

THEATRE, DANCE AND PERFORMANCE AFTER COVID-19

Between current damