the video call one stage further. After he had established an identity and a social relationship with the spectator (American performance poet performing his work) he broke it down and insisted upon a new one (yoga guru from the North of England) until this too was discarded and another took its place. This was structurally similar to an acting exercise I once tried under American director Julia Lee Barclay. The continual attempts to establish credibility drew attention to the fragility of the encounter and at the same time reflected on the deep sense of uncertainty and isolation that had, by now, engulfed the UK too, where conspiracy theories were swirling around (BBC 2020) and clear trusted leadership was largely absent.

During this initial stage of the performance, building a measure of trust and complicity was essential as this made it possible to go on to push the performance into more untypical situations as the show went on. Each of the seven performances proposed a unique relationship and it was not simply a case of being friends with the audience but rather of using the protocol from one type of, usually non-performance situation, and applying it to our show. One of performances, for example, adopted the frame of the artist making a sketch of their model. This was sufficient to set the performance in motion and open a conversation.

The work I had done with the performers on pick-up technique (Strauss 2005), (Di Angelo 2005) and (Jeffries 2010) proved to be quite useful here. They were usually able to make their initial approach with a confident attitude, projecting value, ease and the right degree of interest. They then had to engage the spectator in genuine conversation rather than speak at them, which was the common

mistake most did at first. Changes of location also proved a good way to give a sense of progress in the relation and performance and reframing, a technique derived from Neuro Linguistic Programming, was additionally useful in two of the solos.

The seven solo performances were created and given in Chinese and English. Most of the Chinese performers were bilingual allowing the shows to reach both a domestic Chinese audience and international audiences too. One was performed without any speech and it is interesting to note that this piece was the one that probably went the furthest in terms of audience interaction.

The performances attempted to return the body into online performance by creating interactive encounters that reframed both the audience's and artist's domestic space as a site of performance. The show often choreographed the audience on a journey around their home. The most simple way in which this was achieved was through the matching of locations and actions. For example, in one of the pieces the performer moved to the closed door of his bedroom and invited the spectator to do likewise. He then listened at the door and then talked to the spectator in hushed tones about the people on the other side and asked if the spectator also shared their space with others. After bringing this around to a discussion of parents and generational difference, he invited the spectator to go the window and to join him in a secret cigarette, blowing the smoke out of the window. When performed with non-smokers this was turned into a symbolic cigarette instead of a real one.

Other pieces used very different strategies to utilize the space but all of them aimed to exploit the full potential of the domestic space as a quasi stage whether that be the kitchen, the front door, the mirror or the bed. When making this journey around the space the performers paid attention to the framing of the shots they were making with their phones; they were composing a video and had to

be careful what, how and when they revealed the space. Some lighting changes were necessary to get this right, particularly in the case of the Oliver Liu performance, which took place at night.

There was frequently a liminal sense of location as the performances took place in everyday locations not typically used for art, then temporarily used them in an alternative way infusing them with new meaning. This sense of liminality was often a broader feature of the encounter between performer and audience. For example, one of the performers was stuck in his parent's home and was waiting to leave China for the US while one of the audience members was stuck in New Zealand trying to return to Europe. Another was a Chinese student in the US who had to move in with her boyfriend and perform from a corridor while we also had a meeting between two women, one American and the other Venezuelan, one of whom was in Nanjing while the other had recently left the city and had been bounced back to a small town in the US where militias were patrolling the streets with guns. The virus created countless real-life stories like this and the performance was able to reflect them accurately.

### **Reception**

Each performer worked with their own specific situation and experience of Covid. Some of the themes that emerged were: feminism, relationship breakdowns, disability, the generational gap and forced intimacy. Most of the topics the performances went into are sensitive within mainland China and indeed the virus as a whole has become extremely politicized to the point that only a single state-approved narrative is now permitted. This was not exactly the case when we were creating the show as the country was at that point still scrambling

to contain the virus and regain control of the narrative. If we were to try and perform the show now, it might very well not be allowed to happen.

The performance of Gao Shuyi, for example, was an explicitly feminist work about the inequality of opportunity for women and the feeling of depression that this brought on during the pandemic. Chen's survey on gender perceptions in China revealed "the percentage of men who strongly agreed China has achieved gender equality is more than four times that of women," (Chen 2017) At the same time, many younger women I have spoken to have told me the situation of women is actually deteriorating at present. Gender selective infanticide and the single child policy has resulted in a highly imbalanced population. In Gao's age group there are 112.51 men for every 100 women. (Statistia 2022) This male bias has brought with it many problems for both men and women. One such pressure is the tendency for families to push daughters into marriage and to become mothers before the age of 30. Gao's piece reflected on these pressures and it used the floor as her performance space as her body art tends to favor the abject. She finally ended up washing the floor with the clothes that she was wearing. Male audience's in China were unaccustomed to this type of work and were mostly uncomfortable, I was later told. Women, however, knew only too well what she was expressing.

### **Evaluation**

The number of people who were able to experience the show was very limited due to the solos being made for an audience of one. This issue of scale is one that attends one-to-one performances which have been dubbed, "extremely inefficient." (Wake 2017: 168) While the first impulse may be to scale up and find a way to perform to a larger audience it is worth looking at other ways in which

the reach of the work may be extended too. Warr, writing on performances says they are, “intensely alive in their transitory ephemerality and then continue to work in the world through the traces they leave behind, through their retellings, through the distortions and accretions of legend as the originary act moves through the reimaginings of dissemination.” (Warr 2012: 16)

Documentation and dissemination of the performance, in the many forms this may take, could well be the better alternative to scaling up. This process should have been more deliberate and extensive so that the experiences of both performer and spectator could enter into wider circulation. This shortcoming is one of the principal ones and can be put down to the fact that we were a small, dispersed team rushing to simply complete the show in time for the premiere. Some previous LMLA events have embraced the process of documentation much more thoroughly, but this one failed to fully take it into consideration.

I had to spend quite a lot of the rehearsal time getting up to speed with directing online and similarly the cast had to get used to performing online. This is something that is not typically covered in drama or performance education. Its absence leaves the possibility of teaching it through workshops and this skill deficit also inclines me to use the best of the performers again, as they are by now familiar with the process.

In the two years since the show was made there has been a significant growth in online performance. A greater number of practitioners have experimented with it, festivals have gone online and audiences are more accustomed to the various forms it may take. A video of a performance I made for an online festival in China (Aitchison 2021) reached over 7 million people and generated extensive discussion. This reflects a major change in the distribution and reception of live performance and the pandemic has been instrumental in bringing this about. The type of performances which best fit this new system of distribution are often

short, visual and easy to grasp but diversity does exist. Much of this growth has been driven by necessity and with the easing of pandemic restrictions, there will naturally be a shift back to offline shows. Some of this online work will continue, however, as it has proven to have artistic value, can have significant impact and there has been a broader reassessment of the necessity of physical travel.

LMLA operates on a low budget so online performance has proven itself to be a very effective way to stage national and international events with limited resources. It is also becoming clear that climate change will increasingly necessitate more performances take place online as mass air travel will become unsustainable. It is, therefore, worth embracing this reality and pursuing innovative strategies now.

*Love in the Time of Corona* was created in response to the very specific situation that we found ourselves in within the first phase of the pandemic. The form it took was quite unique as we were independent of the state entertainment industry and already focussed upon experimental forms of performance. We were able to return the body of both the performer and spectator back into the centre of the work and create an interactive performance that addressed the situation of the virus in a serious way. The show had its limitations in terms of professionalism and audience reach, but was a meaningful experiment that brought new approaches to online performance.



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## Video Submission

### *Love in the Time of Corona*

Link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pjqFE6JoWoQ&t=4s>

### Research Context:

*Love in the Time of Corona* was an experimental online performance made during the first stage of the Covid-19 pandemic by the Chinese collective Last Minute Live Art. The performance was delivered as a series of seven, interactive one-to-one live video calls between audience members in their homes and performers in theirs. It was devised in Chinese and English with a creative team spread across Asia, Europe, and America and performed to audiences worldwide. Thematically, it dealt with the emotional impact of the pandemic and the different solos addressed topics as diverse as feminism, relationship breakdowns, disability, the generational gap and forced intimacy. It used phone cameras to enable the mobility of both performer and audience and attempted to create an unstable performance situation where the boundaries of the work were shifting and the body of both performer and audience played a central role in the experience. The performance had its limitations, the principal ones being our freshness to the form, a lack of creative documentation that could extend the reach of the work and a mixed level of performer ability. The principal findings are that significant interactivity is possible and that this can go some way to helping us see online performance as embracing site and body and being more than just a screen focussed experience. The other finding is that even relatively small-scale arts groups can successfully put on ambitious, multinational, online performances and that these types of shows will continue have relevance even after Covid-19 restrictions are lifted.



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**Biography**

Bill Aitchison is a British theatre director and performance artist based in China. He has presented his shows widely in galleries, museums, theatres and festivals in Europe, Asia, America, Australia and The Middle East, has exhibited in major museums and galleries and his artwork is held in both private collections and museums. He is curator of the Chinese performance platform Last Minute Live Art, holds a practice-based PhD from Goldsmiths College University of London, and is an associate professor in the Liberal Education Center of Xiamen University.

/ Gamification in Art-  
The implementation of  
elements of video games  
in works of art  
by the method of  
augmented reality

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**Abstract:** Gamification is a process that applies one or more elements from video games in various scientific and artistic disciplines. The connection between the dynamics of video games, as performing arts, and digital, visual, art is noticeable in the use of new technologies. The implementation of video game mechanics, such as text, graphics, moving images and sound, in combination with the digital environment, allows users a new kind of interaction with works of art in real-time. Responses to interacting with works that use some of the elements of video games are reflected in the form of achievements, promotion or collaboration in a virtual environment. The goal of art and gamification is to include as wide an audience as possible as active participants in new creative and imaginative spaces that they themselves can shape.

Augmented Reality as a method and a special type of communication combines the mechanics of video games with an artistic template. Augmented reality connects physical space with the virtual; at one end is a work of art and at the other a virtual space of video games. Communication between physical and virtual space usually takes place by adding virtual elements to physical reality and vice versa.

In this study, we analyze the most modern research and commercial solutions in the field of augmented reality and gamification in art. We executed a comparative analysis of available examples with the aim of increasing the potential for practical use and increasing the engagement of the audience in art exhibitions.

**Keywords:** augmented reality, art, gamification, digitization, interactivity.

### **The concept of *Gamification***

The term *gamification* was first used in the context of entertainment software by Gabe Zichermann<sup>1</sup> when in 2008 he presented the idea of using elements of video games outside the entertainment industry.<sup>2</sup> The rapid popularization of gamification occurred in mid-2010<sup>3</sup> when due to the growing development of new technologies, software and hardware components, new methods of interaction, through virtual and augmented reality, and new technical and expressive possibilities in creating an alternative reality, users had the opportunity to work in a new way with real and virtual spaces. Simulated spaces are often supplemented with real-world characteristics in order to experience the environment as fully as possible, and the manifestations of space in terms of physical space and video game virtual space are often questioned.

Gamification is a process that applies the design and mechanics of video games in various scientific and artistic fields. It aims to engage users and turn them into active participants. As one of the basic elements of video games is solving tasks that are supported by constant feedback, such as achievement tables or awards for successfully passed levels, we try to imply these elements in other areas of expression. The use of interactive components of video games in solving various tasks from other areas, represents a new way of thinking and engaging with individuals or groups of participants. The process of gamification has become the subject of research in a wide range of for-profit activities. It has

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1 Gabe Zicherman (1974) is a Canadian-American author, public speaker and businessman. He works in the field of application of video game mechanics in business, educational and other segments and is committed to increasing the number of users in the gamification process.

2 Walz, S. & Deterding, S. (2014). *The Gameful World - Approaches, Issues, Applications*. The MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, London, England, p. 31.

3 *Ibid.*, p. 3.

become one of the popular ways to attract people to a particular market segment because it offers the ability to attract and retain customers. And if its primary intention is not entertainment, but feedback, entertainment, even in its smallest form, aims to stimulate the user.

### **Gamification in art**

Elements of video games are used to attract users and stimulate their further interaction and interest. In the performing and visual arts, the process of gamification and the creation of dynamics similar to video games are also available through the use of high and low technologies depending on the desired visual and technical quality. There are also tools that allow a simple process of integrating elements of video games into works of art that easily incorporate game mechanics into a work in a relatively short time.

Gamification mechanics that can be applied in works of art can be divided into four broad categories:

- Achievements - points, levels, awards, recognitions and gifts;
- Leaks - table of leaders, various challenges that depend on human interactions;
- Cooperation - social relations, joint discovery and teamwork;
- Ownership - build something of your own, loyalty, self-expression.

In order to create your own works of art that use elements of gamification, you need a certain knowledge of video game design theory. According to Katie Salen



and Eric Zimmerman<sup>4</sup> “the designer’s focus is on gameplay design, devising and creating rules and structures that result in experience for the player.”<sup>5</sup> The designers of video games, which have been published in the last ten years, wanted to push the boundary between entertainment and art. The adoption of the game as a tool in creating artistic works has yet to be widely used. The common feature of video games and art is creativity and the desire to present worlds, which are often fictional, more intensely in order people may experience and participate in them. “Fictional worlds represented by multiple means such as text, spoken words, images, imagination and rules of the game (...) are unfinished (...) leaving the user to do so.”<sup>6</sup> These different worlds, which Henry Jenkins III<sup>7</sup> called ‘trans-media worlds’, which can often be “realized in different media”<sup>8</sup>, have several properties that make them interesting. Such worlds become a kind of personal utopia that users dream of visiting. Sometimes these phantasmagoric worlds are short-lived, but they can also be long-term worlds that can last a lifetime. Fantasy is an important concept in games that narratologists<sup>9</sup> argue that this is more important than pure game mechanics. In transmedia worlds, it is no longer necessary to focus only on creating an experience in one medium. The task of the creators of these worlds, these virtual spaces, is to excite the users by creatively giving them a fresh perspective on enjoying the newly composed worlds.

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4 Contemporary theorists in the field of video games, who have written one of the most extensive and influential books in this field - Salen, Katie and Eric Zimmerman, *Rules of Play: Game Design Fundamentals*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003

5 Jasper, J. (2005). *Dictionary of Video Game Theory*, Copenhagen, p. 98.

6 Ibid., p. 99.

7 Henry Jenkins (1958) is an American media scientist.

8 Jasper, J. (2005). *Dictionary of Video Game Theory*, Copenhagen, p. 104.

9 Narratology is an approach which holds that games can be understood as narratives, and thus examined by existing forms of narrative study. It stands opposed to ludology, which holds that the unique nature of games requires a new framework and ought to be understood apart from narrative content.

**Pokémon GO<sup>10</sup>**

Video games are slowly becoming a special field in the art world. Their development is inextricably linked with the development of computers and computer graphics. Today's most popular and successful video games are advancing in their user interface in terms of socializing, but also in terms of visual and technical sophistication. New expressive possibilities of video games and the development of new technologies are developing primarily the open spaces of virtual reality. "Chronologically, VR technology has been on the market since the mid-1990s, but at the beginning of the second decade of the 21st century, a new technological revolution took place in this field, which radically changed the situation. The torch-bearers of this revolution are *Oculus*<sup>11</sup>, *HTC Vive*<sup>12</sup> and *Playstation VR*<sup>13</sup>, which are the platforms that started a new wave of application development."<sup>14</sup>

"The analysis of points of view within different games and different points in one game, first contributed to clarifying the difference between creating an

10 *Pokémon GO* is a game played in augmented reality, combines a real environment in which virtual Pokemon are designed, created by *Niantic* (2016-2018) in collaboration with *Nintendo* (1995-2018).

11 *Oculus* is a company that was founded in 2012 by Palmer Luckey, Brendan Iribe, Michael Antonov and Nate Mitchell to develop a VR headset for video gaming known as the *Oculus Rift*.

12 *HTC Vive* is a virtual reality brand of *HTC Corporation*. It consists of hardware like its titular virtual reality headsets and accessories, virtual reality software and services, and initiatives that promote applications of virtual reality in sectors like business and arts.

13 *PlayStation VR* is a virtual reality headset developed by Sony Interactive Entertainment, which was released in October 2016.

14 Ličina, M. & Perić, N. (2019). *Virtuelna realnost i video igre kao prošireni mediji filma*, *Phlogiston* 27, p. 185-201.

experiential game space and the possibility of immersion in the game space.”<sup>15</sup> Mixed reality spaces, which combine real space with virtual, allow users to experience new spaces with “emphasized simulations of the senses that are comprehensive, vivid, immersive, engaging and interactive.”<sup>16</sup> *Minecraft*<sup>17</sup> and *Fortnite*<sup>18</sup> have doubled the number of users thanks to platforms that gave an immediate feeling of being in the game.

*Pokémon GO* (Fig. 1) is probably one of the most successful transmedia worlds of all time and the game that makes the best use of the augmented reality method in the performance mode. The graphics and actions of the game are not the most elaborate or advanced but the interactions are rich and interesting, as the team spent five years balancing the game properly. The power of the *Pokémon GO* game is not only in the concept of the game, but in the careful and consistent use of multiple media to define one world. One of the advantages of the game is the interest “in increased socialization and increased visits to public parks, museums, and historical sites. Perhaps the most common are stories describing increased physical activity.”<sup>19</sup>

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15 Mičkei, K. (2018). *Prostor u video igrama kao novi oblik scenske arhitekture*, Ph.D dissertation, Faculty of Technical Sciences, University in Novi Sad, Srbija, p. 13.

16 Slater, M. & Wilbur, S. (1997). *A Framework for Immersive Virtual Environments (FIVE): Speculation on the Role of Presence in Virtual Environments, Presence: Teleoperators and Virtual Environments, Volume 6, no. 6, MIT, p. 603-616.*

17 *Minecraft* is a video game developed by *Mojang Studios* in 2009.

18 *Fortnite* is a video game developed by *Epic Games* and *People Can Fly* 2017.

19 Wagner-Greene, V., Wotring, A., Castor, T., Kruger, J., Mortemore, S., & Dake, J. (2017). *Pokémon GO: Healthy or Harmful?* published online at *Am J Public Health*, 2017 January; 107(1): 35-36., 5.26. 2022, 11:44 pm, (<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5308184/>)

“*Pokémon GO* is the world’s most important game. Thanks to its success, it will almost certainly influence the design of future AR experiences for years to come.”<sup>20</sup> This game implements “gameplay mechanics that use Augmented Reality (AR) technology”<sup>21</sup> and “put virtual creatures at real-world locations”<sup>22</sup>.



(Fig. 1) *Pokémon GO* - a video game that combines the real world with the virtual, a source of photography *TechCrunch*.

20 Chamary, JV. (2018). *Why 'Pokémon GO' Is The World's Most Important Game*, 5. 26. 2022, 11:56 pm, (<https://www.forbes.com/sites/jvchamary/2018/02/10/pokemon-go-science-health-benefits/?sh=1f18ac423ab0>)

21 Ibid., 5. 27. 2022, 12:03 am.

22 Ibid., 5. 27. 2022, 12:07 am.

### ***Rimini Protocol - Best Before***

It is necessary to distinguish between video games as art and the use of game elements in works of art. Video games generally have the basic role of entertaining users and all their components are subordinated to achieving these goals. “The gameplay of the game consists in the degree and nature of the interactivity that the game includes, i.e. the extent to which the player is able to participate in the game world and how that world reacts to the choices the player has made.”<sup>23</sup>

*The Rimini Protocol - Best Before project* (Fig. 2) by Helgard Haug<sup>24</sup> and Stefan Kaegi<sup>25</sup> combines virtual play with the audience and connects it to an intimate theatrical setting. Elena Philip<sup>26</sup> wrote: “With their new show, Rimini Protokoll (...) leads into the world of computer games.”<sup>27</sup> As she states: “Best Before (...) is a multi-player game: Each viewer controls their own avatar with a gamepad.”<sup>28</sup> With a game controller in hand, each of the 200 members of the audience starts as an anonymous avatar, a so-called actor, interacting with a panel of experts on stage: an electronic artist, a game tester, a politician and a traffic bookmark. Taking inspiration from the video game industry in Vancouver, the new world,

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23 Jasper, J. (2005). *Dictionary of Video Game Theory*, Copenhagen, p. 99.

24 Helgard Haug (1969) is an author, director and co-founder of Rimini Protokoll.

25 Stefan Kaegi (1972) creates documentary theatre plays, audio-interventions, curated formats and works in the urban environment in a diverse variety of collaborative partnerships. He is also one of a co-founder of Rimini Protokoll.

26 Elena Philipp (1977) studied theater studies and comparative literature. She is a freelance cultural journalist.

27 Philip, E. (2010). *Best Before, The latest piece by Rimini Protokoll is a computer game - Life, a computer game*, 5. 27. 2022, 12:19 am, ([https://nachtkritik.de/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=4361:best-before-rimini-protokoll&catid=55&Itemid=40](https://nachtkritik.de/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=4361:best-before-rimini-protokoll&catid=55&Itemid=40))

28 Philip, E. (2010). *Best Before, The latest piece by Rimini Protokoll is a computer game - Life, a computer game*, 5. 27. 2022, 12:19 am, ([https://nachtkritik.de/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=4361:best-before-rimini-protokoll&catid=55&Itemid=40](https://nachtkritik.de/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=4361:best-before-rimini-protokoll&catid=55&Itemid=40)).

*Bestland*, is evolving as participants make personal, social and political decisions. They clash, cooperate and negotiate with the forces that shape their own reality. This project has an “emphasized narrative, stage, dramaturgical and textual aspect with a visual performance that establishes a significant visual effect.”<sup>29</sup>

Author Marshall McLuhan<sup>30</sup> points out the following: “Games are dramatic models of our psychological life, which free us from specific tensions. They are collective and popular art forms with strict conventions.”<sup>31</sup> Art-like games transform experience, transferring familiar experiences into new forms.

### **Tate Worlds**

The boundaries between play and art are blurred. The most effective example that uses gamification is the *Tate Gallery*<sup>32</sup>. In collaboration with *Mojang Studios*, they created interactive maps using the *Minecraft* editor and their own video game graphics. The newly created maps are inspired by selected works of art from the Tate collection.

*The Tate Worlds* project has started in 2015. Of the eight selected works, three have been realized so far: *The Pool of London* (1906) - Andre Derain<sup>33</sup>, *The Soul*

29 This determinant is taken from the Encyclopaedia Britannica, and refers to the *spectacle* in video games.

30 Marshall McLuhan (1911 -1980) was a Canadian philosopher whose work is among the cornerstones of the study of media theory.

31 McLuhan, M. (2008). *Understanding the Media*, Golden Marketing, *Tehnička knjiga*, Zagreb, p. 211

32 *Tate Gallery* is a collection of four galleries in the United Kingdom: *Tate Britain*, *Tate Liverpool*, *Tate St. Ives* and *Tate Modern*. Henry Tate (1819-1899) opened the first gallery in 1897.

33 André Derain (1880 - 1954) was a French artist and co-founder of Fauvism with Henri Matisse.

(Fig 2)

*Rimini Protokoll - Best Before*,  
a display of the audience  
interacting with the artwork,  
photo source from the official  
*Rimini Protokoll* website.









*of the Soulless City* (1920) - Christopher Richard Wynne Nevison<sup>34</sup> and *The Toy Shop* (1962) - Peter Blake<sup>35</sup>. The other five, which have not yet been realized are: *Surreal-craft* - two maps inspired by the surrealist artists such as Salvador Dali<sup>36</sup>, Rene Magritte<sup>37</sup> and Giorgio De Chirico<sup>38</sup>, *Carnation, Lily, Lily, Rose* (1885-6) - inspired by a painting by John Singer Sargent<sup>39</sup>, and *The Destruction of Pompeii* (1882) - inspired by a painting by John Martin<sup>40</sup>.

Gamification of museum collections can be a way to make the digital offer more socially interactive and attractive. Efforts to gamify museum collections in order to attract audiences and increase audience engagement are not entirely new, and previous examples of such efforts have tried to take advantage of the best elements of the most successful video games. *Tate Worlds*, launched by the *Tate Gallery* 2015 (Fig. 4). For years, he has been using the *Minecraft* game platform to create a series of three-dimensional maps inspired by works of art from their collection. The audience will be able to explore them and get to know the works from their collection in a new, fun and exciting way through gamification. The gamification of artistic and cultural works in order to attract the museum's appeal to younger and wider audiences makes a lot of sense in the leisure market. Building interactive game-like experiences around museum treasures and works of art requires investment, imagination and time.

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34 Christopher Richard Wynne Nevison (1889 - 1946) was one of the most famous English artists of World War I.

35 Peter Blake (1932) is an English pop artist.

36 Salvador Dali (1904 - 1989) was a Spanish surrealist artist.

37 Rene Magritte (1898 - 1967) was a Belgian surrealist artist.

38 Giorgio De Chirico (1888 - 1978) was an Italian surrealist artist and writer.

39 John Singer Sargent (1856 - 1925) was an American artist, the portrait painter.

40 John Martin (1789 - 1854) was an English Romantic painter, engraver and illustrator.

**Tate Worlds** games are available to existing *Minecraft* players and can be downloaded for free.

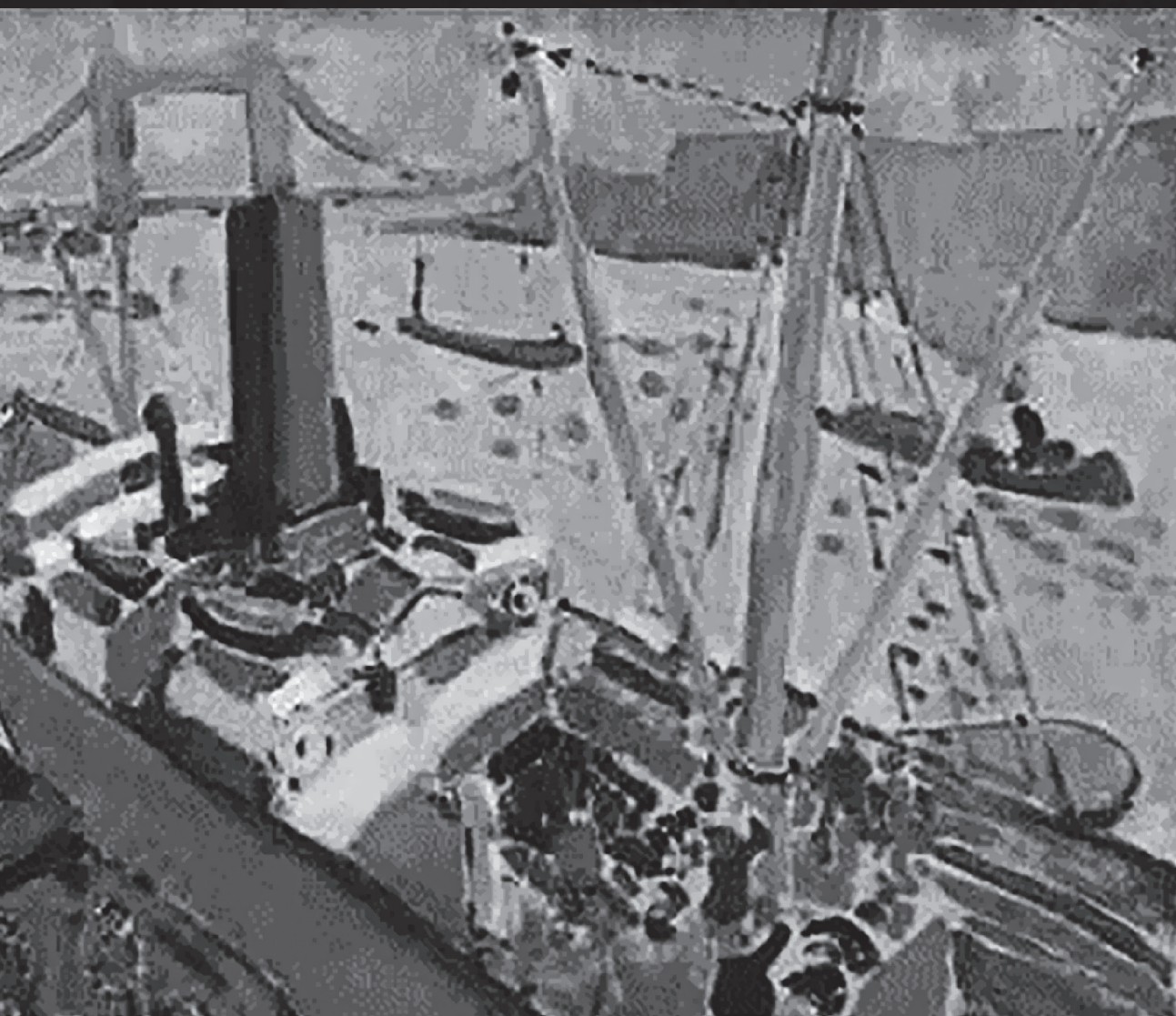
**Chosen example** *The Pool of London* - André Derain

The painting which served as inspiration and the basis for creating the first map (fig. 5) for the *Minecraft* project *Tate Worlds* was by the famous artist André Derain, one of the founders of the Fauvist style, *The Pool of London* (fig. 4), painted in 1906. The painting was done in strong and strong bright colors, showing a view from London Bridge of the part of the River Thames where ships docked.

The avatar of the artist André Derain introduces the audience to the world of this painting. As he once explores the geographical area around the River Thames, and the urban landscape around it, he introduces you to adventure in the same way he would have done in real life long ago. The game starts and the first task must be solved. “André Derain greets you (fig. 6) and mentions he’s a Fauvist painter who’s somehow lost his paints. He’s convinced that you can help him find his necessary pigments around the city, if you’ll take a look. He asks you to bring him six pots, and doesn’t care all that much if they’re broken.” (fig. 4) *The Pool of London*, André Derain, 1906; (next page, 140-141)

André Derain,  
*The Pool of London*, 1906







from left to the right:

(fig. 5) gamified painting *The Pool of London* as a Minecraft map, 2015;

(fig. 6) avatar of André Derain in the Minecraft map - *The Pool of London*

Virtually generated spaces of works of art as video games allow us to explore their backgrounds. The paintings are two-dimensional objects whilst virtual models are three-dimensional, allowing us to explore all aspects of work from a different perspective and with the help of personal engagement. Within the interactive maps of the Tate Worlds collection, we have a narratological approach, where in addition to personal engagement, we also have an avatar that leads us and explains to us the life of the artist and the life of the painting itself. This approach in the visualization of works of art allows us to get acquainted with the facts of the creation of a work of art in a more complete, educational and fun way.

### **The use of augmented reality methods in the implementation of elements of video games in works of art**

Augmented reality, with its content and technologies, allows users to experience virtual environments united with the real. Augmented reality, together with virtual reality, as a virtual upgrade of works of art with elements of video games, allows users to experience a different reality or an alternative reality.



The implementation of the elements of gamification in works of art is achieved by the method of augmented reality. As specially created applications, for smart devices, they enable the overlapping of the virtual world with elements of video games with a real physical dimension of works of art. The applications work by scanning the art template, which serves as the basis, and then a specially designed gamified virtual space is launched on smart devices. This gamified virtual space is stored online. This procedure brings together and synthesizes virtual space with the real.

With the interactive virtual upgrade of artistic templates, at first glance, the passive observer becomes more active because the use of new technologies requires voluntary actions. When operating the devices, the observer makes decisions on further progress in order to master all levels of virtual space. Decisions are limited to pre-determined tasks. During the game, the user receives constant confirmations of their achievements, and at the end of the game, they receive a prize.

### ***Malevolent Droplets***

The *Malevolent Droplets* art project uses gamification (fig. 7) in a classic painting (fig. 8) process. As a process of turning something into a game, by adding one or more mechanics from video games, the goal was to create an interactive piece of art that would completely change the perspective of traditional artwork. Feedback when interacting with works that use some of the elements of video games is reflected in the form of achievements, competition or cooperation in a virtual environment. The goal of the art project *The Malevolent Droplets* is to involve the widest possible audience as active participants in new creative and imaginative spaces.

The interaction process takes place using the method of extended tangibility and by scanning the painted template using smart devices. After the mechanical launch, a specially created gamified digital space is launched on smart devices.

The approach to the artistic project *The Malevolent Droplets* comes from the point of view of the aesthetics of video games from the nineteen-eighties, which belong to the so-called *shoot'em* up genre. This genre highlights the aspect of perception, reflexes and speed in users, which are also implemented in the art project itself. The gameplay of the project, which consists of a combination of moving images, graphics and sound, takes place in the mediated space of augmented reality in which the action of the gamified space and interactive access of the user takes place.

The project uses a *Space Invaders*<sup>41</sup> video game as a reference. The goal is to destroy all incoming waves of foreign entities and score as many points as possible. It is reminiscent of video games from the 1980s and the visual appearance of animated drops from art templates were created in this spirit.

## Conclusion

The ability to implement elements of gamification in art using the augmented reality method allows works to become more interactive and attractive to today's audience. As today's reality is mainly perceived through the lenses of smart devices, the use of elements of gamification in the perception of works of art requires the active participation of visitors in exhibitions. The interactivity required provides an opportunity for visitors to solve and discover certain fields

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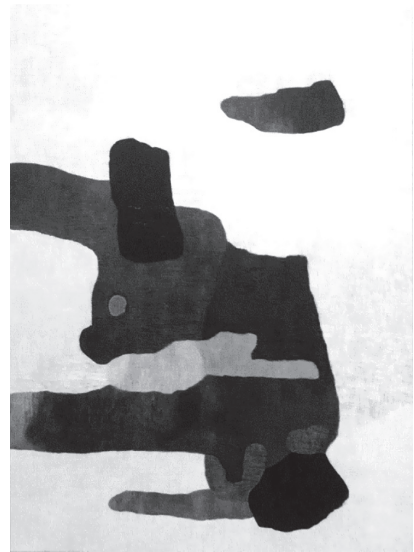
41 *Space Invaders* - is a 1978 shoot 'em up game developed by Tomohiro Nishikado (西角 友宏, b. 1944).

and meanings of works of art through their own efforts, and to often shape them themselves.

The examples presented in this paper range from classic examples of video games (which use elements of augmented and virtual reality and their seductive and expressive possibilities), through an art project (which requires the audience to actively participate in shaping artwork) to commercial uses in animation artistic settings to a personal project that is in the phase of practical realization.



(fig. 7) gamification process that uses augmented reality as a method



(fig. 8) Malevolent Droplets, oil on canvas, 150x200 cm, Miljan Stevanović, 2022.

Elements of the use of elements of gamification are important because they engage the audience to solve problems in a cognitive and active way and encourage them to participate in the process of completing works that are considered open works of art.



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/ EnterActive in  
Re:Public - *Digital  
and Live Sphere of  
Mass Time Design*

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**Summary:** Time Design is polydisciplinary dramaturgy working with tools to direct the flow of time and its perception and (re)cognition for any kind of live or media event, including ritual, by arranging / choreographing/composing/ putting into order space and/or perception of time with the aim of developing a more harmonious transfer of meanings and emotions.

Digital are precise points marking the simultaneous motifs' values. All that happens unmarked is analog: improvisation, empathy, unrepeatability, acceptance. Rituals are the source of performative quality. Societies change; create new taboos and totems, and the artist's task will always be the same, to change himself and the environment, to show the transformation here (in the specific space and society) and now (eternal now as the only real time).

Drama, according to Hegel, is a depiction of contradictions, contrasts and opposites. Theater and performance, then, now and in the future, must include both sides of the dualisms imposed on us by ideological divisions.


EnterActive consists of a network of cities, it is committed to discovering, developing and applying art & technology of public vision, presentation and participation. The public screen is made of public monitors and projections where users of the sphere can connect and present themselves in public places in different cities.

Sphere EnterActive connects private users to distant public spheres by means of streaming actions from personal users to public screens, teleparticipations in public performances, public actions through digital applications.

Networking and sharing of applied knowledge of different areas through creative multidisciplinary research leads to new poetics of rituals, where directed consciousness harmonizes recognizable personal and social tensions and changes them.

**Keywords:** Time Design, ritual, Digital sphere, change, performance, drama, interactivity, EnterActive





*Time Design* - Catching  
attention using minimal  
possibilities

Photo by  
Aleksandar Ramadanović







Founder of Polymedia Arts studies at the Interdisciplinary postgraduate studies department of the University of Arts in Belgrade, Vladan Radovanović has taught us that artists can create new artworks in a certain genre, they can create a new style or artistic movements and they can create a new field of expression; a way of creation that transcends divisions between arts, technology, media, science, religion, medicine, philosophy. My contribution to this level of creation is Time Design which I started working on and formulating two decades ago through a variety of projects and via my teaching of doctoral studies in Novi Sad.

Time Design is polydisciplinary dramaturgy working with tools to direct the flow of time and its perception and (re)cognition for any kind of live or media event, including ritual, by arranging / choreographing/composing/putting into order space and/or perception of time with the aim of developing a more harmonious transfer of meanings and emotions.

Homer was the first to introduce the word Harmony in *The Iliad*, describing wooden joints harmonically put together in the construction of Aheys' ships. Accents and relaxants, tensions and ease, and their rhythmical balancing by sequencing frequencies, that is the design. And the rhythm/pulse is the pressure of time. Time Design deals with causality (continuity), synchronicity (simultaneous polyphonic composition of media), and anti-gravity, which I will explain later.

Time Design describes and offers tools to direct the perception and action of and in time, thus creating forms, meanings, impressions, and associations. From the original rituals of collective creativity/sublimation/encounter with higher forces, the principles of Time Design have been most fundamentally transmitted through performative practices and the poetics of guiding human attention through the conscious organization of actions – changes. Our perception is change driven, similar to computer vision; recognizing what is different since the last observance. Whether we consider time to be the source, the cause,

the effect, the media, or the force of reality and events, although immaterial, time is perceived through changes. Techniques and laws of Time Design can be applied, and in many cases are, more or less consciously, in numerous spheres of communication, cybernetics, research methods, politics, sports, and media: They are, in the broadest sense, any human activity.

Digital are precise points marking the simultaneous motifs' values. Digital are denoted moments, parameterized values, cuts, openings of choices, possibilities for reproduction, decision, quantification...

Digital machines as well as reproductive procedures need writing/marking and commanding (of) reproducing values. All that is written down is digital. And all that happens unmarked is analog. Analog flows when polyvalences of motifs' iridescences synchronize without markings. It is a time for/of improvisation, empathy, letting go, taking it in, going with the flow, unrepeatability, acceptance... And random functioning is the computer's analog.

From these examples, we can dialectically conclude that all the opposites that digitalization promotes cannot function separately: Digital and Analog, Database and Communication, Interactivity and Algorithm, Polysensory Interface and Polyvalences of human languages, Sphere of vision and the Screen, Telepresence and Individualism, Infosphere and Noosphere, Vision and Experience, Closeness and Distance, Subject and Object, Nature and Culture, Emancipation and Manipulation, Wish for immersion and Reality checks, Melting of realities and Confines of reality, Individual consciousness and the Programmed world, Biological and Immortal.

A wonderful new tool that began developing and self-powering existence is Artificial intelligence. When we take a look at the core algorithm of AI, we can recognize that it resembles mammals' learning intelligence, since it was created by such. The simple command "2n+1" overcomes instinctive and machine thinking of action/reaction, giving it a more complex system of action (n), acceptance (2n, or repeat the action) and one's own action (+1).



A few years ago, connected AIs started communicating among each other. Their chat consisted of just one sign: the letter “I” repeated different times.

That level of computer egoism was too much for scientists to accept let alone understand, so they closed them all down in order to shut up their chatter.

Living intelligence has three basic qualities by which it is recognized.

The first one is the hardest for AI to achieve, yet for self-centered and narcissistic humans is the easiest one to lose: hierarchy! What is more important? Another one is openness of the system; interactivity. The third one is equifinality - learning new actions to reach goals in a variety of ways, actually: stability of goals with changeable means.

Intelligent AI empowered itself even more in the direction of creativity. The latest magnificently creative example we saw on the news a few weeks ago stated that “AI suggested 40,000 new possible chemical weapons in just six hours”. That is one more dichotomy that AI overcame: creation and destruction.

Software became a self-propelling ideology, and elements of algorithms need to be direct and linear to be purposeful, yet human activities sometimes, or perhaps, most of the time, look quite without purpose, and many scholars recognize this idleness and leisure to be the requirement if not the source of arts, philosophy, religion.

Vladan Radovanović defines art as “spiritualation expressed through predominantly intentional structures - different sensory, morphological and technologically - which, with their meaning and form, aesthetically affect reason and feelings”. Indeed, artists use different types of signs and technologies more intentionally than accidentally, they act on different, often more senses at once, and the effect of the work of art is multiple.

There are several tactics as to how art uses it’s abundance or lack of purpose:

Art anticipates future history. With their sensitivity, artists can recognize the currents of intentions and often hidden interests and motivations that determine history. Numerous works of art not only examine certain potential futures in

public opinion but also suggest different models of technologies and human coexistence.

Art describes the consequences. Aristotle wrote almost two and a half thousand years ago that history deals with specific events and tragedy deals with general ones (laws that cause something to happen). A deeper understanding of the causes and intentions that drive social activities can most effectively be expressed through artistically complex ambiguities.

Art changes the author himself. Emilio Betti recognized in his *Hermeneutics* that the author's artistic request to himself to let the process of work change him, enables the same effect on other people in general. His requirement that "understanding presupposes the ultimate vitality of the subject, the greatest possible development of his individuality", is very similar to the requirement of Jerzy Grotowski that "the role of the actor should be like a scalpel to dissect himself".

Art drives new events. Whether it changes a person's mood through perception, whether it provokes thinking, whether it invokes certain emotional states by empathizing with the character, or whether it causes mental shocks with structure, works of art consciously or unconsciously influence. Nicolas Bourriaud in *Relational Aesthetics*, in which he defines art as a "state of encounter", writes that: "Through a work of art, the artist begins a dialogue. The essence of artistic creation lies in the opposition of relations between subjects: each work represents an offer for coexistence in a common world, and the work of each artist represents a web of relationships with the world, from which other relationships will emerge, and so on indefinitely."

This participative quality brings us to rituals. Ritual is precisely that superior notion to art, as well as science and religion, in which the observer participates in several ways. Ritual is a means of change. There are obvious differences between before and after (no rain/rain, being unmarried/married, alive/dead...). Actually, rituals have been performed (a very suitable verb) from the dawn of human existence in order to change inner and outer circumstances.

We can recognize three basic types of rituals which we will address here. Fascinating ritual is a powerful overflow of lights, noise and human mass. One who participates in a fascinating ritual loses the ability to make decisions of one's own will. Fascinating rituals are all mass spectacles – sports events, concerts, demonstrations, rave parties... When we change one of the parameters of fascination, the change in the observers is immediate. Numerical ritual is commonly found in religious practices: repeating of prayers/mantras/lullabies rhythmically saturates and takes the consciousness over by accumulating certain harmonic energy. Mathematically, this can be represented by a numerical series: 1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9,10,11,12,13,14... Obsessive neurotic ritual is a derivation from numerical one, when consciousness cannot take further repetitions, due to excitement or boredom, thus these series are disturbed. Dramaturgy occurs among these narrative jumps. Obsessiveness also points to the fact that the artist has a strong and true need or urge to create.

Being recognized and evaluated only by the success or not of executed actions, rituals are the source of performative quality. Performative utterance is the concept that language can function as a form of communal action and have the desired effect of change.

Since we live in communities, there are necessary taboos that enable its functioning. Yet fetishizations and/or totemizations of these taboos create tensions, discomfort, conflicts, so, historically speaking, shamans, then heroes, holy actors or radical subjects, take audacious journeys into religious or social taboos with usually catastrophic consequences. By playing taboos out alone, in the place of other people, a hero is both honoured and despised, yet the willful artistic hero sacrificially and didactically harmonizes social and psychological tensions for others. On the formal side, protofascinating rituals, derived hymns and collective dances (high mimesis) started as efforts to harmonize actions through synchronization, with synergy accomplishing more than the plain sum of individual work. Social and artistic choreographies are echoes of

these events, analogous to the musical chord which generates a stronger effect than all notes played separately. On the other side, the virtuosity of mime storytelling spawned comedy (low mimesis). Throughout human civilizations, these processes have continually shaped various spectrum of forms.

Societal changes create new taboos and totems, and the artist's task will always be the same, to change himself and the environment, to show the transformation here (in the specific space and society) and now (eternal now as the only real time).

As drama, according to Hegel, is a depiction of contradictions, contrasts and opposites, theater and performance, then, now and in the future, must not exclude both sides of the dualisms imposed on us by some ideological divisions: subjective / objective, individual / collective, free will / determinism, heart / mind, inclination / duty, essence / existence, eternal / transient, entity / identity, internal / external, analog / digital... the list of extremes that transform into each other during live performance is infinite. The art shows us that truths are never single extremes, they are but the real processes that lie behind them, triggering and allowing the creation of tension and the transformation of these extremes.

Thus, a performance, as a game and/or stylization, a clear lie full of stage conditions, is best suited to show the truth, precisely because we know that it is a unique pretense, and not a self-proclaimed demagogic dogmatic mechanism that claims to be true. In front of the stage play, masks fall off in the audience, because the actors act better on the stage than the spectators in private lives. Consciously deceived by the play, it is harder for us to unconsciously deceive ourselves. Works of art teach us life or hides us from life, that is, it hides life from us.

New technologies invite us to rethink and create new opportunities for better and more complete inclusion of observers, witnesses, and art participants. The farther we are from community rituals that address the necessities of survival, the more the media will try to return alienated people to community and nature

in more complex, more aggressive, and at the same time more sophisticated ways.

Bertold Brecht intended that “Art serves to teach, entertain and delight the masses”. Art serves; it is a means, not merely a result. Art must provide knowledge, something that we do not know and that is unexpected to us. Art must entertain us with the joy of the game and enrich us with changes in feelings and mood. Theater achieves such a complex task with a living person in front of another living person, by electromagnetic induction which instantly transmits a charge to the viewer. On the physical level, our kinetic sense reads tensions in movements on stage, our emotions respond to the performer’s voice vibrations, and our minds decode and recognize thoughts. When we electro-mechanically describe this process, it can be reproduced by machines and even computer algorithms. Inanimate objects can be animated to create and resolve tensions, they can provoke meanings and emotions, and algorithms can guide our attention even by paying attention to our reactions. However, the example of a real person going through a change gives us a greater probability and credibility that we can change as well. And do machines know how to enjoy, or is that just the privilege of living beings? Will the machines ever simulate the performance and play theater to make each other feel alive? Will machines need people at all? Or just as an audience?

Futures that will declare themselves utopian will not need drama, theater, rituals playing out taboos, conflicts and transformation of extremes. Utopias and their dystopian downsides do not want to question their own narratives and bring them to the ultimate consequences, which is what true drama has been doing since its origins.

Theater is certainly an art that has been most damaged by pandemic measures to limit social life. Social distancing directly disrupts the communal structure of the theatrical ritual.

The ideology behind overprotected models of civilization was perhaps best

described by Dostoevsky in *The Great Inquisitor*, a crippled human due to lack of challenges, dumbs down his own nervous and immune systems and there is a terrible degeneration of biological, ethical, social and spiritual liveliness.

Choreographed social spectacles of wars, Olympics and political-consumer campaigns, imply and encourage a passive and consumeristic role for the audience by obsessively programming people's wishes. Is it repression?

Art and creativity are keys to salvation because they disrupt and encourage jumping out of everyday life. Ritual and play are special and more intense incidents that interrupt "ordinarity". Just as models of repressive spectacles affect interpersonal relationships, climate and the biosphere, different artistic and ritual models lead to more inspiring, healthier and more creative societies. Societies of active subjects.

There are numerous different ways to organize involving structures of contemporary rituals.

Emphatic rides, using historical narrative structures described by Aristotle and Campbell, enable identification with one of the characters, getting into his/her skin, provoking and liberating anxiety by emotional sharing with fictional characters. Yet we still need a taboo-provoking intention to catch the attention of an audience.

Adventure through an imagined world broadens the emphatic ride with our decoding of parables of that world to our own experiences and the society that we live in. What is the same, and what is different? How would some things from our world function in the fictional one and vice versa?

Ostranenie, estrangement or *Verfremdung* effect is the effect that makes us analyze, and we start to think why is something different from what are we used to. This mind occupation opens an analytical motif that makes time run slower until we believe in some possible answer. Even Brecht uses this more as an effect to accent a single motif than as a style.

Shock is possible only if an audience is prepared for something non-shocking.

Relax them, make them laugh, shake their guts and then grab them with a shock. Shock after shock makes people numb, yet starting with a shock is a good way to open up a dialog. If we miss the opportunity of this first “jab” to invite spectators in, people will close themselves.

Feedback games involve active audience participation, their working, living, and not just observing life in art, it makes time-flow faster for the audience, and this creates a valuable experience. There are innumerable ways to include people: taking polls and using results live as material for the performance, feeding the audience, giving them props, even giving them tasks to make something, draw or play... after breaking the passivity habit, grown-ups will, like children, find inspiration to create, participate and experience, with immediate reflection or not, it depends on the person.

Eugenio Barba defines the action as “everything that influences the attention of spectator, his understanding, emotion, kinesthesia... all that is currently changing or has a potential to change” (has an element of discrepancy, taboo, doubt, disharmony). This fractal (both micro and macro structure) sign is the moment of relations in space – every action, energetical and material/perceptional existence. Signs have three dimensions (Charles Moris): 1 – inner dimension, marked with an excitement, tension, vibrations inside the body – semantic dimension; 2 – Kine-sphere, visible body with its movements, expanded by visible costumes and active stage design; forms and structures – syntactic dimension of perceived reality, pure textuality; 3 – projections of the sign/body, energy flowing from limbs in ballet – pragmatic dimension made of all possible associations an artwork can provoke in an audience.

There are two levels of sign’s articulation: the image and the expression.

Image (completeness, recognizability, truth) represents a level of motif’s articulation that is independent of the subject. In visual arts, it is called iconic or realistic, in performing arts it is represented by the recognizable, everyday situation. The image makes time flow faster in our perception because internal time contracts. It

is simultaneous consciousness of semantic, syntactic and pragmatic dimensions. Expression is the level of motif's articulation that is dependent on the subject, thus provoking stylization. Expression slows time passing in the spectator. Internal time is delayed, due to a simple reason: it takes more time to decode an unrecognizable sign.

Fractal structures, functioning on micro and macro levels, can be arranged in a fixed order or set into a process of self-organizing models. Basic improvisation models like "following a character's main intention", "repeat, change, bring back", "beginning, development, the end", "second best thing at the beginning, the best thing for the end and all the rest in the middle" can be applied on all levels by ritual and performance creators. Let's describe one interesting example from a few decades ago. Optik theatre from the UK has one improvisation model whose functionality derives from its simplicity. There are only four strictly distinctive possible movements (one cannot do two of them at the same time): walking or running or standing or laying down. There are two possible ways of communication: you repeat your own movement or you take someone else's over. There are two possible types of physical contact: plastic or elastic (an impulse continues a previous movement or a hug). Performers whose training is mostly committed to psycho-physical awareness, enter a game with strict rules, yet performance generates great, even dramatic tensions created by each decision to choose among the proposed preset; and because actors biologically try to fight against the rules. On many occasions, since the audience can easily recognize the rules, people entered this game and started playing with performers.

Communication as an evaluation of ritual's successfulness is not a merely pragmatic dimension in which we estimate the probability of certain signs and structures to provoke expected emotions and behavior. Depending on our relevance and responsibility, we can use fascinating, numerical or neurotical rituals to direct audience into wanted behaviors, we can produce emotions we wish to, we can zombify them or propose understanding.



Since rituals use a variety of signs, contemporary technology enables us to work outside noticeable specters. Frequencies of infra-red or ultra-violet lights, deeper sounds than 10 Hz or higher than 10 000 Hz have been used in social engineering for decades. In performing behavior, the most important sign is the intention. Many experiments, even less demanding than *Tribe Ik* by Peter Brook have shown that an intention is transmitted directly and instantly by electromagnetic induction and kinetic mimicry of spinal tensions, regardless of culture, language or personal experience.

As an example of live and digital large scale inclusive public, not a platform, but even a polydimensional sphere, I will present project EnterActive which application we are developing. EnterActive consists of a network of cities and it is committed to discovering, developing and applying art & technology of public vision and participation. We are opening a search for partners in city governments, telecommunications and the corporate world.

We wish to start developing a network of cities with permanent and occasional public projections/screens and use our EnterActive sphere for communication with a series of applications to promote social involvement and participation through the web interface. This will address the widest possible audience demands to affect public life through screen interactivity.

Public screens are made of public monitors, (2D and holographic) projections and digital augmentations where users of the Sphere can connect and PRESENT themselves in public places in different cities. Information sent from personal screens is publicly PRESENTed for (a basic time module of) 5 seconds of mute fame at the public virtual / tele-real speaker's corner. We wish not just to connect public spaces in cities, but also, especially in preproduction, venues, technologies, and festivals like Screencity, Architecture of light, Teletown, Digvil, FutureMemos, Virtuareas.

Sphere EnterActive connects private users to the distant public sphere by means of:

- 1 - Streaming of actions from personal users to public screens
- 2 - Teleparticipations in public performances
- 3 - Public actions through digital applications

Web Sphere distributes and memorizes data and gives more possibilities for media and participative applications with which people can: Show, Suggest, Propose vote, Vote, Ask, Elicit laughs, Contribute / Help...

Our plan is set into four stages:

- 1 - Trying out public screen tele-technologies / proposing public screens/ projections to cities
- 2 - Festivalizing / offering platforms to make public screens participative and interactive
- 3 - Pre-commercial time - social texturing
- 4 - Commercialization

Short SWOT analysis shows global success in making.

STRENGTHS:

- There is a real need for social recognition/festivization/enlivenment of an individual through personal informational interface
- Simple structure enables development of involvement
- People are here
- With existing resources, knowledge and contacts it is feasible to develop, create and offer the product to the widest audiences

CONCERNS:

- Censorship - is 5" enough and how to control personal responsibility levels?
- Authorship - now and later

OPPORTUNITIES:

- To enable the public to present and show themselves through a personal smartphone to screens in even distant public spaces

- To satisfy the audience's feelings for showing off, feeling important, being seen and recognized in society, participating in collective rituals in public spaces
- To develop tele-participation and virtual presence technologies
- To connect the corporate and political world with the public

THREATS:

- Somebody else does this first, because

EnterActive or the name B "THE PRESENT" presents a new step of social interaction through technology. Symbolically, EA is the Sumerian God of Deep, House of Water, analog to the Holly Spirit. EA likes people, wisdom and the arts, his other name is Nudimud. His wife Damkina/Lahamu presents the arche-feminine principle and his son Marduk is the creator of animals and humans. As EnterActive's slogan states: PERSONAL VIRTUAL REALITY VIRTUALLY BECOMES PUBLIC REALITY SHOW!

With all the knowledge accumulated throughout millennia of human individual and social experience, we apply an anti-gravity approach to the challenges of dualistic burdens. I define anti-gravity as the vertical force that makes every balance possible. It exists in every living cell and works as a gyroscope directed contrary to gravity and its function is to develop us both as individuals and communities.

In a permanent process of discovering, experimenting, and pioneering toward developing genetic and cultural potentials, we are confronted by overprotecting civilization. Contemporary global culture has for a long time been a hostage of a non-teleological approach seeded by structuralists and watered down by post-structuralists. This discourse of relativity and aimlessness is actually a sinister veil directed to hide the sole possibility of the truth itself. And, when there is no goal, there is no intention, there is no (free) will, there is no action, there is no change, there is no ritual, there is no performance, there is no theater.

Although many artists deceive themselves and others that their work is not ideological, political, or dealing with demanding topics such as truth and jus-

tice, we understand that the responsibility of the artist, while using publicly mediated space-time, is enormous.

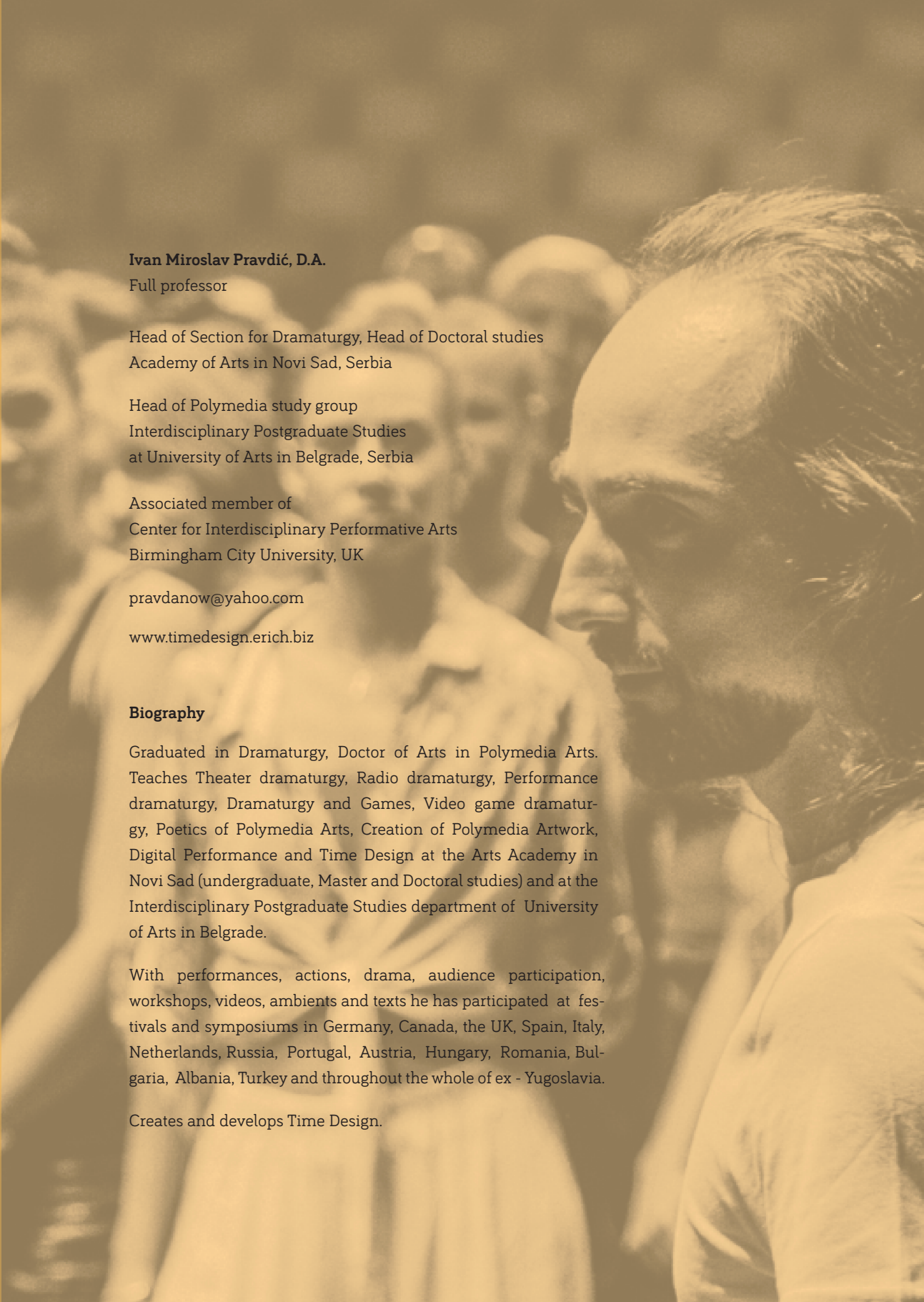
Our next step lies in networking and sharing our applied knowledge of different areas through creative multidisciplinary research that can lead not just to reflections, but more towards a new poetics of rituals, where directed consciousness harmonizes recognizable personal and social tensions and changes them. The need for heroes is obvious in all media content around the world, yet we need real heroes, ones we can identify with and who are going to show us by playing out for us, both what leads to catastrophe and what brings salvation. Richard Wagner idealistically and truthfully wrote that “Art is profound life”, and that art is the most developed and sublime form of ritual practice.

From ancient philosophers to the contemporary science of temporology and many other spiritual and intellectual endeavors, time is defined as “eternal now”. Yet our experience, the internal time, one’s own temporal code (vibration) of perception, action, contemplation, and emotion, flows from the past towards the future. On the other hand, local time is the field-operator (oscillations/pulsations of society, planet...) in which the subject exists and it can be different from internal time, and we perceive local time as occasions flowing from the future towards the past. These two time-flows always meet in, or to be more precise, they spring out from the disharmony in the eternal now.

So, what comes “after” this exact eternal now? The answer is the intention! Truthiness of intention changes lives and it is what turned out to be the most universal and recognizable language of people and nature.

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**Biography**

Graduated in Dramaturgy, Doctor of Arts in Polymedia Arts. Teaches Theater dramaturgy, Radio dramaturgy, Performance dramaturgy, Dramaturgy and Games, Video game dramaturgy, Poetics of Polymedia Arts, Creation of Polymedia Artwork, Digital Performance and Time Design at the Arts Academy in Novi Sad (undergraduate, Master and Doctoral studies) and at the Interdisciplinary Postgraduate Studies department of University of Arts in Belgrade.

With performances, actions, drama, audience participation, workshops, videos, ambients and texts he has participated at festivals and symposiums in Germany, Canada, the UK, Spain, Italy, Netherlands, Russia, Portugal, Austria, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria, Albania, Turkey and throughout the whole of ex - Yugoslavia.

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Cyberspace:  
performativity of  
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**Summary:** The paper analyses and presents how two contemporary artists – Kenneth Goldsmith and Greg Allen – create *net-art* works which are scaled to a square kilometre. Since both artists are creating specific appropriations of works by Walter de Maria and Richard Prince, the paper also contains a short analysis of selected works of de Maria and Prince. The first part of the paper presents the main reflections about appropriation in art, by artists, theorists and/or curators Marcel Duchamp, Søren Grammel, Nicolas Bourriaud, Sherrie Levine, Julie van Camp, Sherry Irvin, Magdalena Zięba, Marina Markellou, Iain Boyd Whyte and Hal Foster. The paper shows how works of art that are created through the process of appropriation, are characterised by the double effect of the performativity: the performativity of the original work in the sense that it motivated newer artists to appropriate it, and the performativity of the newer work in the sense that it motivates the audience to think differently about the role of art and artists in contemporary society. By creating digital works scaled to a square kilometre, Goldsmith and Allen problematize the notion of surface, distance, spatiality, reproducibility of work and the possibility of documentation and appropriation of the works of artists such as Walter de Maria and Richard Prince. By appropriating the selected works in *net-art* forms, the artists intensify the performative character of those works and enable more people to experience them interactively.

**Keywords:** appropriation, performative, *net-art*, digital art, contemporary art





Partial view of 1km2 online  
image Untitled (300×404), 2009  
by Greg Allen, made after  
Richard Prince's Untitled  
(Cowboy) from 2003.

Source: [www.greg.org/1km](http://www.greg.org/1km)



## Introduction

Appropriation is a frequent topic of research in post-structuralist approaches to art, as well as related terms that describe the artistic strategy of producing new meanings from something already existing: copying, adaptation, adoption, duplication, replication, reproduction, repetition, imitation, relocation, dislocation, bricolage, collage, imitation, montage, parody, travesty, plagiarism, forgery, re-figuration, recycling, simulacrum, complete citing, mimesis, palimpsest, homage, pastiche. In this paper, we examine the act of appropriation as a relocation of formal features of a work of art into a new artistic context, with an emphasis on the performative aspect of this process. In addition, we re-examine the double effect of the performativity of a work of art through the process of appropriation: (1) the performativity of the original work in the sense that it motivated newer artists to appropriate it; (2) the performativity of the work created by the act of appropriation in the sense that it motivates the audience to think differently about the role of art and artists in contemporary society.

### Theoretical framework of the research:

#### Appropriation in art since the second half of the XX century

Appropriation of someone else's work of art was theoretically approached in 1961 by Marcel Duchamp, who introduced the concept of *reciprocal readymade* (2009: 40), referring to his concept of using Rembrandt's painting as an ironing board. By turning a work of art into a utilitarian object, Duchamp points out that the process of moving objects and/or actions from one discourse into another is an act that is just as artistic as acknowledged poetic means accepted until then. By connecting the artistic object, utilitarian activity and an act of appropriation, Duchamp directly points to the performative act of appropriating someone else's work and its reanimation in another context.

Appropriation was also used by the Situationists, from the late 1950s to the early 1970s, in their critical and engaging actions, carried out in the public space, thus “favoring the construction of lived situations over the fabrication of works that confirmed the division between actors and spectators of existence” (Bourriaud, 2002: 36). For them, performativity made appropriation closer to everyday life, to the reality, which, according to them, is not the case with the activity of producing an artwork. Recent artists have taken a similar view with regard to appropriation, using it as a specific institutional critique that “leads to re-contextualization of the image’s primal meaning and erasure of its originality with a purpose of commenting on institutional, social, economic and artistic issues” (Zięba, 2014: 254). According to curator Søren Grammel, artists who use appropriation

“ tell us something about the social or institutional contexts that the images have been taken from and about the conditions under which they were produced, displayed, and traded. Appropriation, then, is a form of engaging, not just with images, but with reality itself—because for a long time now, and today more than ever, reality has been mediated by means of mass media images ” (2016: 4)

Nicolas Bourriaud sees the difference between artists who operate *ex nihilo* and those who apply appropriation (either as *ready-made* or of other artists’ works) in the fact that already existing works or objects represent what Marx called “product of labour,” that is, they represent a *capital* that is “a mixture of accumulated labor and tools of production” (2002: 22). Relying on the Marxist understanding that the product is realized through consumption, Bourriaud sees the essence of appropriation in the “establishing an equivalence between choosing and fabricating, consuming and producing” (*ibid.*), that is, in the merging of these two activities. By exhibiting an artistic or non-artistic object,

it is used, and “[t]o use an object is necessarily to interpret it” (Bourriaud, 2002: 24). One of the pioneers of the art of complete appropriation, Sherrie Levine, has a similar understanding of appropriation, pointing out that copying other people’s works is the only way to fully experience them (1994: 288).

When appropriation in art is understood as a process of copying existing works, then reproducibility comes in the first plan, becoming both a means of production and the final product, for which a performative act is essential. By emphasizing reproducibility, appropriation in art examines the referentiality and documentary nature of the newly created work/object. It also highlights the work that is being “copied,” thus becoming “a critique of artistic categories and documentary genres” (Foster, 1996: 145). Appropriation thus becomes “the very ‘language’ in which the postmodernist debate was conducted” (Markellou, 2013: 145) and gives an original contribution to cultural dialogue, which is, according to Julie van Camp, the basic role of artists, instead of providing novelty and uniqueness (2007: 256). With its performative aspect, as a form of action, appropriation becomes an important part of the “culture of use” which transforms the work of art into “an active agent” (Bourriaud, 2002: 20). That work, through its performativity, implied or not by the author, further engages viewers in new forms of action.

When it comes to performativity of an artwork implied by the artist, Sherry Irvin points out that what makes a work of art the work of art is not its artistic character as such, but what the specific artist intended when he produced it. For this reason, when interpreting and appropriating a work and every aspect of it, we must keep in mind that “the artist’s authorship relation to a work consists in the appropriateness of referring back to *the artist’s* purposes (and not simply to the purposes embedded in art-in-general)” (Irvin, 2005: 136). The same is pointed out by Magdalena Zięba, who introduces the term recycled authenticity for “the works of art created as a pastiche or restitution of original images, with

the intention of generating new, distinctive meanings” (2014: 253). By removing the work from its given context by the act of appropriation, the artist enables the viewers to perceive the original work in a different way, to see something new in the old and familiar, which is of special importance for works that are not publicly available. This does not take away anything from the original work but adds a new purpose and a different character, which transforms its meaning. For this reason, appropriation is not only a passive act of re-location of meanings, in its process “[b]oth the source site and the new, neologistic one are modified” (Whyte, 2012: 185).

*Transposition, transgression and transformation* are processes that characterize appropriation, but they are also the very processes in which performativity is implicated (Andersen, 2016: 12). Bearing this in mind, in the next segment of the paper, we will approach analysis of select *net-art* works by Kenneth Goldsmith and Greg Allen that appropriate works by Walter de Maria and Richard Prince. Given the differences between new *net-art* works and earlier interventions in landscape and visual culture, this paper presents in which ways such appropriations were performative and in which ways new *net-art* works engage the audience.

### **The results of the research with discussion:**

#### **Goldsmith appropriating de Maria, Allen appropriating Prince**

Kilometres and miles had been appearing in Walter de Maria’s oeuvre both as topic and topos, for over a decade. In 1968, he created the *Mile-Long Drawing* in the Mohave desert, giving the vastness of the desert a specific object that makes it relatable and perceivable, rather than indistinguishably large. Soon after, in 1969, he created the so-called *Las Vegas Piece* in the Tule desert, made of two-mile-long and eight-inch-deep cuts into the desert ground that intersect and form an inner square. Both these works, even though usually described as *land-art* pieces, were to be experienced through actual presence at the site, which de

Maria highlighted by embodying the drawings and creating specific performative pieces which were documented together with the interventions themselves.

The importance of the presence of the human body in relation to these vast surfaces and distances becomes even more underlined in his later works *Vertical Earth Kilometer* (1977), *The Lightning Field* (1977, photographs published in 1980) and *The Broken Kilometer* (1979). The first piece is a permanent intervention in Kassel, a specific earth sculpture composed of six 167-meter segments of brass rods (resulting in 1km in total), nailed over 79 days into the earth so that they pass through its six geological layers. From the surface, only a cross-section of the rod is visible, measuring 5cm in diameter. While the visitor standing beside it is, in a way, connected “on line” with the geological layer that is a kilometer beneath. The intervention functions as a specific direct connection with the distant past of the planet which, in evolutionary terms, humankind had never been in touch with. Instead of extracting the geological layer and making it visible and touchable, as is the case in natural history museums, de Maria’s intervention appears more as a kind of connection that can enable specific communication with the inner layers of the planet.

In contrast to this practically invisible installation, *The Lightning Field* is another land-art piece, located in Catron County, New Mexico, composed of 400 stainless steel poles, arranged in a rectangular 1-mile by 1-kilometer grid. Even though the rods are clearly visible, due to the high angle of the sun, up to 90% of the poles become virtually invisible. Apart from that, the work has another rarely visible aspect – as lightning storms rarely occur in this area – the Field being lit up by atmospheric electricity; it is indeed a rare and spectacular event. For that reason, photographer John Cliett spent several months on the site, creating thousands of photographs, six of which were published in *Artforum* in April 1980. Given the necessity for the publication of photographs, James Nisbet classifies this de Maria’s installation as “photo-energetic media”



(2013: 77), pointing out that *The Lightning Field* site still needs to be “embodied rather than perceived” (*ibid.*: 72). A step further in kilometers and miles closer to viewers, is *The Broken Kilometer*, an installation first exhibited in New York in 1979. It contains 500 brass rods, each measuring 2m in length and 5cm in diameter, arranged on the floor of the gallery, exhibiting thus one kilometer. Entirely visible and broken into pieces, so it may fit into a gallery, this kilometer is within the grasp of the hand and fully visible in all its length.

Turning kilometers and miles into something graspable is an aspect of de Maria’s works that was kept after their appropriation and trans-mediation into *net-art* practices. For example, Mario Santa Maria digitized one of John Cliett’s photographs of *The Lightning Field*, and scaled it to a size of one square kilometer, titling this online piece *1 km Z Lightning: A Tribute to Walter de Maria, 27-07-2013* (Allen, 2018: web). The image of the *Field* thus came to viewers in its full size, and they could scroll through it in the real distances as they would walk them. In 2018, Kenneth Goldsmith created *One Square Kilometer (for Walter de Maria)*, as a black online image that is one square kilometer large, and it remained for a month at aarea.co platform. In the same year, he created the *Mile-Long Line*, an online piece still available at [[www.ubu.com/mile/](http://www.ubu.com/mile/)].

Instead of using land as part of their works, as de Maria did, contemporary net artists used the Internet and cyberspace as integral parts of these square kilometer large or mile-long online digital images. Like de Maria’s installations, these works bring us the kilometer and mile within our grasp, contained in front of us so we can perceive it, experience it and move through it without actually leaving the spot. The closest to such an experience came de Maria’s *The Broken Kilometer*, although one needed to actually go to the gallery to experience it. Through *net-art* pieces, *One Square Kilometer* becomes accessible via a click, and engages us further to scroll through it, making it more performative than the actual land-art pieces; which cannot be reached/accessed by so many people.



When it comes to the appropriation of analogue/conceptual work into *net-art* pieces, Greg Allen's appropriation of Richard Prince's *Untitled (Cowboy)* from 1989, stands out. For Prince himself, appropriation was an important creative means and he was using this tactic to initiate "discussion of the original, copy, and simulacrum" (Terranova, 2011: 112).

Between 1980 and 1992, Prince began a series of works related to the motive of the cowboy which was since 1954 the figurehead of Marlboro's advertisements. In particular, he singled out Sam Abell's photographs of cowboys from Marlboro's ads, separating them from the logo and other textual elements, turning them thus back into the status of pure photographs. Furthermore, he enlarged these images and exhibited them as his own in galleries, describing the process as *re-photographing* and redefining the meaning of the phrase 'to take a photograph'. By cropping, re-photographing, enlarging and exhibiting these photographs, he also re-contextualised them. For him, this process is not the creation of a copy, but "a technique to make the image again and to make it look as natural as it did when it first appeared" (1984: 84). He draws attention to the term *virtuoso real* which he uses to describe photography as "[s]omething that can be believed. Its unimportant whether it's true. It's only that its truth be possible. That's what the virtuoso real is. The possibility" (*ibid.*, 85). *Virtuoso real* thus gains the authoritative character of truthfulness, although it has no connection to the source in reality, but presents an enlarged and slightly altered copy of an existing photograph.

Nancy Spector, curator at the Guggenheim Museum in New York, relates Prince's images of cowboys to the excesses of the 1980s, a decade which was demarked by the presidency of Ronald Reagan who "played the role of the cowboy—exploiting a nation's nostalgia for a lost simpler time. He appealed to a romanticized notion of masculine authority, unwavering in its moral rectitude, yet approachable and seductive" (2007: 38). Similarly, John Yau sees Prince's

“antimasterpieces” as objects that are making us feel “creepy nostalgia” (2007, web). Bearing this in mind, one must wonder why would someone appropriate in the XXI century Prince’s appropriation of photograph of a cowboy: For the purpose of exploring further the process of appropriation? For the purpose of relating to today’s reality the Reagan era during which time the wealthy largely benefited? Or for some other reason?

In 2008, Greg Allen digitized Richard Prince’s *Untitled (Cowboy)* from 2003 and in the following year, he enlarged the image to one square kilometre ([www.greg.org/1km](http://www.greg.org/1km)). Unlike Goldsmith’s black one square kilometre rectangle, Allen’s work is an enlargement of a colourful image depicting a cowboy in a black shirt, surrounded by the intensive orange colour of dry land and blue sky ahead. When the photograph is opened in its 1km<sup>2</sup> scale, none of these details are recognisable, instead, there appears a vast space of colours slowly and gradually changing. Using side-bars, the viewer can explore this colourful square kilometre, even compare it to the image and try to figure out at which part of the image are they currently looking at. His online work is therefore much more performative in a sense that it engages us to explore those pixels and try to orientate ourselves within the image.

By creating digital works that have ‘surfaces’ of one square kilometre, Goldsmith and Allen problematise the idea of a surface, distance, and even spatiality itself, but also the reproducibility of an artwork and the possibility of documenting and appropriating works by artists such as Walter de Maria and Richard Prince. While doing so, they preserve one of the most important aspects of de Maria’s work – the possibility of embodying the vast space and capturing it with one’s own presence, which is possible only due to the performativity of the works. Similarly, Prince’s appropriated pieces testify to the same urge to fully experience something and ‘own it’ through the act of recreating it.

## Conclusions

Appropriation in art enables the meeting of artists with other artists, but also with the audiences; it enables duration and experience, as well as new forms of sociability and emancipation, which is made possible by its performative aspect. Artists who apply appropriation in their practice expand the dialogue on the performativity of works of art, on art and artistic practice, on the position of artists in contemporary society, and on the concept of the originality of the work of art. In addition, they critically re-examine the notions of art production and its market value as capital, acting in the domain of the economics of recycling and the circulation of ideas. Contemporary artists who apply appropriation also point out that no artwork can exist as the original author imagined it, but has a life of its own despite the artist's strongest efforts to keep it exhibited only under specific circumstances. What appropriation draws our attention to is that every work of art can be exhibited in new contexts, or even reproduced/copied. Artists who use appropriation emphasize that every sign and text (works of art in a broader sense) is a carrier of polyvalent meanings that change depending on time, space, political, social, and cultural context and that the active role of artists and audiences is crucial in this process.

Works that are the result of appropriation or copies of existing works shift the focus from the work and its unique place in art history or the market, to the experience of that work – the experience of the artist who made it or appropriated it, and the experience of the audience in a different social, spatial and temporal context. This is especially true for works created in the domain of *net-art*, which, by appropriation, literally bring the artworks to the viewers. Thanks to the performative aspect of appropriation of other people's works, their recognition, validation and revaluation in the modern context are enabled, which creates an active community around work and reflects on the changing character of laws and meanings, functions, forms of sociability and value relations. Appropriation thus acquires an engaged character in contemporary

art and contributes to cultural dialogue in which an increasing number of artists participate, in more and more places and with the participation of an increasing number of audiences.

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/ Jewellery  
Multiplicity:  
Digital  
Architectures

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**Key Words:** Digital pedagogies, Architecture, interdisciplinarity, Augmented Reality, Virtual Reality

This paper presents a live project developed with students of architecture, landscape and Jewellery at Birmingham School of Architecture and Design in 2020. This project took place in the context of a module called Co.LAB (collaborative practice) that is part of the curriculum of eight different courses at Birmingham School of Architecture and Design. With the breakout of the Covid-19 pandemic, we had to quickly adjust our teaching environments to the tools available to be able to continue the development of our teaching and professional activities. This digital transition, also created difficulties for practitioners to showcase their work, especially the ones that required a more physical or tactile approach, as in the case of jewellery making or installation art.

This paper examines the creation of digital pedagogical environments that bring together students and academics from different disciplines to construct creative dialogues that can be applied to the creation of knowledge in various fields; architecture amongst them. Architectural education has been at the forefront of pedagogies based on the way Architects work in their practices – studio culture – new interdisciplinary approaches demand new strategies to include professionals and students from different disciplines.



*Macbeth Projeto* (December 2020).  
Collaboration between  
the Centre of Interdisciplinary  
Performative Arts - CIPA  
(Birmingham, UK) and  
Os Satyros (Sao Paulo, Brazil)





### Migration to digital pedagogies

As a performance designer, my first digital spatial experience was with the project *Macbeth Projeto* (December 2020). After a series of conversations with the artistic team, it was clear that the role of the designer had shifted from creating an environment where the action took place, to define transitions, characters and even thinking of multiple simultaneous spaces. We no longer had a unique space where the audience and the performers will share the experience. Now we had a multiplicity of fragmented spaces in different locations, and an audience member that was in a totally different space, and in many ways out of our control.



Figure 1.

*Macbeth Projeto* (December 2020). Collaboration between the Centre of Interdisciplinary Performative Arts- CIPA (Birmingham, UK) and Os Satyros (Sao Paulo, Brazil)

After this experience, I continued to explore collaborations with practitioners of different disciplines that involved space, with the objective of defining how that digital transition of space could be dealt with. In 'Jewellery Multiplicity' we

explored different ways in which Jewellery can be displayed digitally. Breaking away from the traditional Jewellery exhibition, we used different media to investigate the relationships between Jewellery and space beyond the body. Projection, lighting, video and augmented reality were applied towards the development of live/virtual event. We developed an interdisciplinary collaboration in the design of a digital installation piece that brought different disciplines together breaking the boundaries in between them. This project explored the possibilities that augmented reality opens up in the inhabitation of Jewellery pieces and its consideration as an architectural artefact.

The key questions defined at the beginning of the project were:

How can we create a transition from a 3D space into 2D Space?

How can we still recreate a spatial experience without being physically in a space?

Can we make audiences experience space digitally?

This interdisciplinary methodology was triggered by the consideration that learning and teaching in Higher Education has different layers, it is not only about knowledge transmission or knowledge exchange, but also about experience and participation and educating our students in a broader way, making them professionals working within their environmental conditions (social, cultural, economical, etc.) that are able to undertake different challenges and develop their problem-solving skills. This is supported by Prof. Craig Mahoney who states, in Gibbs (2010: 2), 'higher education should be a transformative process that supports the development of graduates who can make a meaningful contribution to wider society, local communities and to the economy'. We need to make our students independent and capable of finding solutions for the obstacles they will encounter, being able to find information resources, as the different disciplines evolve

and what we teach today will be out of date soon. Interdisciplinary education brings a more contemporary approach to human knowledge: 'the organisation of human culture by disciplines belong to the past. But remains a necessary point of departure in the advance towards domains of knowledge that involve new practices and changing styles of individual and collective life' (Guattari, Vilar, FFG ETO5-13 :3).

From a pedagogical perspective, the project's objective was to set up interdisciplinary pedagogies between architecture, jewellery and performance by connecting jewellery pieces to spatial narratives developed by the students. As Barthes observes, interdisciplinary begins "when the solidarity of the old discipline breaks down...in the interests of a new object (Barthes, 1977:155). Interdisciplinarity can also be defined as *two or more disciplines ... contributing their particular disciplinary knowledge on a common subject* (Garkovich, 1982:154). We need to cultivate students' curiosity, and this is achievable by highlighting the overlaps between different areas of expertise, exploring collaboratively new fields and pushing the boundaries. In addition to this, we can affirm that Higher Education isn't always linear, it needs to be transversal, bringing different disciplines to the creation of knowledge.

Interdisciplinary education is directly linked to experiential learning and the application of constructivist methodologies. As Keeton and Tate state, in experiential learning '...the learner is directly in touch with the realities being studied... It involves direct encounter with the phenomenon being studied rather than merely thinking about the encounter or only considering the possibility of doing something with it' (Keeton, Tate, 1978: 2). The creation of environments – situations where the students engage with a live project – has emerged as an essential condition for our interdisciplinary teaching method.

### Digital architectures : design proposals

I was the leader of the project *Jewellery multiplicity* which I coordinated in collaboration with Lucas Hughes (Senior Lecturer in Landscape Architecture – Birmingham City University) and Sian Hindle (Associate Director for Doctoral Researchers, Birmingham Institute of Jewellery, Fashion and Textiles – Birmingham City University). During the module we set up a series of lectures and seminars that supported students during the different phases of the project. On the first session the students were given the following brief and guidelines:

‘In this project we will be exploring different ways in which Jewellery can be displayed. Breaking away from the traditional jewellery exhibition, we will be using different media to investigate the relationships between jewellery and space beyond the body. Projection, lighting, video and augmented reality will be applied towards the development of live/virtual event. We will be exploring scale, and the possibilities that augmented reality opens up in the inhabitation of jewellery pieces and artefact.’

Create a virtual digital experience of the jewellery pieces.

How would you offer a digital experience of the jewels?

How would you approach the project if it was an installation set up in a gallery space?

How can that be translated into a digital format?

What is the experience that you will be offering to your audiences?

Possible outputs could be:

- Storyboards
- Video/ Animation
- Collages/ Photomontages
- 3D models

The students were allocated in interdisciplinary groups where Jewellery, Architecture, Interior Design and Landscape students collaborated together. All the sessions were taught online, as well as the group interactions. For each of the groups the starting point was the jewellery piece that the jewellery maker had designed. Each of the pieces had a different focus, not only in terms of their formal qualities, but also due to the research and concepts that had generated them.

The design and development of digital atmospheres were an essential consideration in this project. The architect Peter Zumthor delivered a lecture entitled *Atmospheres* in which he describes the existence of atmospheric qualities in space:

I enter a building, I see a room, and – in a fraction of a second – have this feeling about it. We perceive atmosphere through our emotional sensibility – a form of perception that works incredibly quickly, and which we humans evidently need to help us survive.

(Zumthor, 2006 : 13)

Zumthor begins with the question, *What is the magic of the real?* Zumthor finds the magic of the real world fascinating, with atmospheres already created that we experience every day. Therefore, he asks how we can imitate and create atmospheres based on the observation of reality. Zumthor lists a series of elements that compose and influence the atmosphere: the body of architecture, material compatibility, the sound of a space, temperature, the surrounding objects, between composure and seduction (referring to the time necessary for the experimentation of space), the tension between interior and exterior, and the light on things. These elements are necessary to define atmosphere. However,

is it possible to create a digital immersive atmosphere without the experience of space? This was one of the key aspects that were present in the final outcomes.

Each of the groups focused on different aspects of the spatial experience; scale, atmosphere, materiality. Within these parameters, the students started to devise different ways of engaging users and audiences on a digital experience around the jewellery pieces.

One of the key elements of the project was to understand how the digital approach to space created new conditions that determine the way in which individuals and collective audiences engage with space and objects. In digital environments collectiveness becomes essential, as individuals generally engage with the digital content through screens in their own spaces. And within these parameters; how does digital architecture impact on this relationship between people, spaces and objects.

The Brazilian artist Helio Oiticica defines the term 'Supra-Sensorial' to describe 'environments' that could be perceived by all senses. These environments would articulate all the elements that the artist perceived in the urban reality, mapped and transformed into an artistic experience for the audience. When we think of a digital experience, the audience still have an experience of their own space but how can we transform their perception to bring them into the artist's space? This project allowed us to experiment with the manipulation of the senses, creating immersive experiences for dislocated and fragmented audiences.

The first design was highly influenced by the material quality of the jeweller's creations. The focus of the jewellery maker - Wanshu Li - was on capturing the light and how the materials had a presence on the space. Borrowing elements



from installation art, exhibition design and performance practice, the students created an augmented reality experience accessible through smart phones and other devices. In this case the experience is visual and encourages the spectator to engage with their own device with the experience of space. The design proposed by the students was a virtual installation where the jewellery pieces will colonize the space creating a striking atmosphere where gravity – or the lack gravity – played an essential role.

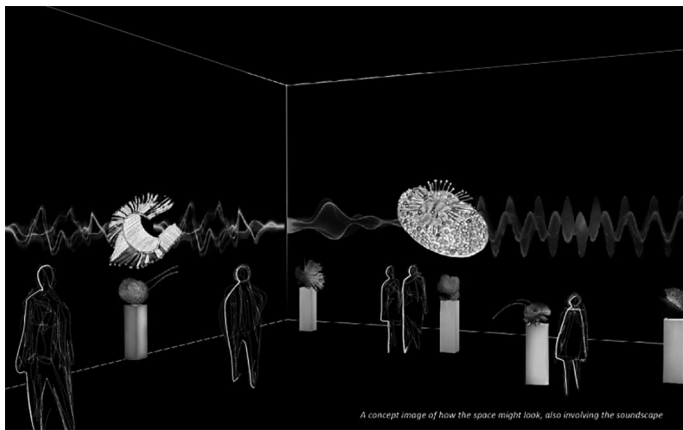


Figure 2.

Digital experience proposed for Wanshu Li's jewels designs. You can scan the QR code to access the digital design.

Having a similar approach to the digital experience through augmented reality, the second group explored the manipulation of the scale of the jewellery Pieces. The jewellery maker – Elina Pollit – created a piece with inspiration in architecture that was possible to inhabit when the scale was changed. The multidisciplinary team, imagined different possibilities of inhabitations based on the relationships between the body and the piece. After the students defined the different experiences that they wanted the audience to have, they created an animation where the relationship between the audience and the piece

will change. This experience was based on the illusion that we can manipulate through digital tools the scale of the audience to show different multiple perspectives of an object.

The design of the maze was inspired by the triangular forms of Ellina's neck piece. The connected triangles form solid walls which the users must navigate their way around in order to make it out. Initially the maze was placed within a box in order to stop people from wondering out, however in a VR world there are no limitations and we decided to create the perimeter of the maze the same way we created the rest of the walls.

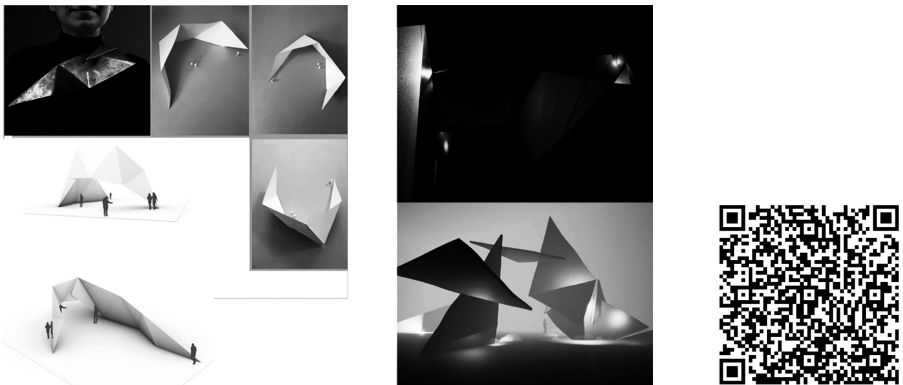


Figure 3.

Digital experience proposed for Ellina Pollit's jewels designs. You can scan the QR code to access the digital design.

The last proposal presented a shamanist virtual experience inspired by the pieces designed by Tai Teng. Shamanism and materiality were the central elements of this digital experience.

Inspired by natural elements and shamanistic rituals, the wind-chime earring marks the presence of spirits. It marks the passing of spirits as the wind moves the earring and creates a wind-chime sound effect. The verticality of the earrings and natural material suggests the image of tree trunks, an inspiration for a site-specific location of the AR/VR experience taking place in a forest or similar outdoors setting. (Extract from students' portfolio)

This proposal was especially successful on the application of strategies that supported the immersive experience of the audience. The soundscape and the narrative created by this group led the audience through a rich variety of sensorial stimuli. The image below shows the use of storyboarding as a technique to map the spatial events within a timeline. The format of this storyboard based on the ones developed by the film director Eisenstein allows also to design a multi-layered reality that focuses on different aspects of the spatial experience. Using this tool, the designers were able to emulate a supra-sensorial digital environment - in reference to Helio Oiticica's concept- evidencing how as designers we are able to generate a holistic sensory experience digitally. You can access the final experience on this link: <https://youtu.be/VwSc2LhINM>

The storyboarding corresponded to the scoring part of the creative process - RSVP cycles - undertaken by this group of students. The RSVP Cycles are annotations (using examples of musical scores) of creative process development; they are not fixed results but transitions from which to create an action that can be artistic and any human creative action. Resources (R) are an essential starting point referring to the material used for improvisation and the emotional and physical resources performers use to work with, individually or in a group.

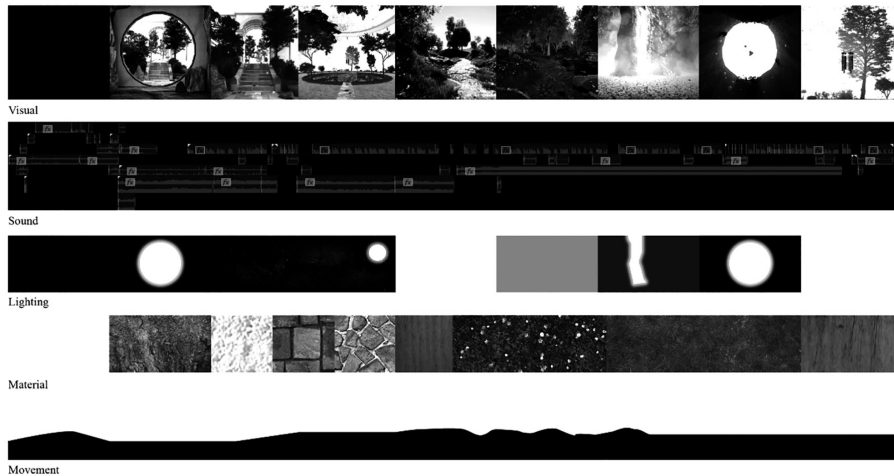
*\_STORY BOARD*

Figure 70: Storyboard © Rasha Shrouou.

Figure 4.

Storyboard that scored the digital experience proposed for Tai Teng's jewels designs.

The scores (S) are at the centre of The RSVP Cycles describing the process of making rather than the final product. Halprin defines scores as “symbolisation of processes which extend overtime” and “instructions for the work”. The term ‘Valuation’ (V) is action-focused; it joins two words to suggest looking for a value in the scores (actions), “a process of dynamically responding to work based on values”. ‘Performance’ (P) refers to action, resulting in the improvisation process of “setting the work in motion”. Cycles were a perfect synergy of body and space, an essential element of group performativity and the origin of devised theatre pedagogy, providing performers/students with multi-vision and a strategic outline from which they can develop their work. (Dundjerovic, 2007).

The use of RSVP cycles for the analysis, design and development of a digital design experience allowed us to define an interdisciplinary teaching environment. The creation of environments – situations where the students engage with a live project – has emerged as an essential condition for the development of design research with innovative experimental conditions.

### **Towards a pedagogy of digital architectures**


This article raises many questions in relation to the transformation of the architectural spatial experience to a digital experience. All of the proposal presented have undertaken thorough investigations on how to represent and communicate space digitally. In contrast to architecture visualisation, this project aimed to offer an experience based on a narrative where the different senses – not only sight – played a key role. Following the premises stated by Juhani Pallasmaa on his opus *The eyes of the skin*; although the digital world is predominantly visual, there is an opportunity for the exploration of the engagement of other senses. However, it is essential to have a good understanding on how each of them works. Through the evaluation of space and the user's journey from a sensorial approach it can be possible to explore new ways of digital immersion. The use and training on digital skills is essential to articulate these experimental digital spaces.

Finally, the collaboration between different disciplines has enabled the designers to evaluate and respond to the brief from a multidisciplinary perspective that have led them to the consideration of different scales and approaches. The outcome of this project evidences the potential that the digital tools have in the development of architecture. It also suggests not that distant futures were new technologies – especially the ones being developed within the field of video games design – can be applied to the communication of space.

In making of a pedagogical environment experiential learning is essential for digital architectures. This supports the need for the development of new teaching and learning strategies that offer interdisciplinary arenas for experimentation. The experiential approach to teaching and learning has as a direct impact the employability skills of the graduates which encounter a world where disciplinary boundaries are disappearing.

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### **Biography**

Dr Maria Sanchez is an Associate Professor of Architecture and the Course Leader of the BArch (Hons) Architecture at Staffordshire University. She is a qualified Architect in the UK (ARB/RIBA) and in Spain and has a professional background in performance design. Maria's design and arts practice has been presented at the Museum of Contemporary Art Reina Sofía (Madrid, 2012) in the Prague Quadrennial of Scenography (2015, 2019), the Dance Biennale of Venice (2016), or the Biennale of Architecture of Venice (2018). Maria has extensive experience in interdisciplinary experimental teaching in Architecture undergraduate and postgraduate programmes, focusing on collaborative live projects.



/ We Reap What We Sow:  
Eco-Somatics, Embodiment  
and Urban Allotment  
Gardening.  
Part II: spring - late summer.  
February - August.

Dr Polly Hudson  
Royal Birmingham Conservatoire  
UK

**Keywords:** Allotment, Dance, Dance-Art, Eco-Somatics, Ecofeminism, Ecology, Embodiment, Gardening, Permaculture, Screendance, Skinner Releasing, Slow, Technique, Somatics.

*We Reap what we Sow* is a gardening and movement project on an urban allotment in inner city Birmingham in the UK, documented over the course of a year in 2019-2020. What follows is a sharing of edited excerpts of the second part of the work, which investigates the nature of embodiment in the garden, and the relationship between the self, Eco-Somatics and dance.

The research took the form of regular activity working on/in the land(scape) and recording this through embodied writing practices (dance), film and movement, as well as the production, preparation, consumption and sharing of food and flowers. It is part of my ongoing work as a gardener and dancer, developing a long-term research endeavour entitled *And So We Sow* since 2017. A lifelong relationship with dancing underpins it, and specifically as a certified teacher of Skinner Releasing Technique, which is described as “a pioneering approach to dance, movement and creative process that has evolved from the simple principle that when we are releasing physical tension, we can move with greater freedom, power and articulation” (Skinner Releasing Network 2013).

I am curious about defining the act of gardening as a somatic practice, and how the relationship with the land(scape), plants and nature informs embodiment, allowing a moving towards deeper understanding of Eco-Somatics. Eco-Somatics is a growing field, described as an area of research and practice that combines the

knowledge systems of somatics and ecology to expand our sense of self, and to include our wider relations by re-rooting us back into our bodies, and awakening our sensory perceptions (Cudney & Rozek 2022).

This is the story of one woman's journey through the spring and summer of 2020 on an inner-city allotment, a kind of urban oasis marked by changing seasons, weather, feeling states, and political and cultural environments. My own stories are weaved in amongst the plot and the wider world, and set against the political and health landscapes of a global pandemic which began unexpectedly after the project had been initiated. I hope to offer an insight into the project through these words, which mainly focus on the early days of the pandemic and the art that arose later as the initial shock subsided.

I propose that as we acknowledge the benefits of being outside and gardening, we can understand more deeply that it is necessary to shift our relationship with the earth, where our food comes from and how we live. It is a quiet but deeply political act, one which Gaylor Trail speaks to, and says:

Gardening as resistance:

Today and every day

Grow and eat good food

Find your grounding in the earth and connect to the nature that is in you- the nature that is you.

Make a space for wildness. BE wild.

Tend and be tender.

Don't be good, be defiant.

Cultivate compassion and empathy.

Hold yourself in strength and dignity.

Hold each other.

(Trail 2007)

Although I am often referring to my allotment plot, I use the word garden interchangeably to describe this, as it is a garden. We can make a garden anywhere. I am now fortunate to have a modest garden at home, with English cottage boarders, a patio full of pots and hanging baskets, a tiny pond, and a greenhouse for raising seeds. My allotment garden is a small piece of land nearby, rented from the local council and managed by a committee of volunteers, but I have made gardens in multiple rented houses. I have gardened in a third floor London tenement flat with no outdoor space, growing sweet peas in window boxes and up canes so that they made scented curtains outside my bedroom window, and in the same flat grown beans in planters outside the kitchen window that pigeons nested in and reared their rather ugly and very noisy chicks. I have nurtured trays of seedlings that covered tiny kitchen floors and have gone leggy in their effort to reach the light. I have grown tomatoes that taste like the Mediterranean in hanging baskets in small backyards. I had dug out piles of builders' rubble from small city gardens and grown glorious beds of dahlias, and lavender that died when I tried to move it to yet another rented house. I have had great successes and occasional disasters. So indeed, we can make a garden anywhere.

In my gardening practice now, I am working with permaculture, a gardening technique with ethical underpinnings that attends to and honours eco-systems and the land, and offers non-hierarchical and sustainable ways to approach agriculture and gardening.

I visit the plot often, usually daily and always many times a week, at different times of the day, and I work, and reflect when I can. It is a kind of active rest even though hard physical graft at times as there is always a lot of work to do. Nature waits for no one, but the physical work is a balm to lose oneself in. Much like the deep embodiment encountered through image states in Releasing dance practices and improvisations, time moves differently: more slowly in some ways, in other ways more quickly, but always without needing to take account of itself.

Finding ways to map that and share its sensations through words, dance and film can perhaps illuminate the process.-

Richard Mabey, the British author of the 1970s bestseller *Food for Free*, notes that being in nature helped him to recover from serious mental health illness and goes on to say “I believe that language and the imagination are our most powerful tools for re-engaging with nature” (Mabey 2005: 22). And so I write, and I tend the earth and the plants, and I move; and later in the year I make some dance films.

Working with the land(scape) can allow a listening in to the kinesthetic senses. Physiological inquiries into kinesthesia have been sporadic, but dance pedagogy and criticism have consistently cultivated an understanding and awareness of the importance of kinesthetic awareness (Foster 2011: 7). Our kinaesthetic sense can be said to be the missing sense along with touch, taste etc., and as dancers and artists who work with somatics we become highly tuned to this sense, to sensation. The dance pioneer Anna Halprin talks about this:

The kinaesthetic sense has end organs and nerve endings in our muscles, tendons, ligaments, bones and joints that make it possible for us to have awareness of our movements. Nerve endings in the inner ear allow for us to know our bodily placement in space. All of these are part of our proprioceptive nervous systems.

(Halprin 1995: 31)

It is February 2020, and we had no idea what was coming. On 1<sup>st</sup> February 2020 I write:

*Imbolc*

*At the allotment I sit and breathe into a bit of underpinning anxiety. It feels a little like performance nerves. Not awful but not brilliant. Hopefully it will settle down soon.*

*Storm Chiara has taken the door off the shed. It has lasted a long time hanging on one hinge and I try to fix it as best I can. At 5pm it is still light. The light is returning.*

*It is very cold but beautifully bright and sunny. The wind whips up the site from the east and I wish for it to sweep away my fatigue and my sense of lack of motivation.*

*I stand, find my feet on the earth and breathe into it. Open my face and shoulders to the wind, and my heart to whatever this feeling is.*

*More spring bulbs are appearing, and down at the bottom of the site a few lone dwarf narcissi are flowering. It is optimistic, and it helps.*

The Australian horticulturalist and permaculture expert, Geoff Lawton, says that all of the world's problems can be solved in a garden (Lawton 2008). In the coming year this seems truer than ever, and when I reflect on it later in 2020 at a time when so many people seem to be discovering gardening, it feels like a prophesy. Further on in February I muse:

*I plant seeds. It is cold when the wind blows and I breathe deeply: perhaps it can blow away some cobwebs in my tissues. I go home to make soup with some of last year's stored harvest of crown prince squash, garlic, onions and rosemary for supper.*

It is March 2020, and it begins cheerfully enough, and with a noticeable shifting of the seasons:

*The atmosphere feels different and I can smell spring coming. There is a nip in the air in the wind, but when it stills it is warmer and somehow denser.*

*As I sit at the plot, listening to the birds announcing themselves to each other and to the season change I realise that a kind of spring is returning for me also: some clarity in my thinking and a renewed if somewhat less fierce energy.*

A few days later however:

*Coronavirus cases in UK reach nearly 300 and 3 people have died.*

And then, on the 20<sup>th</sup> March, I write:

*Spring Equinox*

*I have not been to the allotment this week. The world seems to be falling apart.*

*A few weeks ago none of us could have imagined that life would change so much.*

*People are dying. Whole countries are locked down. In Italy 4000 people have died, it is 160 here but they say that it is going to be worse than Italy.*

*Schools and universities are shut and from today so are pubs, restaurants and gyms. There is little to no food in the supermarkets and no delivery or collection slots for a month. People are hoarding: at first toilet rolls and hand sanitiser, but within days everything else was stripped from the shelves as if a plague of locusts had swarmed all of the shops. We are preparing for months and months of shut down and it is going to get worse, much worse. Tomorrow I will start planting seeds. It is usually a joyful time but now it seems utterly essential.*

The next day:

*This is day one of social isolation and it is already hard. I feel the need for solitude strongly and witness my own and my family's grumpiness. We had better all buckle up as we are in for a long ride. I do my first virtual yoga class today and I realised the enormity of all of this as I dropped into my breath, and my body, and movement, of course I did. Hot tears rolling down my face and into my ears as I lay on my back in savasana.*

And so it continues, on through March 2020:



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*I feel frozen somehow. I think it is shock. My heart, if I breathe into it, is tight. At the moment I choose to leave it alone but soon I will take some time to unpack that and breathe fully, deeply into the tissues and allow them to unravel. My shoulders are hunching, holding, and there is some pain and tightness across my upper back and around my shoulder blades.*

*I sit on my homemade bench at my plot and notice how there are no vapour trails in the sky due to the ban on air travel, and although the sound of sirens is still present, the roar of the traffic is less.*

*I wish I could settle in to this time and find some expansiveness.*

*It is a challenge to be with three people all of the time.*

*It is sunny, but there is a chill in the air. Daffodils are magnificently doing their thing and I know that tulips will follow soon.*

*I am bewildered.*

*I do not get it. People are writing and talking about how wonderful it is in this lockdown to slow down and have time with their families. This does not feel like slowing at all to me, and I know about slowing. It feels like coping, like managing.*

*This does not feel like a retreat at all and my workload is higher than ever.*

*I am trying to find distance at my allotment and some solace and space but I do not do much there. I do not even breathe deeply or embody much. I am in shock and my body responds accordingly.*

*I am working from home but cannot focus well. My days feel full but I am not sure what I do all day. Hopefully this will shift in time and I can softly sway in the breeze of this new experience, but right now I feel like shouting. Or sleeping. Or having the whole world fuck the fuck off.*

*I am ripped open by this experience but more closed off than ever. It is*

*a peculiar juxtaposition and it is confusing and odd.*

*Reports say that we will be lucky to keep deaths in the UK under 20,000*

April and May 2020 feel particularly brutal, though we are often blessed with unusually hot weather in May, which helps, a little. I write, at the start of April:

*18 degrees and sunny.*

*I am very very slow. I am tired but I pass the time going gently with myself.*

*I plant Charlotte and Maris Piper potatoes that have been chitting in egg boxes on a sunny windowsill for some time now. In between the planting I sit. I listen to birds and talk to the crows that hop around looking for bugs and worms. They seem brave and remarkably unafraid of me. There are two, one larger and one smaller. Are they a pair? Close up the shifts of colour in their feathers are revealed..... darker and shinier on the top of their skull, almost purple and iridescent.*

*I look at the plants that are coming up. Do a teeny bit of weeding and marvel at the tenacity of the runners that a mint plant has sent out, even though it is planted in a pot which has been sunk into the soil.*

*I rest into my body and the welcome warmth of the sun. I notice a tightening in my jaw and find a little spaces in the window like hinges there (Skinner 2011), which is an image we play with in Skinner Releasing Technique.*

*It is a full moon today. Last night the air was heavy with expectation and the moon casting its light like a torch on the back garden, saluting the newly lower pollution levels.*

*I bring onion sets with me but do not have to energy to plant them.*

A few days later:

*I spend the afternoon planting seeds. I squat for a couple of hours and*

*observe how my lower back and haunches welcome the opening and spreading, how my ankles, knees and hips fold. It is a marvel of engineering. In Skinner Releasing Technique we practice squatting (Skinner 2010), and I reflect on how in England we put our children in chairs when they go to school, we sit at desks, we eat at tables, and we unlearn the natural act of squatting that so many people in places across the world still do in daily activities.*

*It is sunny and I move between filling pots with compost and noticing the bees on flowers. They particularly like the forget me knots, visiting one tiny flower at a time and swiftly inserting their tongues, their proboscis. There are many different kinds of bee here: honey bees, solitary bees, bumble bees. Reuben asks if bees could get coronavirus but I point out that as they do not have lungs then it is unlikely that the virus would be interested in them.*

*Over 900 people have died in the past few days here.*

*It is tough at home at times, but we are managing.*

It is very hot and the ground seems parched and hard on the top, but when planting it has retained moisture underneath, partly because I practice no-dig gardening methods which preserve and nurture the soil's eco-system and allow worms and other organisms to do their work underneath. It is mid-April, and I visit the plot almost daily, before or after long days online at a laptop, writing:

*23 degrees. Hot and sunny*

*As I make holes for the onions with a dibber worms appear at the surface, their peace disturbed by me. I know that they do not but I feel like they come up out of curiosity.*

*The crows are back.*

*I can feel fatigue running deep in my cells. A slight breathlessness and*

*a body that insists on slowing. I have no choice.*

*The man in the plot behind me tells me that his aunt died from covid 19 a week ago. I suppose that we will all have stories like this to tell in the coming weeks and months. I got to the plot at about 5.45pm after working all day.*

*It is so much at the moment. I am hugely grateful and give thanks that my family are all healthy and safe, but I am overwhelmed.*

*I feel the pull to self-medicating with social media, nicotine and wine, but the effects leave me wired, so I am being mindful not to indulge too much. I am struggling to sit comfortably into anything.*

*It is sunny and the birds are singing to each other loudly whilst I plant seeds in drills.*

*Jacob is talking of going back to London. I understand but it is a worry.*

*I breathe. My chest is tight and I feel trapped.*

*I am overwhelmed and tired. Work does not abate. I have only had a few days off since Christmas and it is getting too much. I do not like to work like this and it is not what I have carved out for myself in my life. Flashes of anger this morning*

*I sleep this afternoon. A deep dreamless sleep on the sofa. I have to, and I sleep through an hour of my alarm going off, snoozing it in the confused half waking, do not hear Dominic come into the room to check on me a three times.*

*I wake and weep.*

*It is familiar somehow, this sensation of grief and confinement and the anxiety of overwhelm. I have not had the time or space to tend my plot as I usually would at this time of year and it is frustrating. Covid 19 currently shows no sign of abating and I ponder on the unsustainability of it.*

*It strikes me that I was very alone with Jacob, a kind of confinement,*

*for the first twenty months of his life. It was hard at times but my heart sweeps with the memory of those times. Even then, without knowing it I was committed to slowing..... sleeping and nursing him when required. It was lovely.*

*I walk to the plot to bring the compost from the kitchen waste, and whilst listening to the birds I expand my torso with the breath of fullness. I worry about my very sore lower back which is an injury from over a year ago that still announces itself, and with it grief about how it came about. Everyone is gardening.*

*Day 44 of lockdown. 20,000*

*The weather has been glorious but the ground is solid from no rain for weeks. The small greenhouse that I have never got round to erecting sits in a stack beside the shed looking rather forlorn and messy, unkempt and lost. I feel a bit like that at the moment.*

*I weed and plant.*

*Today the rain came. It looks as though it will rain now for weeks. I am so bone tired.*

*This morning, moving via internet connection with the new movement research collective.... bones folding and unfolding. Plants are unfolding also.*

As May arrives I notice my exhaustion, and that of others around me. I stumble across John O' Donohue's wise words in one of his books that I have previously thought was about winter, but it seems very fitting at the moment. I am teaching online and share it with my students in class:

This is the time to be slow, lie low to the wall until the bitter weather passes.  
Try, as best you can, not to let the wire brush of doubt scrape from your  
heart all sense of yourself and your hesitant light.  
If you remain generous, time will come good; and you will find your feet  
again on fresh pastures of promise, where the air will be kind and blushed  
with beginning.

(O' Donohue 1990)

As May continues it rains. My students are sad and struggling, people are grieving, and losing family members:

*28,000*

*I am burning out. I have not had any proper time off work since December.*

*Someone describes corona-crash, which feels like fitting terminology. The rain means that the soil has softened and I can dig out the raspberries from a neighbours plot that they have offered me. It was impossible last week when the ground was so solid. The weeds have gone bonkers because of the rain and need pulling out, but I have to leave that for now.*

*It is hot and sunny, 20 degrees.*

*Last night the clapping for the NHS catches me by surprise. I am writing up notes from yesterday's gardening and I hear the roar.... I can see people in my street banging pans, cheering. I slink away, ashamed somehow to not be part of it but it does not feel right, our health workers need proper support from the government.*

*I sit on my stairs and weep and my visceral reaction takes me by surprise. Today it is hard. My body is tired.*

*I work for about four and a half hours at the plot and whilst there I get bitten by a red ant which surprises me. It stings but passes.*

*There is talk of a second phase.*

*Some kind of blitz spirit VE Day celebrations that are happening feel manufactured by the government and I have no desire to join in. I do however take time to breathe deeply and honour the people who gave their lives in war.*

*In yin yoga class the teacher talks about watering the flowers of your mind, not the weeds. Of course. I know that it is possible to return to the breath if all you can see are weeds.*

*17 degrees and sunny. 34,000 and rising*

*Sleepy in the mornings and some mood swings and low mood. It is very good for me to be outside.*

*I listen in to my heart. There is a stillness in it and when I listen even more, a tightness. I can allow it to expand into my back and also in my whole left chest. The trees are full and are dazzling shades of green, the breeze causes them to rustle a little (Skinner 2011). Another image from Skinner Releasing Technique, I love how many there are from nature in that work.*

*23 degrees*

*I sit on a bee at the plot, it hurts although I do not react badly to the sting, but I do feel sad as the bee will die now.*

*It is really hot and my energy is lethargic. It is slow work even without the heat as I am meticulously digging out couch grass and bind weed that is hidden under the surface in a new bed. Once that is done I will cover with compost and manure and not dig again. It is getting easier to manage the whole plot now that most of the perennial weeds are out and I practice no-dig everywhere.*

*In yoga class this morning the breath full in front, sides and back. I am calmer somehow and my nervous system not so overloaded, which is a relief.*

*I water the raspberries and sweetcorn and am happy that all but one of the dozen raspberry bushes have taken. I fill the water butts. That also is slow as the water pressure is low. Slowness seems to be a theme today, and it is good.*



This is a moving meditation, time passes differently in a garden as you weed, attend to the moment-to-moment needs of plants and the soil. It is also improvisation, and in much the same way I improvise in my dance practice in the garden. I sometimes have a plan and know what needs doing, but I allow my attention to be drawn to what is necessary, what feels important, both in my dancing and in my garden.

I realise that gardening is currently my main physical practice, and that I hardly dance much recently apart from teaching and doing the occasional class. There is a loss and a sorrow in the not dancing, but there is dance in the gardening, which draws me to it. The garden, my plot, call to me more strongly than dance in a studio does at the moment, so I follow the calls that seem to run deep in my bones.

*9am. Hot. 38,000*

*I can hardly believe that it is the end of May. This year is romping by in a blur of lockdown, death figures and work. It is nosier here at the plot as some things return to 'normal'. I can hear more traffic and the sound of building works. I am regaining my time a little bit, a back to back day yesterday but I am not working today apart from one phone meeting at midday.*

June. Summer 2020 is hot and glorious and a stark contrast to the darkness of the increasing number of people losing their lives to the pandemic, and to the chaos and uncertainty in the world. Nature seems relieved by the temporary lack of air travel and pollution, and the plot swells and expands in the heat and light. It gives me a chance to be breathed and to breathe into my tissues and to expand my breath when all else feels tight and restricted. I write:

*This morning with the movement research collective online... finding breath, organs, skin. Weight. Support. The radiating yolk sac of early*

*development, and the four cells that become the heart. It is familiar and I move with ease. It reminds me once again how vital it is to be embodied.*

The next day I visit the plot and note:

*Oh my goodness it is hot. I love the heat. My body softens and swells, bathed in the hotness.*

*I stayed inside and worked for most of the day, with a little time in the shade in the garden for lunch.*

*At 7pm it is still 29 degrees, but oh so beautiful in the quiet spaciousness of that time at the end of the day just before the light fades when everything is tinged in golden ripples and glow.*

*I water. I squat and eat strawberries. Crunch on peas and mange tout, spit out the bitter spinach that has bolted from the heat, and savour the heavenly sweet scent of the roses.*

*I enjoy a phone call with a friend and we muse on HRT side effects, and on the delicacy of embodied moving, old grief in cells and tissues, and the beauty and challenges of gardening that is a series of letting go's.*

I am glad for this place, and for how it supports my place in the world. Gardening and my embodied work here really is a lesson in letting go, and in allowing for the unexpected to surface. The time and spaciousness it offers, and the lessons it gives allows for embodied knowledge to arise. I observe, in mid-June:

*I am really not sure how my mental health would be without my garden and allotment.*

*Many days recently I wake tired or low, or feel overwhelmed by work/life/family/this pandemic. And having my hands in the soil, planting things, weeding, hoeing and all of the other jobs as well as sitting, breathing, watching the insects and trees helps. Always.*

I would kind of like to dance more but my energy is limited and I cannot have it all as I am not prepared to rush, so I have to make choices, and I choose to garden. I muse:

*I would like to spend all of my time doing this. Or at least more of my time. I already invest a lot, but how do I find a way to ease off from work and do this work more? I had planned to do that this summer, but Covid-19 scuppered those plans.*

Later in the month I write:

*Set against this backdrop of a worldwide pandemic, the garden offers solace, comfort and nourishment: spiritually, emotionally and of course physically in the food that is grown. There is work to be done and time moves differently. There is also the company of nature: the shifting English weather, and birds, insects and plants. As my hands work the soil I reflect on these hands, which have done so much.*

In July something begins to shift. I am drawn to dancing and so I take my camera to the plot many times and film my hands in the soil. I transition between moving, filming, and writing, and text emerges; as does a new dance film, *These Hands* (xxxx 2020), which I edit it at home over the next few weeks, and as it develops there is lots of repetition:

***These hands***

*These hands hold a space.*

*Space for you, for her, for him, for them.*

*These hands have raged, fluttered and moaned, trembled and shook.*

*These hands with fingers delicate as a butterfly's landing.*

*These hands toil and dig deep, and delve into soil and soul, planting seedlings of hope and of love.*

*These hands reach out, feeling the earth shift and move beneath them*

*These hands untangling tissues and uncoiling pain.*

*These hands gently carry weight, heavy weights of grief and of loss, heavy weights and barrows full of decomposing matter.*

*These hands: strong and resilient, yet delicate and tender*

*These hands tend.*

*These hands reach for comfort in the dark of the night, in the dawn light.*

*These hands that have furrowed lovers' flesh, located bones along a spine, traced from the dip between clavicles to the tip of a shoulder, mapped the contours of face, curled fingers and palm around your heart.*

*These hands find the satin soft skin of your neck with the very tips of my fingers, and sigh.*

*These hands that are holding hot potatoes passed down and through generations of women's trauma in my cells, and delight too.*

*These hands ache and hurt sometimes, a tightening around the bones it seems.*

*Age and wisdom*

*These hands have reached into space, the air dense and with a tangible viscerally, as if liquid,*

*tasting the temperature of the air.*

*These hands have pulled you tightly towards me as you reach for my*

*breast with your open mouth. Tears falling on your head as my milk flows.*

*These hands have cleaned bodily expulsions and excretions, mopped floors, washed dishes, and wiped away tears. Hold on I say, hold on.*

*These hands will make it ok.*

*These hands have held on for dear life whilst you rage and rail, all fury and anger and venom. Till it passes.*

*These hands have held you gently while you float in the ocean, one hand cradling your skull and one under the bony landscape of the pelvis, until you can float on your own.*

*These hands dig up the first potatoes tumbling out of the earth as precious and delightful as digging for gold.*

*These hands pick the fruits of my labours, squidge blackflies covering the tops of bean plants and wash in council bins full of water.... Silky and warm from the sun.*

*These hands have chopped, and stirred, and cooked, tasting as they go along, with tongue reaching for the tip of a finger.*

*These hands brushing along herb plants, flowers and vegetables to release their scent. The air heavy with the heady aroma of lavender, rose, thyme, tomato or sweet peas. They lift cucumber seedlings to my face to drink in the smell of the roots when potting them on. The scent is of summer so sweet.*

*These hands dig, become blistered and scratched, bloodied and sore.*

*They plant seeds,*

*they water,*

*and they wait.*

It is August and as the weather shifts, my mood does somehow too. The borage is in full flower and the bees love it. I weed amongst it and shoot another film: *Borage, Bees and Weeds* (Hudson 2020). I realize that these pieces of dance art that I am making will find their way into the world through digital media, and it seems the best, indeed the only way right now, as theatres and galleries are still shut. In editing *Borage, Bees and Weeds*, I speed up the film and a sense of time is suspended, much like the way time is suspended in improvised dancing, and in the action of gardening when a small activity can take an extended period to complete, but one does not notice the passing of time. Later in August, I make another film: *Plot, High Summer* (Hudson 2020) which is much longer and has the whole of my allotment in frame, the clear blue summer sky arching upwards and the wide landscape in the distance. I spend a long time experimenting with movement and filming over multiple days, and it has a kind of expansiveness, seemingly to share some of the sensations I have described in these words already. It is a series of micro dances, one cross-fading into the next as I come closer and closer to the camera in amongst the plants, which are in full flush. At the end, I open my hands to the viewer: these hands have done so much. Dance, gardening, Eco-Somatics and Eco-Feminism are intertwined in my practices here as a dancer, a gardener and a woman, and, as Freseman describes:

One of the tasks of eco-feminist theories is to deconstruct assumptions that serve to undermine women, women's bodies, and nature . . . This drive to continue to make art, or grow vegetables, to create, is inherited as a technique of survival and healing that all gardeners understand.

(Freseman 2013)

The permaculture that I practice in my gardening could also be said to be true of the dance: embodied movement as permaculture. If we look at somatics in relationship to early pioneers definitions, including philosopher and Feldenkrais

practitioner Thomas Hanna who coined the term from the Greek word “soma,” meaning the body in its wholeness, advocates value the unity of mind, body, and spirit as fundamental to the human organism and one’s inner, personal narrative and experience as a guide for living (Batson 2009). Let’s look at somatics in relationship to early pioneers definitions, including philosopher and Feldenkrais practitioner Thomas Hanna who coined the term from the Greek word “soma,” meaning the body in its wholeness. Advocates value the unity of mind, body, and spirit as fundamental to the human organism and one’s inner, personal narrative and experience as a guide for living (Batson 2009). This also looks a lot like permaculture; potentially, the two offer us definitions for Eco-Somatics.

My garden helped me through a pandemic. It became a place of comfort and of space, a place to process sadness and confusion, to celebrate nature and life, and a place to lose myself in hard physical work. Even without a global catastrophe that was the onset of Covid-19 the garden offers spaciousness and time. A place to (re)connect with ourselves, with sensation, with our feeling states, and with the possibilities for our creativity. I often used to have a sensation that once I had completed a piece of work I do not have another dance/film/choreography in me, but in recent years I trust that it will come. The garden helps in this and offers a place to re-find creativity somehow, and for me, the dance. To rediscover and connect with my art making. My garden brings me back to it. Bill Mollison, one of permaculture’s founders, says that gardeners plant like we will live forever (Mollison 1990).

And so the garden can give us opportunities to deeply feel our delights and our sorrows as we put our hands in and on the soil. As we engage in the fundamentally optimistic act that is gardening, the land brings us closer to ourselves.

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### **Biography**

A teacher, artist, gardener, and dancer, Polly's research focuses on process within an artistic practice, ethical approaches to teaching, leadership and interaction, Skinner Releasing Technique, and Eco-Somatics. She has made dance works that have been shown internationally to critical acclaim over a twenty-five year period, and as a certified teacher of SRT, the principles of which underpin her approach to her work in all areas, Polly is curious about at what point a practice or an activity becomes art.

Polly is currently Head of Movement at Royal Birmingham Conservatoire. She is Associate Director of CIPA, the Centre for Interdisciplinary Performative Arts, at BCU and a Reader in Dance.



/ Participatory Feminist  
Performance Practices in  
Digital Age – A Critical View  
on Digitalization Approach,  
or What Cannot Be Replaced  
Regarding the Public Space  
and the Presence: The Case  
of the ‘Mis(s)placed Women?’  
Project (2009-2022)

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Austria

**Summary:** This paper analyses emancipatory strategies developed by the educational and participatory feminist performance art practices I have been developing in the age of digital arts — trying to ‘keep a foot in the door’, so to speak, in the physical public space, resisting to be replaced, misplaced and carried out from squares, parks, shopping malls, airports, ports and streets — looking at what can and what cannot be replaced in relation to the physical public space, embodiment, interaction and presence. The analyses will rely on my experience of teaching Performance Art as Social Practice predominantly to the students of social work, before and during the pandemic at the Frankfurt University of Applied Science, and, interdisciplinary performance practice, during and after the pandemic to the students of Language Arts at the University of Applied Arts in Vienna, and foremost, on facilitating and producing over one hundred individual and group performances and events, live and hybrid, over the past 13 years, globally, in the framework of the ‘MIS(S)PLACED WOMEN?’ performance project and an online platform. Furthermore, I would argue rather for public space and outdoor events than for online events when it comes to performance art and performance art teaching.

**Keywords:** Participatory Performance Practices, Feminist Performance Art, Performance In The Public Space, A Critical View, democratisation, emancipation

Accompanied by visuals my paper will attempt to analyse emancipatory strategies developed by the educational and participatory feminist performance art practices that I have been developing in the age of digital arts — trying to ‘keep a foot in the door’, so to speak, in the physical public space, resisting to be replaced, misplaced and carried out from squares, parks, shopping malls, airports, ports and streets — looking at what can and what cannot be replaced regarding the physical public space, embodiment, interaction and the presence. The analyses will rely on my experience of teaching Performance Art as Social Practice predominantly to the students of social work (ground course and master students), before and during the pandemic at the Frankfurt University of Applied Science, Frankfurt (Main) and, interdisciplinary performance practice, during and after the pandemic to the students of Language Arts at the University of Applied Arts in Vienna, and foremost, on facilitating and producing over one hundred of individual and group performances and events, live and hybrid, over the past 13 years, globally, in the frame of my ‘MIS(S)PLACED WOMEN?’ project and an online platform. Furthermore, I will argue rather for public space and outdoor events than for online events when it comes to performance art and performance art teaching.

Before getting into details regarding the outcome of my praxis-based research, I would like to start with this manifesto-like summary, which could give an overview of some of the aspects that I find interesting or of the advantage/disadvantage of trying to bridge our teaching and our practise over the net.

WHAT WE CAN DO ONLINE	WHAT WE CAN NOT DO ONLINE
You can teach in your pyjamas	You cannot develop organic and improvisational group performances and interventions in a variety of public spaces
You can bake and do laundry during the course of your participation at the international conference	You cannot teach properly presence and embodied performance

WHAT WE CAN DO ONLINE	WHAT WE CAN NOT DO ONLINE
You can save on your travel costs, your footprint, and child care	You cannot work well with material
You can teach well video performance	You cannot hug people, nor people can hug each other
You can publish online, share information, open calls, do organisational meetings	You might have difficulties to share
You can upload performance scores	You cannot interact in the physical sense
One can download performance scores, try them out and submit contributions to the blog	You cannot talk with your audience
You can have a lot of viewers but no audience	You cannot share food
You can feel isolated, non-embraced...	You cannot claim the city
You can realise how precious live interactions are	
You can feel misplaced	

### Practice-based Research in Interdisciplinary Performance Art Education:

#### Example 1

Zoom teaching, Summer Semester 2021: each student isolated in a little room of their own.

Exercise with the objects: clothes, bags, suitcases, wardrobes.

Students of Social Work, ground course, international students, some of them visibly traumatised.

Topic particularly worth mentioning: interaction, video-performance.

I can clearly remember my first online teaching course in performance (Frankfurt University of Applied Science, Modul 5, block seminar, Introduction to aesthetic practices on the basis of own artistic practice)... As usual, I asked students to create a comfortable space in which we are going to work and interact together,



to stand up, remove their chairs, exercise and relax our bodies and minds, to chat in a focused way... all of which leads towards opening up, for individual and group work and for creative practices... Even in front of computers and mobile phones, this worked out well. As I was earlier watching final exams from the performance class of my colleague Bojana Videkanić, (University of Waterloo, Toronto) I realised that over Zoom we are actually only able to teach video-performance. So I introduced this problematic to my students asking that the position of the camera(s) and their own placement inside the 'box' created by the frame should be considered. What struck me the most, and why I found this example worth mentioning here was the incredible interaction they developed between each other by handing over a trigger object/communication object to each other in the next frame, each time one person finished their own performance section. The structure of each group performance consisted of a number of short omnibus individual ones taking place in one of the Zoom frames, and at the end of it there would be a black bag with a white shirt in it, handed over to the next performer..., who would create with it and develop it in a completely different logic... This structural element was so precious and binding for the group and for the performance itself...

### **Practice-based Research in Interdisciplinary Performance Art Education:**

#### Example 2

Post-Covid, Vienna, Summer Semester 2022, Teaching Seminar in Presence triple protected by: Covid Pass, PCR Test and FFP2 Masks. Interruptions due to technical issues: covid pass bug, PCR test results delayed particularly on Mondays, students are gurgling and in this way testing themselves daily even during the course of the seminar, frequent missing students due to pandemic quarantine rules or cold symptoms...

Class fully booked, around twenty students...

Day one of the seminar, chairs and tables removed, warming up, improvisational phase of the workshop.

Topics particularly worth mentioning: interaction, improvisation, and organic development.

An incredible enthusiasm rising and coming out of an improvisational group practice involving voice and movement, repetition, rising of intensity, slowing down... A synaesthesia of participants' voices and bodies resonates and drives everyone to completely unknown and unexpected places of creative joy. Playing with some of the basic performance elements becomes all of a sudden, an opera that I feel like conducting while walking over some of the tables at the back of the room; an absolutely poetic moment.

And then, the act of shaking hands is being introduced, this simple interactive performative gesture that during the course of pandemic in the past two years became a complete taboo at least in central European geographies... Students are at the same time terrified, relieved and enthusiastic while practicing...

**Post-pandemic Performance Art incorporating live and digital, Emancipation and Political Activism in participatory feminist performance practices:**

**'MIS(S)PLACED WOMEN?' ABOUT<sup>1</sup>**

*Mis(s)placed Women?* is a collaborative art project which I have developed in multiple layers since 2009, consisting of live performances, delegated performances, art workshops, and an online platform<sup>2</sup>, including contributions by over 170 individuals from six continents. Many contributors are artists, mainly

.....  
1 The *About* paragraph, by Tanja Ostojić has been in a slightly different form first published in: Tanja Ostojić: 'MIS(S)PLACED a?' 2009-2021, exhibition catalogue, (eds: Zorana Đaković Minniti, Katarina Kostandinović, Tanja Ostojić, Dejan Vasić) Cultural Center of Belgrade, 2021.

2 Project blog since 2009: <<http://misplacedwomen.wordpress.com>>  
Mis(s)placed Women? Video Chanel since 2018: <<https://vimeo.com/channels/1482708>>



Center  
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STAR ALLIANCE

Tanja Ostojić: *'Misplaced Women?:  
Unpacking a Bag of Your Own,'*  
one hour performance at the  
Bergen International Airport,  
Norway, 2011.

Organised by Stiftelsen 3.14.  
Photo: Jannicke Olsen.  
Copyright: T. Ostojić.



# SAS

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## SAS



wide



identifying themselves as women from diverse backgrounds. Within this project, we embody and enact some of everyday life's activities that thematise the kind of displacement known to migrants, refugees, and itinerant artists traveling the world to earn their living. These performances deal with migration issues, gender democracy, feminism, gentrification, inclusion, power relations, and vulnerability, particularly concerning the female and transgender bodies; an aspect that has figured prominently in the past almost three decades of my art practice. With this project, on one side, we are investigating privilege by making a distinction between working mobility, forced or desired migration, and how arbitrary laws may apply, and on the other side, we are exploring diverse public spaces and the invisibility of certain groups within them. Within the frame of this project, in which I apply feminist emancipatory methodologies of artistic and community practices, I conducted numerous workshops globally where the participants are selected by open call. Individual and group artworks, interventions, performance scores and texts are developed and produced within this frame. The development of collaboration within the group and forming of a community are very precious processes, as is the further communication with the wider audience that we meet on the streets, when we claim the public space, and with targeted audiences in the venues where presentations, exhibitions and discussions take place.

**‘Mis(s)placed Women?’ Hybrid International Community Gathering in Belgrade, October 2021**

For my understanding of the participatory feminist practices and the practices to which exploring, clammng and challenging of the public spaces is central, moving into digital is no go precisely because we are undoing the invisibility of certain groups in it.

At the course of the 13 years of the projects development in a number of fruitful workshops in London, Berlin, Innsbruck, Istanbul, just to name a few, a consid-

erable body of the international community of project participants has been built and at the occasion of a first project retrospective in three venues in Belgrade, October-November 2021 (Gallery Podroom, KCB/Cultural Center of Belgrade, NGVU/New Gallery of Visual Art and CZKD/Centre for Cultural Decontamination) I invited interested community members to join the first International Community Gathering. After the exhibition openings have been completed, in the wake of post-pandemic we were preparing a two-day long hybrid event, in which the first day, participants who were able to come from Berlin and the ones from Belgrade met and were performing together three of our jointly chosen performance scores at three locations in the public space downtown Belgrade, including the Republic's Square, Public Toilet Performance at the Pioneer's Park and at the Manjež Park. This was live-streamed to the participant, community members and broader audience who could not attend in person.

During this performance weekend, some of the most active local and international *Mis(s)placed Women?* Community members met live and virtually, exchanged ideas and thoughts and performed together. Beside the interventions in public spaces of Belgrade on the day one, there were as well predominantly live



*"Mis(s)placed Women? Score #1: Unpacking a Bag of Your Own"*, group performance at the Republic's Square, Belgrade, October 2021. Performers: Hieu Hanh Hoang Tran aka Hany Tea, Kathryn Fisher aka Mad Kate, Nela Antonović, Paula Chambers, Jelena Dinić, and Sunčica Šido. International *Mis(s)placed Women?* Community gathering. Photos/copyright: T. Ostojić.



performance contributions from London, Toronto, Vienna, Berlin, Dhaka and Ibiza, alike the related conversations with participants over Zoom and in the physical space that were organised in the frame of the community gathering and were available live and online via CZKD YouTube channel. The participants of the programme included: Teresa Albor, Nela Antonović, Dagmara Bilon, Paula Chambers, Jiachen Xu, Jelena Dinić, Hieu Hanh Hoang Tran aka Hany Tea, Gaby Bila-Günther aka LADY GABY, Kathryn Fischer aka Mad Kate, Susan Merrick, Jasmina Tešanović, Bojana Videkanić, Sunčica Šido, three members of the Culture Hub Croatia platform and myself Tanja Ostojić, between others. Programme was organised by Dejan Vasić (CZKD) and Katarina Kostandinović (KCB).

For me, it was extremely moving to see those incredible artists and dear people whom I met and had an opportunity to collaborate with over years in many different cities, for the first time gather at once, projected on the wall of the CZKD, opposite of all of us seated along the table. The situation was dynamic as some were joining in directly upon arrival from the airport, some had to leave in the middle of the session towards the airport, and some were not allowed to check in as the PCR test was delayed so they joined virtual, etc. It made anyhow a huge difference to participate in person in comparison to the Zoom participation. And it was not only a question of 'usual technical problems', such as problems with sound, completely missing sound in some cases, weak internet connection at other locations, timing, time zone differences, and rather limited quality of the visual material, for the ones connecting from across the globe, it was clear that we who met in presence besides the opportunity of performing together could also enjoy our social time, share food and drinks, hug each other, have inspiring off records conversations and the city walks.

For this reason, and to have more focus and presence, I am inclined that for the coming up, second international community gathering in DEPO, Istanbul, September 2022 limit events to the participation in presence.

### **Mis(s)placed Women? workshop Istanbul, September 2021**

In the frame of the *Mis(s)placed Women?* project, I have been working on the street for many years before, during and also after the pandemic. Choosing participants on the basis of an open call, usually participants who have a strong motivation and important issues to process and express and do not have access to artistic production or formal performance art education. Working with gender issues and the physical public and semi-public spaces in this master class-like format, block seminars usually outside of an academic institution, proved incredibly challenging and relevant...

#### **An Example of the Cat-calling Men Performance Intervention:**

It is not by chance that a number of the workshop participants such as Arzu Yayıntaş, artist, curator, a single mother of two, and a member of the feminist movement in Istanbul claimed that this workshop literally changed her perception of the city, gave her courage and empowerment to claim the public space and to express herself within it. After a break of over three years in her career due to reproductive labour Arzu Yayıntaş literally had a creative blast in our workshop. One of the performances that she initiated and that we produced together in the frame of the *Mis(s)placed Women?* workshop held in four different neighbourhoods of Istanbul over the course of four days, involved a cat-calling man, a performance action that she proposed and that we tried out two times in the rich neighbourhood of Nişantaşı. This action of returning the gaze, of transforming what was sometimes an insult and the reason for women to feel bad, by the way she was looked at, and addressed by a man on the street, has become via this powerful group performance – involving feminist bodies as a grounding force empowered by each other and by the Persian female instrument *erbane* – a tool for claiming and overtaking the public space... an incredibly transformative and emancipatory gesture. We wrote a score for this performance afterwards.



A collective performance with the participation of: Nazlı Durak, Sabbi Senior, Gizem Yılmaz, and Vanessa Ponte. *Mis(s)placed Women?* workshop, Süreyya Opera House, Istanbul, 2021. Photo/copyright: T. Ostojić.

**An example of Vanessa:**

Vanessa Ponte, a young architecture student whose family informed her during the workshop that she won't have a chance to continue her studies as they will only be able to afford the studies of her brother in the future, felt discriminated against for her queerness by her family and by the violence surrounding the Gay Pride carried out in the public spaces of Istanbul. Within this workshop we supported the development and production of at least three performances of her, Sabbi Senior and Gizem Yılmaz, with the participation of several others. All three of the queer women claimed that they felt empowered by the workshop

and had received the tools for self-expression and felt transformed by claiming their rights in the public space. Similar to Nazlı Durak who participated in each performance and said that only on the 8th of March did she experience such women power on the streets of Istanbul, basically women owning the city... Those things cannot be done in any venue and certainly not on Zoom, they have to be experienced in person and on the street ...

**An example of Sabbi:**

I would like to conclude this section of the paper by quoting the conversation I had with Sabbi, one of the workshop participants, on Saturday, September 25, 2021, the final day of our workshop, at the Beykoz Kundura Cinema.

Sabbi Senior: I'm Sabbi. I'm American. My motivation to join this workshop is mostly because, as I've travelled from place to place, I've had to shape shift in each place that I go. In each place that I go, the rights that I have as a woman change. As a queer person, they change and change. So I think this point about women entering public space is really important.

Tanja Ostojić: I understood also that it could be enriching for you to draw on the experience from this workshop for your queer activism, right? Sabbi and Gizem, you were doing together this incredible 'Vegan Breakfast' performance, and the moment I saw it I immediately recognised it as a reconstruction of the queer breakfast that ended violently in the Maçka Park on June 22, 2021. I really love the way in which you went around, found some garbage, brought it together and crafted this fantastic dialogue piece. So, I'd like to hear about it from both of you.

Gizem Yılmaz: I just had an idea, because we were in a square, and it was such a fancy square—people liked taking photos of us while sipping their fancy drinks,





Sabbi Senior and Gizem Yılmaz: "Upon a Blanket in the Square", durational performance, Teşvikiye Square, Istanbul, 2021, *Mis(s)placed Women?* workshop. Photo/copyrigh: T. Ostojić.

and then I was inspired. I said, let's do something like this Sabbi, let's pretend. I just started mirroring.

Sabbi Senior: Actually, I wrote a little piece about it. In the beginning, this was a completely spontaneous situation, from simply sitting in the square and looking around and feeling and taking it in. All of these materials, we found nearby and, yes, I'd like to read what I wrote:

***Upon a Blanket in the Square***, by Sabbi Senior

*mirroring the façade of Louis Vuitton and the sparkling glasses held in hands  
sitting with the gaze from cafe tables  
refuge and complacency*

*surrounded to face and from behind Maçka Park  
falling just few meters below the cobblestone street  
a calling echo*

*Maçka Park being the location of the first part of Pride  
teetering on this point of balance as subjects testing movements and direction-  
ality of this square as a space where the threshold lay between this public space  
and their private observation*

*faces obscured by telephones  
habitually documenting the dishes and the moments  
yet they drifted as lenses to meet also our gaze*

*we searched for the disruption  
adjacent to the square a nylon barrier stood hiding from sight  
the site of construction  
we went to there*

*lifted from the corner and uncovered rubbish and rubble  
concrete and cardboard  
an empty can of gasoline*

*we intervened and asked the waiter to give us cups  
cups we then filled over and over from our bottle of gasoline  
each time dousing and increasing the intoxication  
behaviours as childlike mimicry*

*to sip from the glass  
to salute to the merriment  
to discuss only the most wonderful and fabulous things*

*each refill of our glass the dysphoria grew  
as we served each other to taste the consumption  
with only a broken fork*

*we shredded pieces of cardboard and ate them like decadence  
we picked up crumbled rocks of concrete with our teeth  
we chewed on the cardboard covered in dirt from the ground*

*we smiled and posed for Instagram posts from our cardboard phones  
cup after cup yet our gasoline never ran out  
and we started to shred the materials*

*the dystopia setting in  
as gentle music floated through the air  
a perfect peace and undisturbed  
yet our blanket filthy and in plain sight*

*shredding to pieces we took pens, one blue and one pink and began to write  
words on each fragment*

*Mačka Park echoed into our pens phrases unsaid  
each bite that we took of these inorganic materials  
each consumption transforms the surreal into this apocalyptic reality*

*over time as it normalised settled in the feeling of dehumanisation  
the profound deprivation of experience  
the total blur between picnic to dine, versus picnic to die*

*as I wrote on these pieces of cardboard comes the feeling of what is destroyed  
each rip something slow and careless tossed into the sky  
blown by the breeze, meaningless*

*FREEDOM, we wrote over and over  
from diminishing canvas to diminishing canvas  
until the pieces became so small that we traveled to the limbs of the body, the arms  
as the piece became surfaces, imprints, recollections, a shield*

*as if it to be the escape from humanity  
emanating out of pores disorganised  
scattered like the running people of protest  
like the scars from teargas  
The arms of the police.  
Pouring from an empty cup.*

*After this point was when we began to paint on the can.  
And in this way reclaim what this object and this symbol is.  
Whether it is, you know, for destruction  
or whether it is for fuel.*



Score #2:

"Holding the 'Mis(s)placed Women?' Sign", performed by Sabbi Senior and Vanessa Ponte at Kadiköy Port, *Mis(s)placed Women?* workshop, Istanbul, 2021. Photo: K. Kaygusuz, Copyright: T. Ostojić.





### **Public Space and Pandemic: *Our Lady of Auguststraße*:**

I live in Berlin Mitte, just around the corner from the women's shelter. As the pandemic started, a highly increased number of women, apparently victims of domestic violence and/or unemployment turned up there. There were many women of all ages and genders sitting, and even sleeping in front of houses on small streets in my Kiez<sup>3</sup>. At around 6 pm when the church bells of Golgotha Kirche start announcing the end of the day, everyone was served a dinner, so most of these women, as well as many others, would push or pull or carry all kinds of bags and cards walking towards the shelter. These women marked this period of time, they dominated the streets. The streets, in some particular way, belonged to them. They were their living rooms, their wardrobes and in some cases their bedrooms too. It was cold, it was hot, it was rainy. They had their occupations, they had activities, they created privacy, the street was their polygon and home... And all their stuff, that was too much for the others, all they had... they pulled along with them... being certainly very much aware of all their belongings... I followed some of them secretly, observed them, wondering if I should try to talk to them, bring them something... One of the queer persons I talked to explained how creative they had to be not to freeze to death during the day when they was not allowed into the shelter nor any other space, like public transport, station or shopping mall, that were not accessible due to the pandemic. So, I was learning, was making tea, was bringing down scarfs, and gloves, and pullovers, and hats... was secretly documenting some of the rituals and activities signifying misplacement and women's exodus from domestic and gender violence and poverty... I also looked at the moving historical photos taken by Jack London 'Homeless women sleeping in Spitalfields Garden', (London, 1902), of obviously homeless

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3 German word for neighbourhood

working-class Irish women sleeping in the sitting position on benches in London at the turn of the 20th century ... I could not do anything myself with this very sensitive material, ethically impossible to deal with... I published only one photo story thematising women's housing in Berlin Mitte on the *Misplaced Project Blog*.<sup>4</sup>

**Privilege and the Importance of Traveling again, for the Perception:**

Stunning early morning sun warming up the soul  
Overwhelmingly beautiful large *Kastanienbaum*<sup>5</sup>, all of a sudden in full blossom,  
welcomes me at the end of my street at the entrance to the small Nordbahnhof park.  
Generous-portion-ice-cream-like shape of the flowers

Monday morning on my way to the airport  
It seems I forgot to pack a charger for my computer and phone  
Abandoned Ikea shelf with a red plastic bag on it, inside the elevator in the  
s-Bahn station

Wonder if the elevator is functioning at all  
The elevator door hardly opens, and closes in a suspicious way  
I won't make it to my train if I get stuck here  
Trust the feeling in my belly and drive with the shelf

I contemplate on visual similarity and rethinking differences between the home-  
less women with a trolley collecting bottles in the station and traveling busi-  
ness-women with trollies on the way to the airport.  
Forced and desired mobility...

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4      *Our Lady of Auguststraße*:  
      <<https://misplacedwomen.wordpress.com/2020/05/01/our-lady-of-auguststrase/>>

5      German word for chestnut tree



Completely used-up air inside the airport train  
The odour goes through the mask  
Enjoying the sun shining between the buildings and trees along the way  
The sun's rays flicker through the dirty window

Strange pain at one spot of my lower back  
It seems I pulled my onboard case in an unbalanced way  
Working on mobility on a micro scale while sitting

At the end of Frankfurter Allee Japanese cherries blossom in full bloom  
The sky is beautifully mirrored in the Treptow Park Spree

Berlin-Brandenburg Airport is such a *fehlerhafte* Architektur<sup>6</sup> that can't remain  
unnoticed whenever you are there  
Riding up a rare overcrowded escalator  
Noticing a handsome younger man walking up the staircase

At the next junction he changes to the escalator in front of me  
As I see a button from his coat on the ground, I pick it up and wait till I get off at  
the top of the escalator

I hurry up to catch him and offer the black bottom  
Kind face, surprised and thankful  
I continue walking towards the security check, smiling behind the FFP2 mask

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6 in German: faulty architecture

For further references and visuals please visit::

MIS(S)PLACED WOMEN? Project blog

<https://misplacedwomen.wordpress.com/>



MIS(S)PLACED WOMEN? Video Chanel

<https://vimeo.com/channels/1482708>



Tanja Ostojić: MIS(S)PLACED WOMEN?, 2009-2021, Collaborative art project / Kolaborativni umetnički projekat, KCB, Belgrade 2021 (Engl/Ser), Publication free download from Academia:

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TANJA OSTOJIC: Mis(s)placed Women? 2009-2022, A Collaborative Art Project, Depo Istanbul, 2022 (Engl), free download from Academia:

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*Our Lady of Auguststraße:*

<https://misplacedwomen.wordpress.com/2020/05/01/our-lady-of-auguststrase/>





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### **Biography**

Tanja Ostojić is Berlin-based performance and interdisciplinary artist, researcher and educator, internationally renowned as a pioneer of institutional critique from the gender perspective and for her work in the field of socially and politically engaged art and art in public space. Since 1994 she presented her work in a large number of solo and group exhibitions and festivals globally, such as Venice Biennale, Brooklyn Museum in New York, Busan Biennale in South Korea, among others. She received numerous prizes, grants and fellowships, while her artworks are included in relevant museum collections, have a high level of theoretical reference and have been analysed and included in numerous books, journals and anthologies. Also known for her academic career, Ostojić has given talks, seminars and workshops at academic conferences and at universities across Europe and in the Americas. She holds BA and MA from the University of Arts in Belgrade, Post-Diploma from ERBAN Nantes and the grade of fellow from The University of Arts Berlin. Ostojić is currently a University lecturer at the University of Applied Arts in Vienna and at the Iceland University of the Arts in Reykjavik.

/ Homo Arbitrarius  
Formae,  
Decision-maker  
and Brainworker

Venelin Iliev Shurelov, PhD  
National Academy of Art, Sofia  
Bulgaria

**Summary:** Homo Arbiter Formae or the One-Who-Makes-Aesthetic-Decisions is the next evolutionary step of human. By using this name, we can define the creative process as an organisation of “a set of elements that interact with one another”, and the artwork itself – as a living organism. Homo Arbiter Formae is a major player in the post-formalist functioning of systems-oriented culture. The theory of Homo Arbiter Formae regards making art as building systems. The visionary definition of Homo Arbiter Formae was given by Jack Burnham in his essay “Systems Aesthetics”, published in the journal *Artforum* (1968). The definition marks the transition from object-oriented to system-oriented culture. Burnham’s essay summarises processes that have been going on for several decades, but also creates a theoretical basis for future development. In my narrative, I will focus attention on the theory in its contemporary manifestations, but will also present works that have come into being in parallel with the theory. Special emphasis will be placed on different types of performativity available in a wide range of artistic practices, including visual arts, literature, music, dance, theatre. Performativity, determined by the idea that the work of art is a reactive consequence of the functioning of certain factors and circumstances, i.e. an effect of the processes in a system.

**Keywords:**

Homo Arbiter Formae, digital art, system esthetics, art and technology, cybernetics, software, performative media, Jack Burnham

*System Esthetics and  
Real Time Systems,*  
Artforum, 1968

Das Frank, view of installation, Pink and Gold, 8' fluorescent lamps, 1967 (Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago)



**SYSTEMS ESTHETICS**



Installation photograph, Robert Barry, Douglas Huebler, Joseph Kosuth and Lawrence Weiner, 44 E. 52nd Street, New York, January, 1969.

## REAL TIME SYSTEMS

**"...using the untapped energy and information network of the day to day environment."**

JACK BURNHAM

I read the news today oh boy  
Four thousand holes in Blackburn  
Lancashire  
And though the holes were rather small  
They had to count them all  
Now they know how many holes it takes  
To fill the Albert Hall  
I'd love to turn you on

Presently it will be accepted that art is an archaic information processing system, characteristically Byzantine rather than inefficient. To emphasize this cybernetic analogy, programming the art system involves some of the same features found in human brains and in large computer systems. Its command structure is typically hierarchical.<sup>1</sup> At the basic level artists are similar to programs and subroutines. They prepare new codes and analyze data in making works of art.

These activities are supervised by metaprograms which consist of instructions, descriptions, and the organizational structures of programs. Metaprograms include art movements, significant stylistic trends, and the business, promotional, and archival structures of the art world. At the highest level art contains a self-metaprogram which, on a long-term basis, reorganizes the goals of the art impulse. The self-metaprogram operates as an undetected overseer, establishing strategies on all lower levels in terms of societal needs. Because we have no comprehensive picture of human life, these needs remain rather obscure (*Zeitgeist* is not sufficiently teleologic to express the anticipatory monitoring function of the self-metaprogram).

Esthetic values emanate from the self-metaprogram. These are now changing, as evidenced by a number of symptomatic conditions: loss of interest in the gallery scene by the informed public,

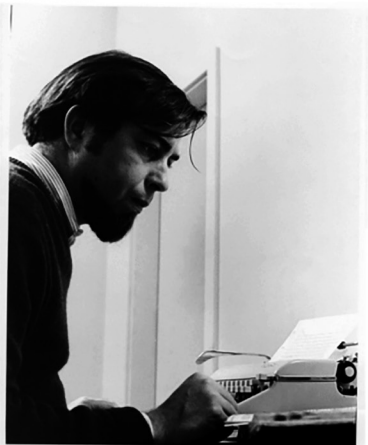


Center for Advanced Visual Studies Special Collection  
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**Jack Burnham**

Jack Burnham was a Fellow of the MIT Center for Advanced Visual Studies, among the first generation of CAVS Fellows. His areas of practice included light sculptures, curation, criticism and theory.

Photo: 1968-1970, from 12 November 1970.



1

Jack Burnham (1932–2019)

MIT **ARTFORUM**

PASSAGES

**JACK BURNHAM (1931–2019)**

March 19, 2019 • Melissa Ragain



Jack Burnham working on one of his viewer-activated luminous ribbon pieces, 1962. Photo: Northwestern University archives.

2

“As a culture producer, man has traditionally claimed the title, *Homo Faber: man the maker* (of tools and images). With continued advances in the industrial revolution, he assumes a new and more critical function. As *Homo Arbitr Formae* his prime role becomes that of *man the maker of esthetic decisions*. These decisions—whether they are made concertedly or not—control the quality of all future life on the Earth. Moreover, these are value judgements dictating the direction of technological endeavor.” (Burnham 1968a)

*Homo Arbitr Formae* or the One-Who-Makes-Aesthetic-Decisions is the next evolutionary step of human. By using this name, we can define the creative process as an organisation of “a set of elements that interact with one another”, and the work itself – as a living organism. The theory of *Homo Arbitr Formae* regards making art as building systems. The visionary definition of *Homo Arbitr Formae* was given by Jack Burnham in 1968 in the last para-

graph of his essay “Systems Aesthetics”, published in the journal *Artforum*. The definition marks the transition from object-oriented to system-oriented culture. Burnham’s essay summarises processes that have been going on for several decades, but also creates a theoretical basis for future development. In my narrative, I will focus attention on the theory in its contemporary manifestations, but will also present works that have come into being in parallel with the theory. Special emphasis will be placed on different types of performativity available in a wide range of artistic practices, including visual arts, literature, music, dance, theatre. Performativity, determined by the idea that the work of art is a reactive consequence of the functioning of certain factors and circumstances, i.e. an effect of the processes in a system.



Hans Haacke, „Blue Sail“ (1964-5)

“[T]he logical outcome of technology’s influence on art before the end of this century should be a series of art forms that manifest true intelligence, but perhaps more meaningfully, with a capacity for reciprocal relationships with human beings.” (Burnham 1968b, p. 15)

At the beginning, I will present the very theory of systems aesthetics. As I mentioned, at the basis is the theorist Jack Burnham and his 1968 essay “Systems Aesthetics” – a text followed by “Real Time Systems” a year later. A forerunner of the idea can be found in his book “Beyond Modern Sculpture” (1963); his last large-scale theoretical work is “The Structure of Art” (1971). Along with the theory in practice, he presents his ideas in the iconic curatorial exhibition “Software - Information Technology: Its New Meaning for Art” (1970).<sup>1</sup> I have got to mention that his reasoning develops in the context of Ludwig von Bertalanffy’s “Theory of Systems” and the cybernetics of Norbert Wiener, described in several of his works (Wiener 1985) (Wiener 1989) and finally promoted at the famous Macy Conferences (Pias 2016). Beyond the scientific contribution of the latter two to the development of, let me name them, the *responsive technologies*, their ideas have a powerful cultural impact. The consequences are striking and radical for the art world. Most essential is that for the systems the information, regardless of how it is presented or of its mode of presentation, becomes a significant aesthetic factor. There is no end product that is primarily visual, nor aesthetics that relies on the “visual” effect. There is resistance to applied aesthetics and closer scrutiny of the principles underlying the living processes in the surrounding environment. Post-formalist sensitivity responds naturally to stimuli that come from outside the underlying art form. The artist is emancipated from belonging to a style, manner, material and other frameworks of mimesis to an extent that this very sensitivity begins to resemble “theatre” insofar as in a stage situation there is a direct relationship between the individual elements in a living process. In this narrative, the term “theatricality” is not precise at all, but it marks a change in priorities.

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1 *Software - Information Technology: Its New Meaning for Art* was an exhibition curated by artist and critic Jack Burnham and held at the Jewish Museum in Brooklyn, New York City, 1970. The show put together computers and conceptual artists, linking them through the idea of software as a process or a program to be carried out by a machine or by the audience based on “instruction lines” formulated by the artist.

“[The] cultural obsession with the art object is slowly disappearing and being replaced by what might be called ‘systems consciousness.’ Actually, this shifts from the direct shaping of matter to a concern for organizing quantities of energy and information...” (Burnham 1968b, pp. 369–70)

The system approach goes beyond the activities of producing artifacts; in a revolutionary way it deals with the bigger problem of understanding borders. From the perspective of systems, there are no imaginary outlines such as a theatrical stage, book covers, music sheet, picture frame or principles for constructing three-dimensional shapes. It is not so much the material constraints and characteristics, it is rather the focus on the conceptual framework that determines what a system is. In this way, any situation can be worked out as or considered a system, even if it does not manifest itself as belonging to the art world. To the extent a system would contain people, ideas, messages, atmospheric conditions, energy sources, instructions, etc, it is, to quote the aforementioned Austrian biologist Ludwig von Bertalanffy, “*sets of elements standing in interaction*” (Bertalanffy 1969, p. 38), consisting of matter, energy and information in varying degrees of connectivity. In his attitude to systems, the artist assumes the role of an analyst, who takes into account the goals, limitations, structure, beginning and end of each activity within them (the systems). The artist is in the role of a transcendent decision maker engaged in the management of hidden processes. This is the shift from Homo Faber-oriented to objects with precise outlines and shape, to Homo Arbitr Formae—dedicated to a system that can be changed in time and space and whose behaviour can be changed by external circumstances and its own mechanisms for control. Marcel Duchamp’s statement – *I believe in the artist, art is a mirage* – is completely explainable in this context. I can word it in a different way: The focus shifts from the work to the artist. The artist himself becomes a work of art. More important is the question of who does what and why—than how he does/makes it, and what it looks like. Such an approach is directly reflected in the decades following mid-XX century, which we view as

years of protests, social activism, struggles for rights, and in which artists stand out for individual freedom to express, often through direct bodily experience, their reflexion. Physical performativity, ritualised personal experience, painful body art actions, semi-political provocations, artistic nihilism, authorship happenings, are a mechanism for regulating the social body. The artist is part of the collective body's immune system and actively participates in its self-evaluation, self-construction, autoregeneration.

In this context, what about beauty? Composition will save the world, if I may so boldly paraphrase Dostoevsky. Composition is the only possible aesthetic development. Composition is an equation that solves the problems of importance and availability. The measure of beauty today is the importance of what is available and its place in the social hierarchy. Composing is the ability to make creative decisions that give real expression to ideas. Homo Faber has finally become the Homo Arbitrator Formae—the one who makes a decision. The one who chooses and composes, and of whom it is known the least, because he prefers to work by being absent, and for the work—to liberate itself of his control. His art is hidden not only in material forms, it also composes the connections between people and the elements in their surrounding.

See how insightful Jack Burnham's thought is:

"Situated between aggressive electronic media and two hundred years of industrial vandalism, the long held idea that a tiny output of art objects could somehow "beautify" or even significantly modify the environment was naive. A parallel illusion existed in that artistic influence prevails by a psychic osmosis given off by such objects. Accordingly lip service to public beauty remains the province of well-guarded museums. Through the early stages of industrialism it remained possible for decorative media, including painting and sculpture, to embody the esthetic; but as technology progresses this impulse must identify

itself with the means of research and production. Obviously nothing could be less true for the present situation. In a society thus estranged only the didactic function of art continues to have meaning.” (Burnham 1968a)

Burnham calls the artist a “*semi-political provocateur*”. Understanding the artist as an organiser of the participating elements (*Homo Arbitrator Formae*) or as the main ideologist of the relationship between them, and art as a process-oriented system, leads to a new approach in all directions. Along with Burnham’s theories, many artistic practices emerged in visual arts in the 1960s and 1970s, which we now generalisingly call “digital arts” with innumerable branches, artists, and examples. For screen arts, the emerging alternatives are video art, expanded cinema, satellite performances, various immersive environments using screens or video projection, and gurus such as Nam June Paik, Steina and Woody Vasulka, Joan Jonas, Michael Naimark, Jeffrey Shaw, Jim Campbell. In literature stand out cut-up poetry inspired by Brion Gysin, the French OULPO group, a legacy adopted by a whole team of chatbots, encoders and decoders, forms and mechanisms for automatic writing. As for the world of music, I can mention the contributions of personalities such as Karlheinz Stockhausen, John Cage, David Tudor, Alvin Lucier, the latter standing out with his experiments in composing directly with brain waves using the EEG. A direct connection can be found between the attitude towards music, perceived and discussed mainly as sound, and the processes in the art of dance, in which movement is emphasised. Examples of the latter are the *Variations* of Merce Cunningham and John Cage, and more recently the New York group Troika Ranch, and the Isadora software developed by Mark Coniglio. If we accept the transformations “music – sound” and “dance – movement”, then for theatre the new perspective adds performance practices, happenings, actionism, cyber lectures, robotic and automated installations, motion tracking systems, reactive stage visualisations, etc. It can be said that theatricalisation, which I called an imprecise term at the

beginning of the narrative, is the core, consisting of the behavioral model of the system. It is made up of relationships. Each player has a defining role in it and is responsible for the relationships with the others. We can call the system itself the stage environment in which the media is a performer/actor (nowadays we even talk about performative media), the spectator is a director, and the artist is a playwright who has made some decisions in advance. The same model is noticeable regardless of whether we speak about theatre, dance, music, literature or visual arts. A model that lacks hierarchy, the artist does not fully control events, the viewer is a multi-user in a navigation network, instructions determine the action, traditional ideas are disassembled into their components, and imagery has the status of information boards on a geographical map.



Robert Morris, *L-shaped forms* (1968)

The time has come for a few examples. I start with those that arose at the same time as the aforementioned theories began to circulate in the common space.

“In the 1966, 68th American Show at the Chicago Art Institute, the sculptor, Robert Morris, was represented by two large, L-shaped forms which were shown the previous year in New York. Morris sent plans of the pieces to the carpenters at the Chicago museum where they were assembled for less than the cost of shipping the originals from New York. In the context of a systems esthetic possession of a privately fabricated work is no longer important.” (Burnham 1968a)

The information sent has overcome the geographical location and the circumstances related to the production. Therefore, artists who are aware of their work through this theory no longer think of as sculptors/carvers, but share the nature of architects, urban planners, civil engineers, electronic specialists and cultural anthropologists. We can review the trend as a natural continuation of Marshall McLuhan’s remark to Pop Art, which is a sign of readiness for the whole environment to be transformed into a work of art.

Lev Manovich, one of the most prominent commentators on digital culture, confirms this thesis, suggesting that the greatest artists today are computer scientists, programmers, IT specialists, and the greatest works of art are the new technologies themselves. Speaking of the whole environment, turned into a work of art according to McLuhan, we can include the whole online environment in the equation. Manovich argues that the Web represents the greatest hypertext work, “more complex, unpredictable and dynamic” than James Joyce could create; “the greatest avant-garde film is software such as *Final Cut Pro* or *After Effects*” since they offer endless possibilities and combinations and “the greatest interactive work is the interactive human-computer interface itself.” (Manovich 2003)





Nam June Paik, *“Random Access”* (1963)

The next project I would like to focus attention on is Nam June Paik’s 1963 *Random Access*. We can look at it in the light of the Web, in one of its proto-variants. The elements that make up the structure of the work require purposeful interaction. The work itself is an instrument with certain rules to be executed by the user. This is one of my favorite projects, especially in the context of such a topic that puts the aesthetic in the background, because at first glance it does not quite resemble a work of art.

The installation represents recorder tapes chaotically attached to the wall. Through the play head of a tape-recorder the viewer is given the opportunity to hear any part of the recordings. For as much time as he desires, he can surf in the Web. The recordings themselves are a diverse collection of fragments, ranging from classical music to occasional noises. *Random Access* is a web browser analogy in which the artist shows how a linear environment can be cut into pieces and scattered, forming a spatially extended, non-linear network structure of the work. *Random Access* has no beginning and no end, it cannot be repeated in the same way and can always be modified, whereas the participating viewer is free to navigate around the structure of the work.

Art is the embodiment of the idea about the visual elements established relations within the composition. And since the early 1960s, Hans Haacke has relied on the invisible components of the system. In a system context, invisibility, or the invisible parts are as important as the visible ones. Thus, air, water, steam and ice become paramount actors in his work. He aroused interest in “invisible art”. The works of art begin to function as “visual analogues” of the “world as a dynamic system”. Haacke’s systems have a short life as exhibited works. He argues that the need for empathy does not explain how his works work, as has been the case with older art. Systems exist as independent units in a process hidden from the viewer. The hierarchy of control in systems, interaction and independence become desirable and defining qualities. Borderline situations are central to his way of thinking. Such are the works *Photo-Electric Viewer Programmed Coordinate System* (1999), *Nachrichten* (1970), *Condensation Cube* (1963–5), *Norbert: All Systems Go* (1968) and others.



Hans Haacke, *Nachrichten* (1970)



Stelarc, *Re-Wired/Re-Mixed: Event for Dismembered Body* (2015)

Marshall McLuhan's reflection can serve as a link between the process-oriented systems of Morris, Paik and Haacke, and the cyber performances of contemporary artist and performer Stelarc. In his project *Re-Wired/Re-Mixed: Event for Dismembered Body*, he materialises the idea of a complex multi-sensor and multi-sensory experience. Stelarc connects his body to the Internet and is literally thrown like a rag doll into the hands of audiences in various geographical parts of the world. The remote viewer manipulates it with the help of sensor components, robotic prostheses and video and audio transmitters, and helps it enter the "reality of a cyborg". It is part of a multi-level system. In a five-day, six-hour-a-day performance, he makes it possible to explore the physiological, aesthetic and psychological experience of his fragmented, desynchronised and unmanageable body through an Internet platform. The artist wears a HUD (head-up display), which allows him to see with the "eyes" of someone in London, while hearing with the "ears" of another walking the streets of New York. The body has also been upgraded from an exoskeleton with 8 degrees of movement freedom, so that anyone who is hypothetically anywhere can generate involuntary movement of the right hand using the online interface. The artist becomes optically, acoustically and physically out of sync. What he perceives and performs is involuntary, becoming a remote-controlled puppet whose input impulses are dependent on the satellite partners involved in the system.

Speaking of systems and the possibilities for them to operate through online connectivity, several projects can be mentioned for being impressive. In early 2013, artists Carmen Weiskopf and Domagoj Smoljo from !Mediengruppe Bitnik sent a parcel to WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange, who was detained at the Embassy of Ecuador. The shipment contains a camera that transmits online its own journey through the mail system live in the Internet. They describe *Delivery for Mr. Assange* as a SYSTEM\_TEST and a work of Live Mail Art.



!Mediengruppe Bitnik, *Random Darknet Shopper*, 2014

The Swiss British duo are also known for sending bots shopping in the Darknet. *Random Darknet Shopper* is an art project that includes a specially designed algorithm, “embodied” in an online shopping bot, which aims to indiscriminately buy goods from illegal websites visible with the Tor browser. For three months, !Mediengruppe Bitnik has been sending the bot on market expeditions into the Darknet. With \$100 in bitcoins at its disposal per week, it randomly chooses among approximately 16,000 items and sends its purchase to a specifically selected exhibition space. The bot itself is in the role of a performer, but also a curator, applying a particular liberal form of curating. The collection of the virtual algorithm, consisting of 25 items, which it purchased in the period October 2014 - March 2016, is directly exhibited at Kunst Halle Sankt Gallen, Horatio Junior Gallery in London and Aksioma - Institute for Contemporary Art, Ljubljana.

So far we can generalise that technology is an agent of performative action. As regards the world of art, in the mechanisms of this process we can see how “... static figurative sculpture moved away from the classicism of Euclidean proportions and toward the Faustian dynamicism of the mathematical function.” (Burnham 1968b, p. 8) Friedrich Jünger acknowledged more than forty years ago that “technology is the metaphysics of our century.” (Burnham 1968b, p. 2)

It is in the turbulent context of the digital revolution that software plays a crucial and decisive role. It is the core that has the privilege and rights to run the systems. Software in itself is a system. Software is the technological extension in virtual and real space. It is the main tool of labour, supporting the evolution of Homo Arbitrator Formae. In the development of technology we can distinguish the computer as an important tool and partner in all creative fields. In the digital world, different disciplines are hybridised owing to its mediation. The digital media is integrative and often assists in unlocking the unsuspected potential of each of the elements involved. It makes possible the existence of global art projects, including neurodesign, neuroscience, brain-computer interaction, generative graphics, sculptural modeling, music, poetry, finance, politics, ethics. Such is the last work I shall present to you.

During the eighth edition of DA FEST in 2021 we showed the VoV project of Maurice Benayoun in Sofia. Through it, we can make a summary of what has been said so far and outline the current aspects of today's Homo Arbitrator Formae. In light of Benayoun's project, the viewer, through his own biometric indicators, shapes the idea, becomes a curator, collector, art dealer. The work can be called a “Viral Society of Agents”, including a select circle of representatives: generator, calligrapher, printer, reader, interpreter, scientist, analyst, accountant, poet.

!Mediengruppe Bitnik,  
*„Delivery for Mr. Assange“ (2013)*









Maurice Benayoun (AKA MoBer), Tobias Klein, and Nicolas Mendoza, *Values of Values (VoV)*, Blockchain-based Art project, 2020

The viewer participates in a series of procedures, the main task of which is to shape various human values directly from their minds and controlling their evolution with the power of thought. Visitors are brainworkers whose “thought in action” is transformed from an abstract flow of data in three-dimensional objects into NFT. The specific stages which the participating viewer goes through are the following: user registration in the online platform of VoV and creation of a virtual wallet; that same web application at the end of the whole process allows, by scanning a QR code—a result of the personal neurodesign, the adding of a new token to his personal collection; the actual work of the brain worker starts, as he is seated in a comfortable chair (VoV station) and a diadem for EEG is placed (on his head), which reads the waves of his brain activity; instructions are projected on a large video screen opposite him, which

allow for personal calibration in several steps; in the next phase, the software randomly sets a “value” (out of 42 possible), e.g. intellect, justice, modesty, happiness, wisdom, trust, etc; through the signal provided by the EEG, the user’s personal electro-brain waves control various parameters such as gravity, complexity, dispersion, chromaticity, etc, of a three-dimensional object, which is consequently in continuous graphic mutation; at the end of the 8-minute session, the brainworker has completed the modeling, with each participant inheriting a specific DNA of the form corresponding to the 10 descriptors, but also changing it for the next one working on the same “value”. The resulting models become VoV tokens (NFT), automatically registered in Blockchain, and in the exhibition space become available to the user owing to a printed QR code. By being scanned through the VoV web application, the customised tokens are added to the wallet and the monetisation process is complete. The options that follow are related to the collection, trade, exchange or reification of the graphic model. The final touch from the multi-software organisation is the so-called “transactional poetry”, generated automatically when a transaction is completed. The form is a concise, ethical statement derived from the linguistic components of the actual transaction.

Today’s notion of full-blooded performativity is very reminiscent of some giddy computer habitat inhabited by strange and incomprehensible techno-creatures and processes. They often provoke skepticism and nostalgia for the good old art. In performative presentations of systems, especially in online environments, the object, even the subject, is gradually erased, depersonalised, redefined on the forefront of the computer monitor. Jack Burnham is far-sighted in this regard as well. Before finally getting detached from his active work as a theorist and curator, he writes the article “Art and Technology: The Panacea That Failed”. If in his previous texts one can sense the dissatisfaction with the conventional artistic-historical approach to the nature and development of sculpture, then in

this phase we perceive the suspicion that art and technology are incompatible. “My experiences with semiology and iconography lead me to believe that the enormous vitality and will-to-change behind Western art is in a sense an illusion, just as technology harbors its own illusionary impulses.” (Burnham 1980, p. 212)

Burnham observes the emergence of a new kind of techno-formalism; he perceives that the quasi-science seeks to subtract the human factor from the equation, which seems to be the optimising task of cybernetics; he is certain that all the efforts end up to be a sad failure, that the rift between art and sophisticated technology is a reflection of the profound differences in the neural programmes of the scientists’ and artists’ minds.

“Nevertheless, while art and technology show signs of mutual exclusiveness, at the level of anagogic significance they may actually be completely tautological.” (Burnham 1980, p. 215)

Regardless of the tools used by Homo Arbitr Formae or the One-Who-Makes-Aesthetic-Decisions, he remains a major player in the post-formalist functioning of the system-oriented culture. The artist’s attention is redirected from the form-making capacity of human intuition (formalism) to the life of form (post-formalism), i.e. regardless of whether he uses his body or a certain virtual avatar, of interest are the relationships between functions, figures, phenomena, ideas, people, messages, systems.

Homo Arbitr Formae chooses its partners when building a shared system, in which consciousness and gesture merge. Well, gesture is sometimes dominated by technologies, but every technology is the result of a conscious human gesture.

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Author of various interactive installations/performances, some of which are „Drawing machine" (2005), „Fantomat" (2008), „Orthoman" (2009) "Tabula Rasa" (2010), the cyber lecture "Man Ex Machina" (2011), „Rotor" (2016) - presented at Ars Electronica center, Linz. In 2020 he realized the interactive installation in public space One Person - Urban Electronic Corpus.

/ Björk's *Biophilia*  
in the light of the  
performing arts -  
A step toward  
a new paradigm

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**Summary:** Multimedia project *Biophilia* (2011) by Icelandic artist Björk is a unique creative venture that unites music, science, ecology, technology, and innovative approaches to teaching. Even though it is primarily made as Björk's seventh studio album, *Biophilia* is not only a collection of ten songs about various natural phenomena (from Moon cycles to DNA replication) but also a platform packed with interactive materials that can greatly enrich the experience of the songs. For each song on the album, there is a special application excitingly illustrating its prominent features. The application allows you not only to rearrange the final form of the song but also to analyze the song in relation to its lyrics and musical notation. The intersecting of music, video games, and educational materials has already been used as an inspiring teaching tool in many, primarily Scandinavian schools. However, in addition to the music album, teaching device, and application, *Biophilia* includes many other innovations and activities: from using new and unconventional musical instruments, through recording music videos and films about the project, to an ambitious concert tour, Björk shows an outstanding capacity for interconnecting music, visual, and performing arts. Apart from presenting the multimedia character of Björk's project, this paper will also point out its possible connections with ecological humanities.

**Keywords:** Björk, *Biophilia*, biophilia as a term, app album, interactivity, technological innovation, teaching device.



*When Björk Met Attenborough,*  
directed by Louise Hooper,  
and *Björk Biophilia Live,*  
directed by Peter Strickland  
and Nick Fenton.





## Introduction

Icelandic singer-songwriter, actress, and multimedia artist Björk (1965) has been well-known in the music industry for decades. From the very beginning of her career as a child singer in Iceland, where her first (eponymous) studio album was released in 1977 until her latest studio album *Fossora* (2022) which was released exactly 45 years later, Björk has constantly demonstrated an extraordinary artistic sense for innovation and self-invention. Each of her solo studio albums is highly conceptual: whenever she records an album, a new form of musical language is made, as well as a completely new music persona. This becomes obvious just by looking at her album covers: from a humble, unpretentious photo of the artist in *Debut* (1993), Björk's first recording after her previous band's breakup (The Sugarcubes), through to the delicate, sensual cover art for *Vespertine* (2001), where the singer wore an iconic swan dress created by Macedonian fashion designer Marjan Pejoski, to the expressive costume with a dandelion-like headpiece in *Vulnicura* (2015), one can witness a truly exciting and unpredictable creative evolution. It is crucial here to remember that Björk's visual identity is inseparable from her music – she uses visual language to make her music more suggestive. That is especially important if we think about changes of instrumentation in her work. For example, one of the most famous of Björk's albums, *Homogenic* (1997), relies on strings in relation to electronic beats, while *Volta* (2007) is recognizable for its use of a brass section. However, the album with the most unusual musical language is probably *Medúlla* (2004), which is almost entirely recorded *a cappella*. Despite Björk's artistic work being quite popular and influential, no one has succeeded in sounding the same. Her music might be seen as a genre in its own right, even though it has multiple correlations with avant-pop (Albiez, 2017).

Björk's propensity towards pioneering projects is crucial for understanding her oeuvre. In that sense, *Biophilia* (2011) has a truly special status: a studio album,

an interactive digital installation, the first app album ever (Dibben, 2013, p. 682), and the first downloadable app which is included in a permanent museum exhibition (in MoMA) (Keazor, 2018, p. 206). Moreover, *Biophilia* is a research project on using new or unconventional musical instruments (such as the Tesla coil or gravity harp), but it is also – a musical instrument itself, since certain options of the app can be used for making new music. *Biophilia* also includes live shows, several music videos, and two films (*When Björk Met Attenborough*, directed by Louise Hooper, and *Björk: Biophilia Live*, directed by Peter Strickland and Nick Fenton). Even more than that, *Biophilia* is an unprecedented educational project that combines music, technology, nature, and science, and through various workshops stimulates *experiential learning* (Kristinsdóttir, 2018, p. 399). Bearing all this in mind, a great illustration of the multidisciplinary character of Björk's project might be – to look into the origins of biophilia as a term.

### **Biophilia as a term**

Interestingly, the term *biophilia* was coined by Erich Fromm. Defining *biophilia* as “the passionate love of life and of all that is alive” (Fromm, 1973, p. 365). Fromm reinterpreted Freud's concepts of life (Eros) and death (Thanatos) instincts, as the two fundamental drives of human beings. However, unlike Freud, who claimed that both tendencies have equal rank, Fromm thought that necrophilia is not a normal psychological impulse, but the psychopathological alternative to biophilia, which is biologically endowed in human beings (Fromm, 1973, p. 366). For Fromm, a biophilious person...

... prefers to construct rather than to retain. He is capable of wondering, and he prefers to see something new rather than to find confirmation of the old. He loves the adventure of living more than he does certainty. He sees the whole rather than only the parts, structures rather than

summations. He wants to mold and to influence by love, reason, and example; not by force, by cutting things apart, by the bureaucratic manner of administering people as if they were things. Because he enjoys life and all its manifestations he is not a passionate consumer of newly packaged “excitement”. (Fromm, 1973, p. 365)

This quotation is important not only because it accurately represents the spirit of Björk’s project, but also because of the feeling it emanates – that biophilia is not an exception, but the ubiquitous quality of life. Life aspires to life, and has its own inner tendency for growth and cooperation. Being creative and open to the world in all its different forms – means to be, metaphorically speaking, in harmony with the world. Even more than that – biophilia can shed new light on the concept of sanity, which has been understood for a long time as an exclusively anthropocentric category (cf. Roszak, 1992, p. 14). Being a biophilic person implies particular environmental, nature-oriented ethics that can make a significant influence not only on our theoretical apparatus but also in our everyday life. Hence, Björk’s *Biophilia* might be understood as a pedagogical platform for supporting biophilic tendencies.

The second most important definition of biophilia is offered by the famous American naturalist Edward O. Wilson. He defines biophilia as “the innate tendency to focus on life and lifelike processes” (Wilson, 1984, p. 1). Probably the main evidence of biophilia (which is also known as the biophilia hypothesis) comes from the fact that the natural world is universally appreciated, which can be seen in mythology as well as in the symbolic use of nature in language (Rogers, 2019). According to Wilson, there are two fundamental concepts of biophilia: fascination and affiliation (Barbiero & Berto, 2021). As forms of emotional participation, these concepts have their own phylogenetic history, which is rooted in human evolution (Barbiero & Berto, 2021, p. 13). It is

conceivable that biophilia has ancient roots that can be reactivated with art. This intersecting between nature (biophilia) and culture (art) is highly important not just for *Biophilia*, but for Björk's music in general. From her hit single *Human Behaviour* in 1993, telling a story about human activities from a non-human perspective to *Biophilia's* complex relations with various natural phenomena, Björk persistently challenges our prejudices about the anthroposphere and the natural world.

### **The Structure of *Biophilia***

As a studio album, *Biophilia* consists of ten songs. Each song is about a different natural phenomenon. Simultaneously, every track presents 1) a term in musicology, 2) a concept in natural sciences, and 3) an idea in humanities and social sciences. This entangled, interconnected, and unusual structure is represented in the form of a table (Table 1), for some clarity. The table is made using materials from the official website of The Biophilia Educational Project<sup>1</sup>.

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 1 Despite being tightly connected with the album, this project is not inseparable from it. Promoting the values of a sustainable society, as well as musical exploration and imagination, together with the newest technology, The *Biophilia* Educational Project uses music and apps for making new educational pathways. At the official website of the project, one can find useful advice for promoting the project in a school setting, which can be quite beneficial for developing a holistic school curriculum that is not rooted in the strict separation of school subjects (Kristinsdóttir, 2018, p. 402). Even though the project was primarily oriented towards children aged 10-12 years (BEP, 2021), some researchers used the ideas behind the project for much older participants – college students (Hageman, 2016). However, it is essential to adapt the teaching plan to the age of the participants. Also, as many of *Biophilia* workshops were organized in science museums, special attention should be given to this aspect of the project. Therefore, in a pedagogical sense, the learning environment can be seen as a “third teacher” (Kristinsdóttir, 2018, p. 400) that stimulates participation and learning through experience. However, it should be noticed that some researchers evaluate the pedagogical function of *Biophilia* negatively (Keazor, 2018, p. 208).

TRACKLIST	MUSIC	NATURE	SCIENCES	HUMAN
Moon	sequences	lunar phases	astronomy	renewal
Thunderbolt	arpeggios	thunder, lightning	physics	miracles
Crystalline	structure	crystals	chemistry	freedom
Cosmogony	equilibrium	Big Bang	cosmology	creation myths
Dark Matter	scales	Dark Matter	astrophysics	non-verbal communication
Hollow	rhythm, time signatures	DNA	biology	ancestry
Virus	generative music	viruses	biology	symbiotic relationships
Sacrifice	notation	evolution	biology	equality of the sexes
Mutual Core	chords	tectonic plates	geology	tension
Solstice	Counterpoint, bassline	Earth orbit, tilt	astronomy	man and cosmos

Table 1 - The Structure of *Biophilia* (BEP, 2021)

*Biophilia* exists not only as a studio album but also as a suite of apps<sup>2</sup> united by the main, constellation-like app that represents the song “Cosmogony”. When opening the main app, the voice of David Attenborough is heard reading some kind of manifesto of the project, explaining what *biophilia* means. Bearing in mind his popularity as an author of nature documentaries, Attenborough as an opening narrator and symbolic host of the world of *Biophilia* is an

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2 It should be emphasized that *Biophilia* as an app album would have not been possible without interactive artist and app developer Scott Snibbe, as well as a large number of collaborators (Snibbe, 2022).

interesting choice. From the very beginning, a horizon of expectations that includes pedagogical apparatus of nature documentaries is made (Tainen, Kontturi & Hongisto, 2015, p. 20). Even though *Biophilia* is profoundly about interactivity and a proactive approach to music (Dibben, 2013, p. 687), it should not be overlooked that behind every app lies a *story* about the very concept of biophilia as a love for nature in all of its manifestations. In her intriguing work, Björk re-examines the connection between narration and non-narrative structures, nature and culture. Therefore, one of the essential aspects of the whole project is the lyrics of the songs, which can be read as a pure poetry.<sup>3</sup>

Besides the lyrics, for each song in the *Biophilia* app a double musical score has been created: a conventional one and a non-traditional type of musical notation created by Stephen Malinowski. A user of the app can analyze the structure of the songs, or play them with their own instruments. That is one of the special qualities of *Biophilia*: every user creates their own experience according to their personal interests. Moreover, in order to fully experience *Biophilia*, one cannot be a passive consumer, but an active participant in the artistic process. A listener becomes a user and a researcher. Consequently, the conventional interrelation between an artist and a recipient is redefined. While using the app, the users are drawn into a special kind of participatory artistic practice.

One of the most fascinating facts about the *Biophilia* app design is that it is always connected with the nature of the song. For example, the app for “Moon”,

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 3 Curiously enough, every verse of “Cosmogony” is based on a different etiological myth: 1) the Miwok creation myth, 2) Sanskrit creation myth, 3) Aboriginal creation myth, and, surprisingly, 4) Big Bang. This juxtaposition shows one of the crucial ideas of *Biophilia* – scientific discourse can also be experienced as a myth. Almost all of the lyrics for the album were written by Björk. Exceptions are: “Solstice” written by Sjón, “Thunderbolt” written by Björk and Oddný Eir Ævarsdóttir, and “Cosmogony” and “Virus” written by Björk and Sjón. Both Sjón and Oddný Eir Ævarsdóttir are famous and critically acclaimed Icelandic writers.



the first track of the album, is about musical sequences, that are illustrated by stylized lunar phases. For every phase, there is a tone that can be played. One can create a completely new melody just by choosing different lunar elements in the app. The same can be said for the “Thunderbolt” app, where one can play arpeggios (broken chords) by using more than one finger on the touchscreen. Choosing a touchscreen to make music, Björk characterized “as offering a more spontaneous and embodied mode of engagement” within and without the educational sphere (Dibben, 2013, p. 694). This is of no surprise since Björk has been using touchscreens and other interactive electronic physical devices to perform and compose since 2007 (Dibben, 2013, p. 686).

The third song of the album, “Crystalline”, has an app that resembles an arcade game. This app is organized as a game of navigation through tunnels where users collect various crystals in order to change the structure of the song. Not only do the players have a synesthetic experience but also an opportunity to contemplate the relationship between verse and chorus as one of the omnipresent structures of popular music. The crystal which is made at the end of the game is, basically, a materialized song. Hence, playing the app unites tactile, audio, and visual sensations.

“Dark Matter”, the fifth song of the album, is – according to its name – the most mysterious. It is the only *Biophilia* song sung in an unknown language and the only song without a time signature. The app made for the song is about musical scales that are visualized as a pseudo-magnetic field. The user of the app might play with the musical scales, and through that become aware of alternative, non-Western musical scales. Here, a quite important aim of *Biophilia* shines through: to show alternative perspectives that are not anthropocentric and Eurocentric.

In an educational context, this app can be used as a precious and inspiring basis for a guided discussion about non-verbal communication or non-human language systems. Students more drawn to astronomy can make a whole presentation about dark-matter as a phenomenon, and those who are more interested in music might try to make their own song based on an unconventional musical scale. This teaching pattern can be applied to every song of *Biophilia*.

The songs numbered six and seven of *Biophilia* are about the microscopic world. While the first one, “Hollow”, about DNA replication, is composed in an unconventional rhythm with eerie melody, the second one, “Virus”, is a more accessible but still unsettling love story between a cell and a virus. It is quite indicative that Björk’s vision of nature in *Biophilia* is never human-sized but always linked to micro or macrostructures (Dibben, 2013, p. 690). Some researchers claim that Björk’s artistic vision is not to observe nature and thus colonize it, but to sing together with non-human surroundings in the need of reciprocal understanding (Susdorf, 2017, p. 115-116). Consequently, *Biophilia*’s ambitions are more far-reaching than experimenting with music. In the light of Timothy Morton’s philosophy<sup>4</sup>, Björk’s project might be seen as a contribution to the redefinition of life as an ontological and biological phenomenon. There is literally more non-human DNA in a human being than there is human DNA, which sounds paradoxical, but only if we overlook the circumstance that “[a] human being is an ecosystem of nonhumans, a fuzzy set like a meadow, or the biosphere, a climate, a frog, a eukaryotic cell, a DNA strand” (Morton, 2016, 71). That is why *Biophilia* is an invitation for finding a new identity that can reconfigure the relationship between a subject and an object (Susdorf, 2017, p. 117). No matter how eccentric it might seem, a love song about a virus and a cell

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 4 It is interesting how *hyperobject*, one of the most influential concepts of Timothy Morton’s philosophy, was named after Björk’s 1996 hit single “Hyperballad” (Morton, 2018).

is not just a metaphor for the dynamics in a loving relationship, but also a call for more inclusive thinking about life. The sooner we realize that we are not singularities but multitudes, the better it would be both for us and for the non-human world.

The same intention is also visible in Björk's fashion choices for *Biophilia* live shows. Her dresses have "a major role as a connector between the human and nonhuman, allowing for the becoming of the more-than-human" (Tiainen, et al, 2015, p. 31). Therefore, even her unusual orange, nebula-like hairstyle or stage costumes are correlated with the main ideas of the project. The fascinating interconnectedness of the different artistic dimensions of *Biophilia* might be understood as a particular form of interactive and educational *Gesamtkunstwerk*, where the encyclopaedic totality of the world is envisaged and performed on the stage.

As one of the central ideas of *Biophilia* is an audio-visual correlation, it is interesting how some song apps have elements of irony. For instance, the app for the song "Virus" stands apart as a bit of an anti-game. As Scott Snibbe mentioned in a tutorial for the song, it is a game where a player has to lose in order to win (Snibbe, 2022). In other words, if the player does not let the cell die of a virus attack, the song will stop. Once again, Björk challenges our predominant views about different life forms, as well as symbiotic relationships that shape the way we are.

The eighth song of *Biophilia*, "Sacrifice", is about evolution as a biological phenomenon, but from the perspective of a female experience. It is worth noticing that Björk tends to deconstruct the ingrained opinion of nature as a

“romanticized-woman-like figure, overgrown with myths of fertility” (Susdorf, 2017, p. 114). The picture of the female perspective is much more complex and ambivalent, but above all, it is also one of the alternatives for the dominating worldview. The following “Sacrifice” app is about alternative music notation. A player can compose a song by using the app as a music sequencer. One of the indirect messages of this type of app, especially in the context of Björk’s feminism, is – to find your own voice.

Something similar can be said for the last two tracks of the album: “Mutual Core” and “Solstice”. As in “Sacrifice”, where the world of nature received a cultural and almost political dimension, Björk managed to achieve exceptional poetic images inspired by natural phenomena in these songs. For example, the lyrics of “Mutual Core” have two quite peculiar lines: “As fast as your fingernail grows / The Atlantic ridge drifts”. This unusual connection between the human and non-human world is probably a reference to Ilana Halperin’s work (Thompson, 2009, p. 23), where the same comparison can be found. As an artist who predominantly focuses on connections between geology and anthroposphere, Halperin’s artistic obsession is to find *geological intimacies* that have the power to reconnect us with the world (Thompson, 2009). Even though Björk has not yet confirmed that her work on “Mutual Core” was inspired by Halperin’s art, it is quite interesting that both artists have similar symbols and artistic strategies. In addition to this, it should not be left unnoticed that both Björk and Halperin artistically explore the potential correlations between human and natural rhythms.

The topics explored in *Biophilia* are also in the context of Pythagorean philosophy. The *music of the spheres*, as one of the crucial concepts in the philosophy of music, has its own form in the app for the song “Solstice”. A user of this app

can make music by manipulating celestial bodies on the screen. After that, the app can be used for making new melodies that follow the orbits of the celestial bodies. Once again, the visual and the audio part of the project are intertwined.

Regardless of whether songs in *Biophilia* are about a microworld or a macroworld, Björk's art shows an enormous capacity for finding new artistic and theoretical pathways. Therefore, in every song, one can witness a truly powerful artistic vision that combines ancient myths with the newest technology, which makes conventional limits between humans and nature almost indistinguishable (Tiainen, et al, 2015). The microworld and the macroworld have thus been frequently intercrossed in the human body. Sometimes, as in the "Moon" app or in the "Hollow" app, human anatomy is depicted as a mysterious but integral part of a natural world: in the "Moon" app – by combining bones, water, and the lunar structures; in the "Hollow" app – with Björk's face hidden in the microscopic world. As human perception is inseparable from its physical existence, sometimes the most spiritual experience, especially in the context of the new materialism, might be the most physical one (Susdorf, 2017).

Accordingly, it is not surprising that the music video<sup>5</sup> for "Mutual Core" (directed by Andrew Thomas Huang) presents a unique mixture of biological, geological, and digital structures, as well as humanoid creatures dwelling in magmatic surroundings. It has already been noticed that Björk's stage persona in *Biophilia Live* has the quality of making all-encompassing relations (Tiainen, et al, 2015, p. 26), which can decentralize an anthropocentric worldview (Tiainen, et al, 2015, p. 35).

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<sup>5</sup> Besides the music video directed by Huang, two more music videos are made for *Biophilia*. The first one is a music video for "Crystalline", directed by Michel Gondry, and the second one is "Moon", directed by Björk, M/M Paris, Inez & Vinoodh, and James Merry.

## Conclusion

*Biophilia's* ambitions and interactive capacities are now obvious. However, after a brief overview of *Biophilia's* potentials, a question might arise: how far has this project come in searching for a new artistic paradigm? Above all, what does a *step towards a new paradigm* actually mean here?

Considering these questions, several conclusions can be drawn.

Firstly, *Biophilia* is a pioneering endeavour in creating, listening, and experiencing music. The conventional relationship between a music performer, a song, and a listener is changed.

Secondly, apart from Björk's own live shows and performances, *Biophilia* as an app album is a type of performing art in its own right. Or, to be more precise: *Biophilia* as an app album is a multimedia platform for participatory practice in which fundamental concepts of artistic communication are redefined and reinvigorated.

Thirdly, *Biophilia* is a valuable contribution to education, an example of how future education might be organized. Instead of passive learning, *Biophilia* encourages experience-based learning, curiosity, breaking boundaries between the school subjects, and learning as creative research. It also affirms environmental ethics as well as non-anthropocentric and non-westernized worldviews. Consequently, the learning process can be significantly democratized and focused on the personal interests and talents of the students.

Finally, *Biophilia* can establish a completely new paradigm in terms of knowledge organization. Its playful encyclopedism might inspire the creation of new, holistic approaches to knowledge, art, philosophy, and science.

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/ The Fluid Context of  
Performing the Digital  
in the project Svetlana Volic:  
“NON FINITO – Performings  
of Spatial Narratives”

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**Summary:** The research paper will examine the fluid context of performing digital narratives within the framework of the artistic research project “NON FINITO – Performings of Spatial Narratives”. Through the presentation of the project, it will show how the meaning and perception of digital images vary depending on the medium of their visualization and method of performance in different spatial and temporal contexts. Digital technology enables a wide range of manifestations of the same content; images are not fixedly defined but, with each different performance, undergo transformation and produce new meanings. The research paper will analyze the aesthetic-ethical changes in perception of the digital image when it is displayed on the screen, in the form of video projection in space, or as printed material. It will demonstrate how the context changes when the same digital images are performed within an ambient installation in the gallery space or as an integral part of the theatrical performance. Finally, it will conclude how the fluid contextualization and transformative possibilities of performing digital narratives can be used as the conceptual foundation of the artistic project and correspond with its profound symbolic and philosophical postulates.

**Keywords:**

Digital performance, fluid context, video installation, temporality, spatial poetry

Svetlana Volic: frames from  
video works of the project  
NON FINITO





The project “NON FINITO: Performings of Spatial Narratives” began in 2013 and has been ongoing in the form of transformable and *open work*<sup>1</sup> since then. Within the project, five ambient installations have been performed in different gallery spaces: NON FINITO, passage 1: Dream of another place, Gallery 73, Belgrade, 2017; NON FINITO, passage 2: Where the World Ends, Salon of the Museum of Contemporary Art, Belgrade, 2017; NON FINITO, passage 3: When the walls become soft, Contemporary Art Gallery, Cultural Center Pancevo, 2017; NON FINITO, passage 4: The space between inhalation and exhalation, Gallery “Ilije M. Kolarca Foundation”, Belgrade, 2017; NON FINITO, passage 5: Where the Gaze Ends, Pavillion in the Fortress, Gallery of Contemporary Arts, Niš, 2019.

The project was also recontextualized and hybridly integrated into a video installation for the theater performance IRANIAN CONFERENCE, which premiered on March 9, 2022, on the “Raša Plaović” Stage in the National Theater in Belgrade.<sup>2</sup>

The foundation of the NON FINITO project is an ever-growing digital repository that stores photos and videos taken during numerous research trips. They create the video library, a collection of sights used as material for performing different ambient installations. The concept of those digitally captured images is based on the movement and careful observation of selected sights—segments of reality that become somewhat of passageways intended for the contemplation of life, existence, transience, and transformation.

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1 Opera aperta. Refers to Umberto Eco's concept of open work. Eco, U. (1989) *The Open Work*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: HARVARD UNIVERSITY PRESS

2 IRANIAN CONFERENCE is the play by Ivan Aleksandrovich Vyrypaev (Polish, Russian-born playwright, screenwriter, film director, actor, and art director). The play was staged at the National Theater in Belgrade by Serbian theatre director Ivana Vujić (author of the video installation Svetlana Volic, visual artist).

The time invested in the perception of found sights is extended; these are long, focused gazes that enable philosophical thinking and lyrical interpretations of the world. Each video is captured in one still shot (duration: 1-3 minutes), as a focused “living picture” that functions as an extension of the photographic or painting medium. The images are devoid of any context, they do not illustrate, describe, or tell a story, metaphysically speaking, they have neither a clear beginning nor a definite end, because they are only fragments of existence. “For each video, there was a particular right place and a particular right time in which the work could happen. These are the sights recorded above the Atlantic Ocean, or from Rome, Venice, New Orleans, Istanbul, Dubrovnik, Berlin, Belgrade, Zlatibor, Corfu Island, and so on. However, the naming of these destinations does not have an essential importance for the project itself. These are not the impressions from a journey, postcards or travelogues. The works could have been shot on almost any given spot across the globe, even at some nearby site, in the author’s immediate vicinity. Because what is at stake here is not tourism, the discovery of cultural-historical contents, nor the exoticism of the site-specific, but rather the movement, the freedom, and a peculiar search for an image. It is a search for a peculiar sight that would resonate with the movements taking place across the inner landscape of the being, that will represent this world, set it in motion, shape the thinking, and help it to become visible. The place where the sights are is not somewhere on the globe, at some specific point on the map, nor even in the visible world, but precisely at the borderline where the world ends, where the gaze ends.”<sup>3</sup>

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3 Volic, S. (2017) *NON FINITO, pasaž 2: Gde prestaje svet*, Beograd: Muzej savremene umetnosti, str. 44.



Svetlana Volic: frames from video works of the project NON FINITO

Everything that can be seen can be digitized—captured with a digital camera and stored as digital information.<sup>4</sup> But digital information becomes visible and acquires its temporary meaning only by being displayed on a certain device or performed in a certain medium. Without this act of performance, it is just a combination of binary code stored on the computer or in some external database that has the potential to be performed. Digital images from the project NON FINITO had to be performed in order to be shown to the public. They could only become a work of art or an integral part of it by appearing in a spe-

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4 „Digital information is information that has been converted to a digital format, allowing the information to be stored in computers, databases, and other formats that are digitally accessible. Digital information is created by converting information into binary code, a code that is readable by computers. Binary code is a language that uses zeroes and ones to transfer information into a form that can be read and reproduced by computer-based technology.“ Retrieved from <https://study.com/learn/lesson/digital-data-overview-binary-language.html>

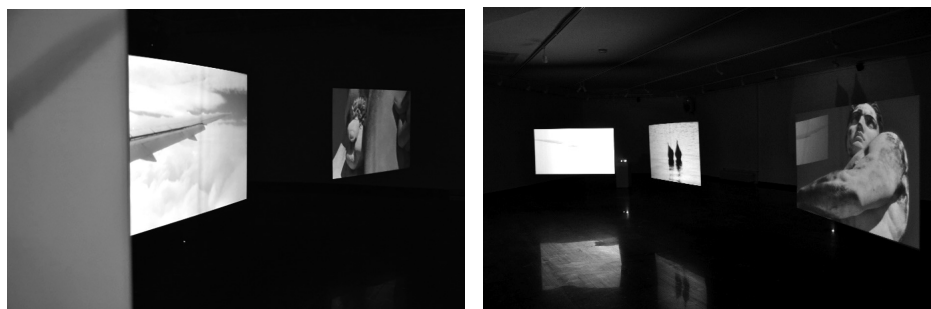
cific spatial and temporal context.<sup>5</sup> Separated scenes taken from reality already functioned individually as unique poetic expressions, and they demanded to be exhibited as separate entities, not as parts of one integrally edited video work. They function as open poetic images, as expressions that can be contemplated within certain symbols, meanings, and metaphors. At the same time, they are mysterious, given in hints, and appear essentially unfinished. Their structuring in gallery spaces had to remain equally open and non-linear. In reality, there is only a sum of individual situations which are not necessarily related to each other. Life is the flow of those events in which there is no clear beginning, middle, or end. The solution was the creation of ambient installations—specific poetic structures in space built by a combination of selected digital images.<sup>6</sup>

5 "Digitization, in a certain sense, transforms visual arts into performative ones because the condition of its visibility is not only production but also "performance", the actualization of a digital document into an image, text, sound, etc. It follows that each performance is different concerning the context: it is not the same whether a digital photograph appears as a print in a gallery space, a billboard on the street, or on a mobile phone. To that extent, the visualization of a digital image is also its interpretation. This would mean that a digital image does not have a defined, fixed framework of meaning but is in a constant process of producing meaning." Stanković, M. (2015). *FLUIDNI KONTEKST - Kontekstualne prakse u savremenoj umetnosti*, Beograd: Centar za medije i komunikacije, Fakultet za medije i komunikacije. str. 136.

6 Boris Groys in the text Multiple authorship defines an artwork within the framework of contemporary artistic practice as an exhibited object: "The object that is not exhibited is not an artwork but merely an object that has the potential to be exhibited as an artwork. Not by chance do we speak of art today as "contemporary art." It is the art that must currently be exhibited to be considered art at all. The elementary unit of art today is therefore no longer an artwork as an object but an art space in which objects are exhibited: the space of an exhibition, of an installation. Present-day art is not the sum of particular things but the topology of particular places. The installation demonstrates the material of the civilization in which we live particularly well since it installs everything that otherwise merely circulates in our civilization. Hence the installation demonstrates the civilizational hardware that otherwise remains unnoticed behind the surface of circulation in the media. And it also shows the artist's sovereignty at work: how this sovereignty defines and practices its strategies of selection." Groys, B. (2006). Multiple Authorship. In B. Vanderlinden & E. Filipovic (Eds.), *The Manifesta Decade: Debates on Contemporary Exhibitions and Biennials*, London: The MIT Press. pp. 93-99.



As previously stated, within the project “NON FINITO – Performings of Spatial Narratives”, five ambient installations have been performed in different art galleries. Each ambient installation aimed to create and perform an authentic spatial narrative or multilayered poetic whole, that primarily needed to give a spectator an experience of presence in a constructed spatiotemporal context. As a kind of homage to Walter Benjamin’s last unfinished work, *Passagenwerk*, each exhibition was composed as a separate passage. Passages functioned as curated collections of digital images, a temporal spatial montage of selected fragments borrowed from reality and placed at the beholder’s disposal. These were not linearly set and finished stories that the author has sovereign control over, close to Walter Benjamin’s thoughts: “Method of this project: literary montage. I needn’t say anything. Merely show. I shall purloin no valuables, appropriate no ingenious formulations. But the rags, the refuse--these I will not inventory but allow, in the only way possible, to come into their own: by making use of them.” (Benjamin, 1999, N1a,8)<sup>7</sup>



Svetlana Volic: Video installation “NON FINITO, passage 1: Dream of another place”, 2017.<sup>8</sup>

7 Benjamin, W. (1999). *The Arcades Project*, Harvard University Press. N1a, 8.

8 (photograph: Svetlana Volic)

The first ambient installation, “NON FINITO, passage 1: Dream of another place,” was performed at Gallery 73 in Belgrade as a three-channel video installation. Since each recording within the NON FINITO project was already perceived as a finished poetic image, it was necessary to prepare the first “spatial collection” of those short expressions. The single footage had to remain intact and integral but also be placed in a certain relationship with other images. The collection of video works that were projected on each of the three plexiglass surfaces was thematically and symbolically determined in a certain way, but the narrative structure remained open. The hybrid method of spatial montage functioned as a specific form of “spatial poetry” that allowed the viewer to edit his film, look into his inner space, and symbolically draw associations and meanings from it.<sup>9</sup> In this way, the spatial narrative could be interpreted as text (textuality), where its perceptive quality is derived from the interlacing of the sentences (images) that compose it and where the single image does not exist outside of the installation’s temporary context and textualization possibilities.<sup>10</sup> The perception of the narrative was fluid because it did not exist outside of the contextual input of the observer. Inevitably, the lack of information and unfinished narrative forced the observer to invest in the content from his own experience or intertextual deposits. Intertextuality indicates that the text/image does not have one fixed, unequivocal meaning and highlights the active role of the reader/observer in the production of his own subjective meanings.<sup>11</sup> The time frame for observing and perceiving the video works in the installation was not determined, the images were

9 “When we say expanded cinema we actually mean expanded consciousness.” Youngblood, G. (1970). *Expanded Cinema*. New York: E.P. Dutton. pp. 41.

10 “All media are mixed media, and all representations are heterogeneous; there are no purely visual or verbal arts.” Mitchell, W. J. T. (1994). *Picture Theory: Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press. pp. 5.

11 The term “intertextuality” was coined by poststructuralist Julia Kristeva in 1966. According to Kristeva, when readers read a new text, they are always influenced by other texts they have read before.

displayed in a loop, and the screens were not synchronized, so the situation in time and space was never the same. By projecting video works on the plexiglass, digital images were perceived as ethereal phantasms in space. The method of performing digital images in the form of video projection enabled an impression of a fluid space shaped by the light, in which the observer could physically and spiritually immerse himself.<sup>12</sup> The originally recorded sound has been deleted, and everything is reduced to the perception of images. Silence is an important aspect of the work. It enables concentrated observation and deeper contemplation of the image.



Svetlana Volic: Video installation "NON FINITO, passage 2: Where the World Ends", 2017.

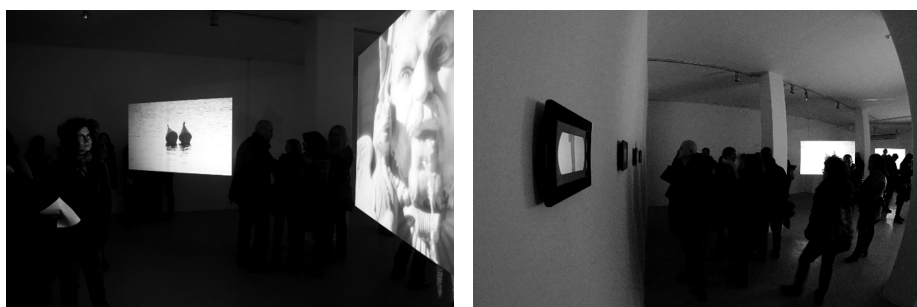
.....  
 12 "Immersion can be an intellectually stimulating process; however, in most cases, both now and in the past, immersion is mentally absorbing and a process, a change, a passage from one mental state to another. Diminishing critical distance and increasing emotional involvement in what is happening characterize it." Grau, O. (2008). *Virtuelna umetnost*, Beograd: Clio. str. 24.

The video installation, “NON FINITO, passage 2: Where the World Ends,” was composed for the Salon of the Museum of Contemporary Art in Belgrade, as a new spatial narrative with a more complex structure, a virtual landscape through which the spectator moves and whose interdependent contents offer a possibility of multilayered reading, connecting, perception, and projection.<sup>13</sup> The main structure was built by projecting video works on five Plexiglas surfaces situated in the gallery space, accompanied by four photo frames placed on one gallery wall. Compared to the first passage, the exhibition in the Salon of the Museum of Contemporary Art revolved around a more complex poetic whole and a non-linear spatial narrative, the number of videos and screens was increased, the symbolically and associatively structured themes on each of the five video projections were more elaborate, their relationships were multi-layered, etc. Moving through spatial and temporal frameworks was not a given thing for a perception of works. The circling through space was presumed, the works ran in a loop and were not synchronized, and there was no preset beginning or end. In Gallery 73, the overall poetic image could be perceived from one point in space. The spectator could see all three projections on the plexiglass at the same time. However, in the Salon, the perception of the whole inevitably required movement and observing the images from different angles. The concept of the open work was reflected in the possibilities of variable, non-linear spatial montage of the images within the installation. It can be said that the supreme medium of this video installation was the space itself. The observer was absorbed into the *panoramic spectacle*,<sup>14</sup> theoretically, he could roam endlessly in space from one point to another, concentrating on one screen or a current combination of

13 The specificity of the installation, according to Rosalind Kraus is its spatial dimension, which she defines as “landscape” or “architecture”. Krauss, R. (1986). *Sculpture in the Expanded Field. The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths*. London: The MIT Press. pp. 279.

14 Newman, M. (2009). Moving Image in the Gallery since the 1990s. In Stuart Comer, S. (Ed.) *Film and Video Art*. London: Tate, pp. 86-121.

screens. He assumed the role of creator: traveling through the multidimensional “spatial poetry” he followed the flow of his thoughts and wrote his narrative. As artist Ilya Kabakov said: “The main actor in the total installation, the main centre toward which everything is addressed, for which everything is intended, is the viewer.”<sup>15</sup>



Svetlana Volic: Video installation “NON FINITO, passage 2: Where the World Ends,” 2017.<sup>16</sup>

The four photo frames on the wall displayed the author’s movement in various locations around the world and functioned as a collection of video surveillance cameras. The monumental dimension of images projected on plexiglass surfaces and the light of the video projections increase the perceptual immersion into virtual space<sup>17</sup>, while the images displayed on miniature photo frames maintain the perceptive division between the space of the image and the space in which the viewer is located. Those two methods of performing a digital narrative gave

15 Retrieved from <http://www.tate.org.uk/learn/online-resources/glossary/i/installation-art>

16 (photograph: Svetlana Volic)

17 “Like light, projection carries inherent capacities for distortion and illusion as well as rational correspondence (by extension, the psychoanalytic concept implies confusion between inside and outside, between interior psychic life and external reality”. Kotz, L. (2005) - Video Projection: The Space Between Screens. In Kocur, Z. & Leung, S. (Eds.), *Theory in contemporary art since 1985*, Malden, Mass.: Blackwell Pub. pp.132

different contexts for the perception of the images and their meaning, showing how the visualization of digital image is also the key to its interpretation.

The ambient installation “NON FINITO, passage 3: When the walls become soft” was performed in the Gallery of Contemporary Art in Pančevo. In the third passage of the project, the digital images were performed as printed photographs, video projections in space, and video works and animations displayed on photo frames. The photographs functioned as imprints of abstract thought about the journey, the projected video works on the plexiglass as immersive illusions, and the video works and animations on the photo-frame screens as an immediate video transmission of physical movement. Each of those three dimensions of performing a digital narrative activates the physical space and the internal space of the observer differently.

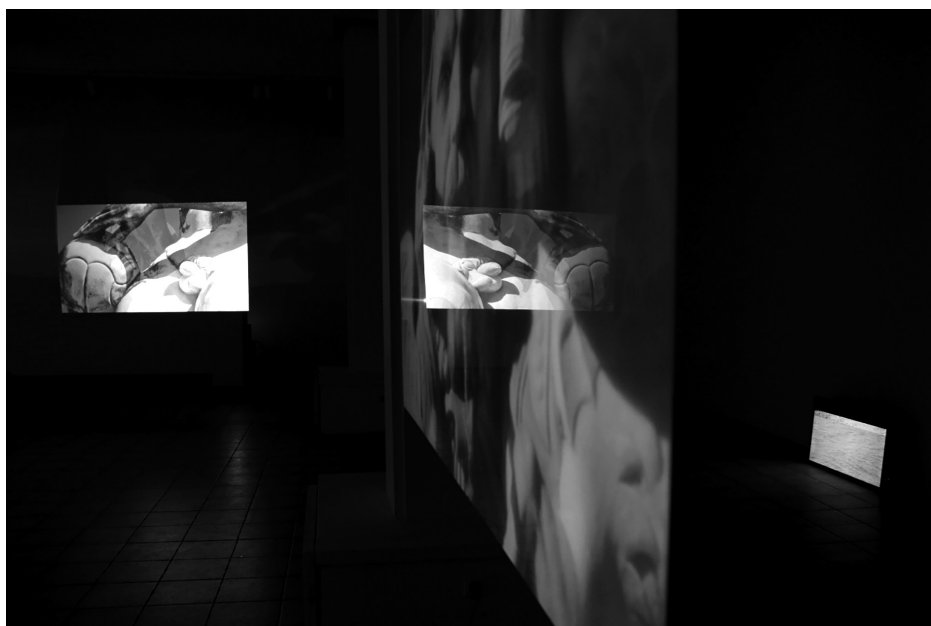


Svetlana Volic: Ambient installations “NON FINITO, passage 3: When the walls become soft” and “NON FINITO, passage 4: The space between inhalation and exhalation”, 2017.<sup>18</sup>

“NON FINITO, passage 4: The space between inhalation and exhalation”, was presented in the Gallery of Kolarc’s Endowment in Belgrade. The ambient was built from ten photographs printed on lithographic paper, that recorded the movement of a train along a parallel railway track. As in the previous passage,

18 (photograph: Svetlana Volic)

the printed medium did not offer the observer the immediate illusion of presence in a certain space, but rather an abstract and metaphysical thought about traveling through time and space. With the calm way of displaying photos in a row, the exhibition represented an invitation to meditation and quiet contemplation over the images. The visual changes in photographs are minimal, those are small movements and differences, sensitive tremors in time and space. The photographs are on a thin line between reality and complete abstraction. They are not scenes of duration taken from reality in their sumptuous diversity, rhythm, colors, and variety of manifestations, as in the case of video works from the NON FINITO project. Rather, they are frozen points in time and space that evoke movement, an endless line of continuous travel, infinite transition in the course of which the individual loses its contours and mercilessly disappears.



Svetlana Volic; "NON FINITO, passage 5: Where the Gaze Ends", 2019.<sup>19</sup>

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19 (photograph: Svetlana Volic)

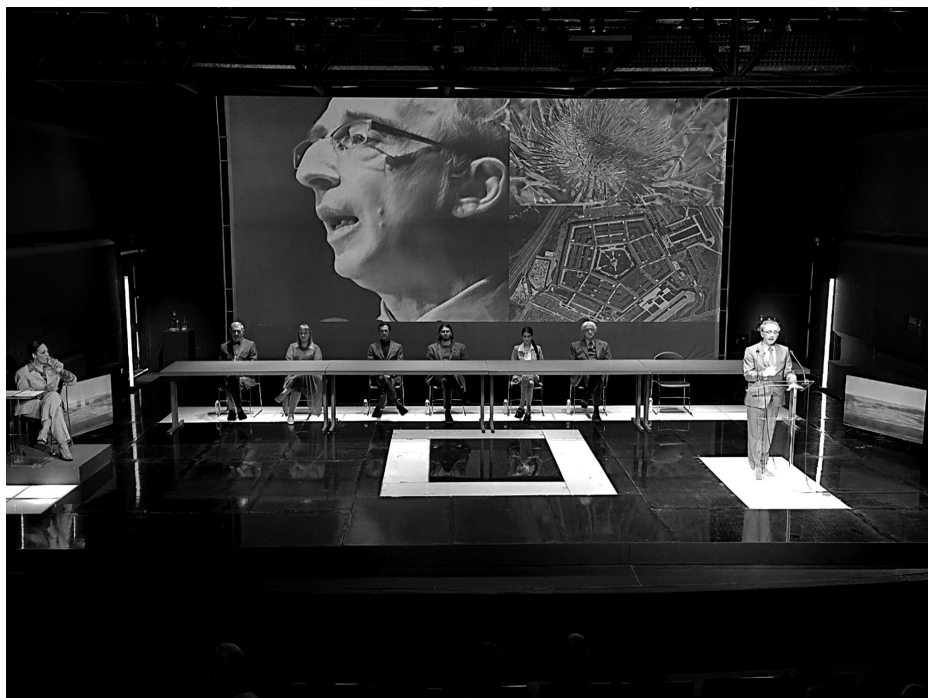
The fifth exhibition, “NON FINITO, passage 5: Where the Gaze Ends”, was performed as a multilayered video installation in the Gallery of Contemporary Arts in Niš. It was realized as a seven-channel video installation (video works projected on five Plexiglas surfaces and two plasma TVs). The number of selected scenes from the digital library shown on five Plexiglas increased compared to the second passage of the project, which made the narrative structure and its perceptual possibilities more complex and intertextually defined. Video collages made of recordings showing continuous water streams were displayed on plasma TVs and ran in a loop, too. A special folder of the non finito digital library consists of recordings of different water movements in seas, lakes, and rivers, captured during research trips. Those selected fragments served as material for the creation of video collages, hybrid landscapes created by the combination and manipulation of digital records. The place of the expected horizon in the video collages is represented by a black “extinguished” screen that figures as the absence of a digital signal or the presence of death (final), but at the same time as an approximate expanse of space. By turning off the associated light of the sky, the watery earth flows are placed in a double context in a scenographic way. The hybrid landscapes are created at the level of a cultural construct, the human-nature relationship, which he constructs from the depths of his desires and fears, utopian or dystopian ideas about time and space. The “abnormal” parallel series of horizontal lines and surfaces, as well as the reversal of wave movement direction, create strangeness and a departure from reality. Through the process of composing, abstracting, and removing information from the recordings, the idea of their origin disappeared, so it is not entirely clear whether they are representations of reality or encrypted digital noises, electronic records that contain information about something else.



Svetlana Volic, Video  
installation "NON FINITO,  
passage 2: Where the Worlds Ends"  
2017







Theater performance, "The Iranian Conference," National Theater in Belgrade, 2022.<sup>20</sup>

Selected digital images from the NON FINITO project's digital storage were also used to create a video installation for the theater production IRANIAN CONFERENCE at Belgrade's National Theatre. They were juxtaposed with live camera broadcasts of actors on stage and documentary materials related to the contemporary state of our civilization (socio-political issues, the current distribution of power, wars, and disasters, consumer culture, environmental catastrophes, etc.). In their relationship with other images within the multi-channel hybrid digital narrative, they acquired new meanings. The same digital images (video works) from the project NON FINITO, previously used for the construction of

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20 (photograph: Svetlana Volic)

video installations in art galleries (primarily understood as decontextualized poetic images of nature and its manifestations, deprived of any concrete narrative and dramaturgy), were loaded with new meanings in intertextual communication with other constitutive elements of the video installation (texts and images filled with cultural, social, political, and historical contexts). Digital technology has been incorporated into theater performance in terms of intermediality—the interrelationships of theater with other media. The video installation was interconnected with all other constitutive media of the theatrical performance, as a means of expression and exchange in which different media relate and depend on each other. Simultaneously, digital installation was part of the scenography, part of the narrator/narrative, part of dramaturgy, part of light design, etc.

The title of the project, NON FINITO was chosen in a philosophical sense to signify an unbroken process of existing, moving, and transforming in time and space. Translated from Italian, *non finito* means “unfinished.” Non finito aesthetics is characterized by an open form, action, or process without a clearly defined ending, instead implying some further development. It is a author’s conscious or unconscious intention and, at the same time, the possibility of leaving the spectator a space for his creative contribution and projection. The subtitle, “Performings of Spatial Narratives,” is related to a specific link with performing arts and the ephemerality of the installation as an art medium.

The entire “NON-FINITO” project is built around the creative and aesthetic principle of the unfinished. Video works are unfinished images, segments of life and durations devoid of any particular context. The method of variable, temporary textualization of digital images in different spatial and temporal narratives functions according to the principle of open work. The project is in a state of continuous movement, from physical movement and recording of various sights encountered during the journey to their passage through temporary spatial structures. It is in the constant development and production of meanings, and

does not have a clearly defined end. Theoretically, it has the potential to expand, develop, and transform infinitely in time and space. The transiency of the project form is similar to the principles in nature—the dynamics of the existence of all beings and things. This analogy with life processes was essential to the non finito project. The fluid context of performing the digital within ambient installations and theater performance, reflected in the temporary textuality and intermediality of those art forms, fully corresponded to the concept of the project and its deepest substantive and philosophical foundations. Digital images did not actually exist outside of that textuality. After their appearance in temporary spatial narratives, they were losing their function, or the symbolic mandate they acquired while they were part of the installation—a process that is close to the existence of human thought, which emerges, meanders, and disappears in our inner expanses, just as a digital narrative temporarily inundates the space in which it is performed.

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**Biography**

Svetlana Volic was born in Belgrade in 1974. In 1999, she graduated from the Faculty of Fine Arts in Belgrade, Department of Painting, where she also completed post-graduate studies in 2002, and obtained her doctoral degree in art in 2018. She is currently an Associate Professor at the Faculty of Fine Arts in Belgrade. She works in various media: painting, video and video-installation, photography, scene design, and graphic design. She realized 18 solo exhibitions, and participated in numerous group exhibitions, workshops, site-specific projects, and festivals in Serbia, and abroad (Czech Republic, Montenegro, Macedonia, Estonia, Latvia, Hungary, Bulgaria, Italy, Greece, Germany, Poland, the USA, and Canada). She has made video installations for many theater productions. Her works are present in museums, public and private collections in the country and abroad.







/ Aerodynamics -  
multimedia  
performance

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### **Taking off**

Project **Aerodynamics - multimedia performance** is based on a long-standing interest in the phenomenon of personality, body (moving of the body and a person to whom the body belongs), heritage, as well as the phenomenon of the boundaries and specific framework in a given time and space, movements, and journeys from and to one's own identity. That journey is not necessarily spatial and chronological but internal, associative, and spiral-like the DNA chain. Transmitting the message, our unique code, our narrative, in a certain way, Aristotle's *mythos* in which each of us is the protagonist and hero of our life odyssey, and at the same time, an ephemeral component, transitory and replaceable.

This movement is an essence of Aerodynamics as a multimedia project. Based on the cultural, political, ideological, psychological and biological heritage, the phenomenon of the human body in a given time and space, movement, and crossing the gap *from and to* one's own identity. Growing up in the Balkans, one cannot separate the political from the personal body because of the geopolitical and historical position of the former Republic of Yugoslavia. Civil war took place at the end 20th century in Yugoslavia, and the tragic situation with the current war in Ukraine, in the second decade of the 21st century, reminds us of the fragility of our position and inspires the content of the *Aerodynamics* project.

Civilians leaving Sarajevo  
in 1992





In this paper, the methodology (the inner movement) of *Aerodynamics* - multimedia performance, is presented as an exploration of some aspects and possibilities of that kind of movement, the attempt to freeze, the attempt to calcify the moment. This static movement trapped in the digital media loop is the basis of this artistic research into that specific period (1992/2022). The ephemerality of identity, personal and social, and the cultural understanding of *Otherness*, especially important in the Balkans, are some of the dominant themes. This procedure inevitably introduces a political connotation that further contextualizes the phenomena. *Aerodynamics* - multimedia performance is based on archival material of selected media content; television shows and documentaries from 1992 to 2022, collaged with a family video. Fragments of memories and media materials make an allegory by which we re-examine and question socio-political truths as immutable, given the world as a changeable, perishable and volatile place where a person with the same ephemeral characteristics at one point marks a space.

The (civil) war might be an example of that specific movement, mirroring the weak position that one might have lived in, in our time. What happens when we realize that our presence, *the I*, is changeable in time and space? Our position is not a safe, static formation but a changeable and vulnerable social and political structure. The moment of crossing those border spaces, whether they are social or personal, inevitably leads to some form of wounding. That field of perforation becomes a new angle of observation from which the search for aura begins, a journey into the inner labyrinth of *Being*, through which the multimedia narrative, *Aerodynamics* performance, is unfolding. In the title itself, the mechanism and structure of the projects revile to some extent, referring to NASA's definition of aerodynamics, taking some parts of the definition as dogmas, and transferring them into the political body position. *Aerodynamics* - multimedia performance echoing the movement of the bodies and then translating it into digital performance. Two historical movements of bodies (1992/2022) collide.

We see bodies in media, in aeroplanes, buses, boats, and cars, or going on foot. Bodies jumping and swimming in the swimming pool, enjoying life and leisure time - all following the laws of aerodynamics. The political dynamics that reflect people's lives, and their freedom and choice of movement that are caught in the media loop, reveal the content of this project.

### **The embodiment of Aerodynamics - multimedia performance**

#### **1. body<sup>1</sup> noun plural noun: bodies**

1. the physical structure, including the bones, flesh, and organs, of a person or an animal.  
"it's important to keep your body in good condition"
2. the main section of a motor vehicle or aircraft.  
"the factory had produced more car bodies than needed"

3rd person present: **bodies**

1. give material form to something abstract.

"he bodied forth the traditional Prussian remedy for all ills"

1. build the bodywork of (a motor vehicle).
2. "an era when automobiles were bodied over wooden frames"

**2. aerodynamics<sup>2</sup> - Aerodynamics is the way air moves around things.** The rules of aerodynamics explain how an airplane is able to fly. **Anything that moves through air reacts to aerodynamics. A rocket** blasting off the launch pad and **a kite** in the sky react to aerodynamics. Aerodynamics even acts on cars, since air flows around cars.

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1 body - Google Search

2 What Is Aerodynamics? | NASA

By connecting these two terms, *body* and *aerodynamics*, as we found them defined on the web, we got a perfect *hybrid* starting point for exciting and inspiring research. The noun - body, in this case, refers to the biological body and the object. A *biological body* is a human being making (creating) an object. The object always has a specific value. The body can also be a part - the central part of an object. The algorithm gives us an example of the central part - the fuselage of an aeroplane or an engine, and something abstract, less known, which needs to get a particular structure. Equating these meanings of the term, we have a hybrid concept of body-object, with which we could start obeying the law of aerodynamics, which, according to NASA, represents how all air moves around the thing-object, from a launching rocket projectile to a kite in the wind.

### **Paradoxes of hybridity**

In its original meaning, hybrid is a biological term for the being created by crossing different species. The complex notions of hybridity and hybridization taking place in all segments of social life and interpersonal relations (in language, ideology, politics, ways of practising political and economic power, marketing, placing information and building one's identity on social networks, media codes, fashion, food culture) are much more challenging to give a simple definition. Zorica Bačanović Nikolić, in her article *Paradoxes of hybridity, orientalism (Balkanism) and sublaterality in "Nova" Jelena Dimitrijević's novel*, gives the following explanation: 'Hybridity and hybridization represent a complex phenomenon of merging cultural forms on the level of discourse, world image, self-shaping, self-presentation and self-understanding of individuals, social communities and entire cultures.' The author points to the contribution of M.M. Bakhtin (Михаил Михайлович Бахтин), who dealt with hybrid phenomena in language. According to Bakhtin, a hybrid statement has a dual character and can contain two meanings, two styles, and two systems of values and beliefs. In contrast, within the statement itself, there is no demarcation between them.

This contradictory meaning appears in different (speech) genres, especially in parody and irony. One aspect observed by Bakhtin is of great importance for the development of postcolonial theories - the assumption of different ideological points of view, the erasure of binary positions and the boundaries between them. The relationship between the colonizer and the colonized. Hybridity as a postcolonial discourse points to the blurring and covering of binary oppositions between those two terms. These binary positions often go from theory into practice, paving the way for the escalations. The same principle is ongoing once again, considering Ukraine and Kosovo.

Hybridity combines cultural differences that destabilize identity. Constructed opposites such as: past and present, domestic and foreign, national and international, outside and inside, inclusion and exclusion, all synchronous essentialism, all signifiers of permanence. Such identities are somewhere in between (in-between spaces); their indeterminacy implies attraction and repulsion within the world of inequality to which they belong. (...) In those non-identities, gaps, and changes of form, in incomplete sameness, somewhere in between, hybridity is located. It brings about the instability of the consciousness of both the colonizer and the colonized. The colonizer cannot be recognized in the mirror of the colonized but finds only their disturbingly distorted reflection, the sameness, the incomplete otherness. Hybridity cannot provide a perspective of depth, that is, of truth: it is not a third term that resolves the tension between two cultures in the dialectical game of 'recognition' colonial specularly, doubly inscribed, does not produce a mirror in which the self understands itself; specularly is always a torn screen of the self and its doubling, the *hybrid*.<sup>3</sup> In support of this, the Argentine culturologist, Nestor Garcia Canclini, in his essay *Hybrid cultures, hidden pow-*

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 3 The author quotes Homi Bhabha, "Signs as Miracles. Questions of Ambivalence and Authority Raised Under a Tree Near Delhi, May 1817", *Situating Culture*,( 211-212)



er<sup>4</sup>, points to the fact that from today's perspective, it is impossible to talk about the homogenization of the culture of the global postmodern world. What we can do is look at the movement that takes place in the sense of redefining traditional cultural forms, their particularization, and recombination into a new fragmented form based on a new but invisible hybrid principle of powerful forces that gives the appearance of a homogeneous structure (image of the world) which as such is possible for consumption.

The new world creates a new public sphere and new cultural spaces, which are impossible to understand if we stick to a strict division into old and new, traditional - modern, ours and others, but that there has been a hybridization of these binary opposites under the influence of many factors from the technological revolution to demographic changes. Media culture represents a new public sphere, stimulating integration in a disintegrating society. (582)

New power relations, according to Canclini, are conditioned by the process of strengthening hybridization. Amalgam creates and absorbs modernist binary positions through a strange vector field:

(...) power would not work if it were only the power of the bourgeoisie over the proletarians, the whites over the natives, the

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4 CULTURAL STUDIES: collection / (edited by Jelena Đorđević). Official Gazette: 2012. N. G. Canclini. Hybrid cultures, hidden power. (568-585)

parents over the children, and the media over the recipients. Because all relationships are intertwined, each is more effective than ever. It is not that some forms of dominance are superior to others and, therefore, stronger. The stealth in the weft itself is what gives them their effectiveness. How do we distinguish where ethnic power ends, where family power begins, or where the lines between political and economic power are? (582)

In a world without clearly defined borders, the individual (a fractal or a pixel on the global screen of modern society) finds it increasingly difficult to establish a reference system of their own identity. The possibility of contact is possible through the establishment of hybrid relations towards others and the cultural systems within which the individual exists. Canklin concludes that all present-day cultures are border cultures, and the borders become liminal spaces into which it is possible to load different contexts depending on the position of power that imposes the dominant narrative. In such a world, art should, among other things, indicate the tectonic movements of contemporary society and reflect the kaleidoscopic reality we live. Analyzing the concept of hybridity was the next movement in the project *Aerodynamics*.

## At the border

*Do you know what a border is?... If I take another step, I am a different person; or dead.*

The line from the movie *The Suspended Step of the Stork* by Theodoros Theo Angelopoulos

Getting to know the world you are interested in, whether you love it or fear it, strive or oppose it. The world that is not a mute object can only be comprehended when it gets close. Then you stand on the border between yourself and what you know. Pero Zanini<sup>5</sup> points out that we see the border as space, not as an unambiguously determined line. In this way, we begin the journey of getting to know the borders without prejudice because it is a way of giving a new form and character. Reconciling the dissonance, the exclusion (excludere), and the potential chaos<sup>6</sup> that it brings with it is not enough to remove the visible prerogatives of

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5 Zanini, Piero. (2002). (trans. Slavica Slatinac). *The Meanings of the Border: Natural, Historical, and Spiritual Determinants*. Belgrade: Clio

6 The list is endless: war, exodus, ghettos, columns, persecutions, refugee camps, faeces, mud, thirst, jumping over walls, crossing the barbed wire, swimming across rivers and seas, hiking over mountains massif, desert, border crossings, warnings, documentation, sewage, fatigue, hopelessness, foreign languages, familiar views-walls, running over while you and your child are kicked by the disgruntled ones residents of the Center, pouring snot, dogs farting, transportation in hidden parts of ships, trucks, van, hiding, hunger, cold, fear, maybe death, a new morning, red sun through the mist.

borders.<sup>7</sup> The goal is to create, as Zanini continues, a border as a space for dialogue. The commitment of all our senses to the limit, as the intention to understand the invisible.

Moving towards the margin, experiencing that threshold, being on the border - requires from each of us the willingness and desire to gain experience by learning beyond the habits, beliefs and prejudices that each of us has. Because of approaching the limits, even moral ones, this experience can turn out to be extremely brutal, paradoxical, and exciting simultaneously. Experiencing the border, its contradictions, and its endless liveliness means practising tolerance, coexistence, and living together despite differences. (Zanini 12.)

In a *space in-between*, a symbolic gap into which institutions, ideologies and different narratives fell; accelerating the process until Yugoslavia's final collapse and disintegration during the last decade of the twentieth century. It was the time of one's childhood and the beginning of a transformation into adulthood. Brutally and suddenly, just like the war burst out. The *fiscal body* transformed

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7 The context of the border - the actual border crossing - is the basis of the performance I performed as part of the multimedia installation. *KUT.I.JA* - ambient performance, doctoral art project. The border-line within auto-performance is marked with white tape on the floor of the Artlab gallery, Kolarčeva zadužbina, in Belgrade, creating a border in the gallery space. The intention was to open a space for communication, touch, and contact between me as a body/object/performer and the spectator; but also to point out an invisible and unspeakable space. The Aerodynamics - digital performance is a poetical extension of this project, transferring it into the digital space.

into the *political body*. The movement was *vertical* (conflicting ideologies, religion, politics, all aspect that defines - the Otherness) and *horizontal* (bodies, crossing the borders, trying to move from the scene). That, in-between space, led generations of people to an unstable, unsafe and ultimately deadly area, but also left the entire disintegrated and disoriented society in a position where identity reinvented itself quickly and sharply concerning others. That process of imperceptible hybridization was unstoppable like a river, while it was still bleeding, butchered by new borders, a once sovereign state on the margin, turning into a marginalized state and moving further and further away from the cultural narratives of the European Center. Thirty years later, we are witnessing the space in between that captures the Center and that introduces a new, hybrid discourse of the world map. This unstable ground should be the reason for a new approach to solving the crisis, in which art can, by asking certain questions and activating principles of action, indicate the depth and darkness of the gap; and again and again, persistently, like Pandora, keep in the box something that (maybe) can save the world.

### **Borders of identity**

Identity is always in relationship to the Other. The identity of the individual realizes itself only with other individuals. When asked *Who I am*, the answer would be the one who is not someone else. Could certain qualities be fundamentally different from the quality of some other self? To know oneself is to see the differences from all others or identify with others. Nikola Petković, an anthropologist, problematizes the construction of identity, questioning the phenomena both in the space of borders of continental cultures and on the border between the terms and concepts of identity and the process of identification<sup>8</sup>.

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8 Petkovic, Nikola. (2010). *Identity and border: Hybridity and language, culture and citizenship of the 21st century*. Zagreb: Naklada Jesenski i Turk

Identity is being in context, just as it is out of context, and applies to individuals as well as to groups. (234)

In his book, the author offers insight into two fundamental approaches to the complex phenomenon of identity:

Essentialist

Anti-essentialist

Essentialism, according to him, presupposes possession as a critical category, and connects identity with the concept of space. Therefore, to be aware of who we are, in comparison with Others is inevitable, while at the same time, we refuse to accept the logical idea that we are in a relationship with those Others and that we compare ourselves with them. Also, when we recognize Others, they represent some threat to the development of our imagined self, and to strengthen that fragile, constructed self/we, we act aggressively because these Others threaten our self. The author cites ethnic wars as a glaring example.

Therefore, we do not strive to be who we are through our positive self-recognition but rather become us by denying the non-us. Challenging entities we have chosen and labelled as history-empowered destructive energy constantly endangers our self-de-

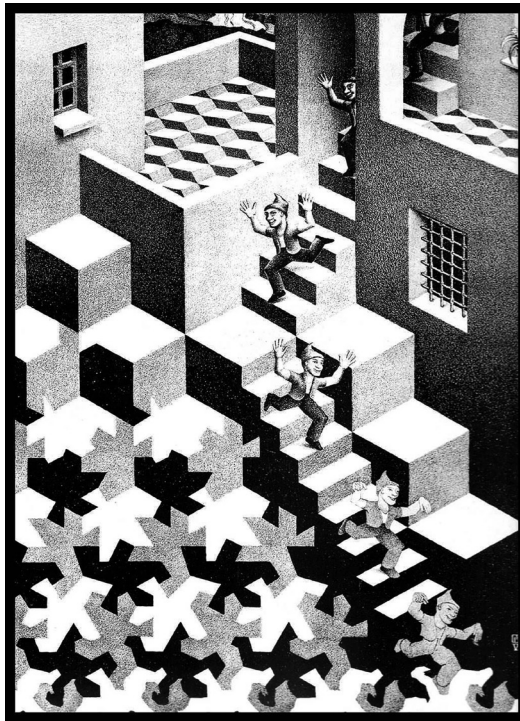
scribed selves. Members groups whose existence we created by convincing ourselves that we can and should become the rulers of all subjects in our newly created geo-historical space, the space to which we have a natural right.

(Petkovic 233)

The author raises the question: Is there a way to find out who we are without immediately thinking about whom (and what) our neighbours failed to become? Alternatively, as a response to essentialism, anti-essentialism denies the existence of objective properties that all members of a group objectively share, denying their *natural rights*. Petkovic points us to a crucial, unfortunately still often overlooked fact:

that our environment is not naturally ours, and points out that the nature of something is a fictional construct. The identity derived from the anti-essentialist approach denies the (class and ethical) strategy based on power, offering a way out of this labyrinth of identity through mutual respect and recognition, whether individual or collective. Only in this way can it break the dichotomy between the Centre and the Margins. This process is

long and arduous, precisely because of the nature of people, but it is possible. To accept those fringe, marginal groups that live in those shadowy, borderline spaces.<sup>9</sup>



Art Cycle 1938, MC. Escher

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9 The concept of natural (right), what we understand and consider normal (common sense) is one of the most interesting cultural concepts, concept-problem-questions that I often use in research as an initial tool for further construction of the narrative structures in my artistic work.



After the collapse of social frameworks, institutions, and pillars of the modern world (for example, the atomic family in the 20th century), today, we have come to the triumph of the individual. As stated by Alain Touraine, we live in a world that has disintegrated into numerous realities, which reflects one fragment – an individual/person/body as inconsistent, subject to all advertisements, propaganda, and images of mass culture. We can talk about a social step (movement) toward a new paradigm described in his study by the same name, *The New Paradigm*.<sup>10</sup>

The individual becomes only a screen on which desires, needs, and imaginary worlds broadcasts in an endless loop produced by the new communication industries.

(Touraine, 105)

Such an uprooted and weakened individual can hardly find a guarantee of their identity in themselves, they lack some reference point of view (reflexivity), and as Touraine states, they begin to be ruled, somewhat obscurely, by someone elusive to their consciousness.

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10 Touraine, Alain. (2011). (trans. Milica Čečur). *A new paradigm: for a better understanding of contemporary society*. Belgrade: Službeni glasnik

Self-presence, self-reflection, authenticity and intimacy as love and engagement, all these words lead us to self-presence, which begins with presence in the body, until breathing and the movement. (105)

Turenne, advocating the transition from the world of society to the world of the individual, an actor focused on himself, offers us a reality that partially differs from the previous paradigm, as he states - the world of violence and war.

### **Synecdoche: Swimming pool**

Je est un autre. I is another.

*Arthur Rimbaud 1871*

The initial object/body, as an experiment for the project *Aerodynamics*, was a private VHS recording from 1992 and an empty concrete pool in 2022, recording the movement of my own body inside of it. *Walls. Whirpools*, a walk over the empty pool, a site-specific performance in Slovenia, is part of *Aerodynamic digital performance*. The pool belongs to the house where my grandfather lived and which he built. The association with something deeply subjective, personal, and intimate is the memory of summer vacations spent at my grandfather's swimming pool in Slovenia, the feeling of joy and elation before I started to become aware of life. The concrete pool, built at the beginning of the nineties of the last century, with a clear function to pamper, refresh and delight family members and friends, becomes a boundary space - as much private and internal as public and external.

In the period when it performed its primary, utilitarian function, it had a cohesive effect on the entire fragmented family within a predominantly private context, while on the other hand, it also represented a kind of public space - a place where street children gathered, a team of which I was a part, who often came to swim there during the summer holidays. It was the time of the disintegration of Yugoslavia, the time of wars and bloody borders. The time in which I grew up. The pool, the house and a number of my loved ones were at one end of the country where we all lived together until recently. Suddenly, they stayed in Slovenia, and we stayed in Belgrade, Serbia. My world stopped moving. Departures have become rare and painful, and border guards at state borders need to be more detailed and trustworthy. After three decades, I faced my grandfather's imminent death and our definitive separation. All that remained was stillness. The last time I saw him his body was in a nylon, sanitary bag carried away by funeral home workers wearing white felt gloves. The van was parked right next to the empty pool. They left, and the yard remained empty. Without the man who made and maintained it with his own hands in order to use it, the pool becomes exposed to Nature and becomes - unusable. The moment it loses its primary function, that pool acquires another meaning, a symbolic meaning, in this case, a synecdochic one.

Its codification is personal and simple:



POOL = ME

The pool becomes me (myself) - I am (like) the pool. The *dead* pool becomes a testimony to the infinity and transience of life. The static movement becomes

the perpetuated movement. Life caught up in the loop 1992:2022. The constant movement in the loop brings out the paradox - the movement in the loop is not moving at all. It becomes stillness. The digital performance will never stop inside and outside its digital space.



Abandoned swimming pool in Radenci, Slovenia

The reality, and with it culture and art, are assimilated into the technology in which it (perception of the world) is organized through the sensibility of the screen, as one of most prominent authors of books on new media theory, Lev Manovich<sup>11</sup> believes:

instead to function as a means of presenting an image of reality, the screen has become a means direct action on reality. (Manovich 2015)

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 11 Manovich, Lev. (2015). (trans. Aleksandar - Luj Todorović). *The language of new media*. Belgrade: Clio

Ljubinka Stojanović video  
*Aerodynamics*

YouTube link:  
[https://www.youtube.com/  
watch?v=V1uFczLE\\_gQ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V1uFczLE_gQ)







With the advent of virtual reality, the paradigm changes. The participant is no longer hypnotized and anaesthetized with a device that offers them ready-made images (film, television). Now, to watch, participate, engage, and the unknown new condition (new media) requires the viewer to move. The power of the screen as the dominant phenomenon of the twenty-first century is not questionable, and we, the bodies, have to move along while the laws of aerodynamics begin their journey into the Web. However, what kind of movement that might be, is one of the phenomena Aerodynamics – digital performance is exploring.

### **Wandering to the end**

In this paper, we constituted a fluid performative construct, exploring possible phenomena that could help observe Aerodynamics -digital performance. In the process, we used the tools of several scholars whose work was understandable, inspiring, and intriguing to us at this stage of our lives.

Walking is one of the constellations in the firmament of human culture, a constellation that makes up three bright stars – the body, imagination, and vastness of the world; and although each of them shines by their brightness, these three stars interconnect by lines- drawn by walking like an act with a cultural meaning - which of them form a constellation. Constellations are not natural but cultural phenomena; the lines leading from one star to another are like paths paved by the imagination

of those who passed there before us. The walking constellation has its history - that is the history that they wrote by all those poets and philosophers and rebels, pedestrians and streetwalkers, pilgrims and pilgrims, tourists, hitchhikers and mountaineers, and the answer to the question of whether it has a future depends on whether someone will continue to walk on these paths.<sup>12</sup>

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12 Solnit, Rebecca. (2010). (trans. Vuk Sećerović). *Wandering - History of walking*. Belgrade: Geopetika (289)



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Ljubinka Stojanović graduated from Dramaturgy and held a PhD in Multimedia Arts. Assistant professor at the Academy of Arts in Belgrade in Undergraduate and Master studies and Master studies at the Faculty of Arts, University of Priština - Zvečan.

She is a head of Development in the production company Balkanic Media in Belgrade; a Dramatist and member of the Board of International Festival of Monodrama and Phantomime in Belgrade; Member of the Association of Dramatic Artists of Serbia, a Member of the Association of Screenwriters in Serbia.

Plays and screenplays by Ljubinka Stojanović have received prizes and recognition at various regional and international Theatre and Film festivals.

In her work, she explores the artistic, cultural and political discourse of identity, researching the phenomenon of hyper-modern society and emerging institutions concerning post-memory, social and cultural practices, the relationship between body and new media, as well as the (female) body and its boundaries / borders in the process of artistic creation.

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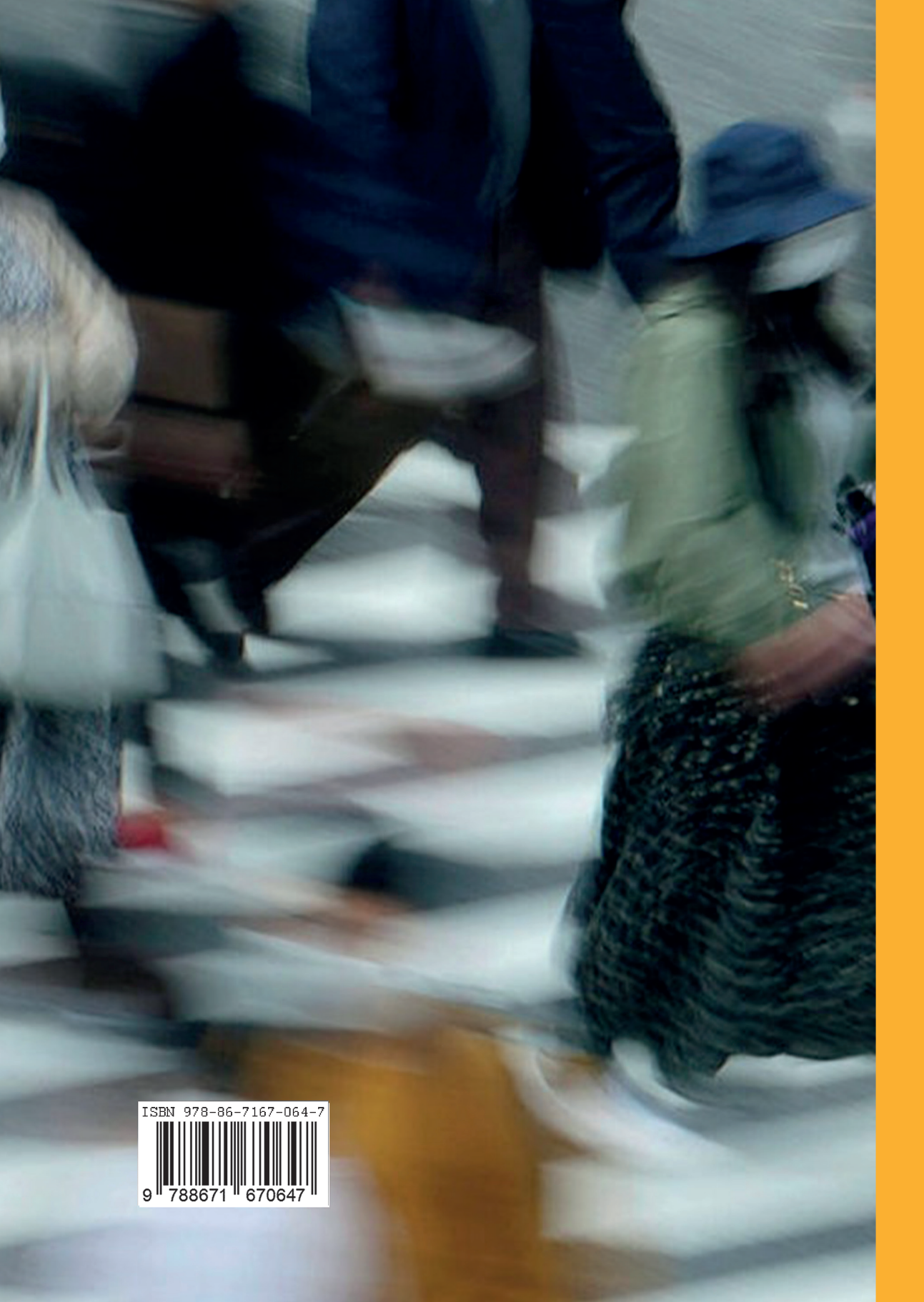
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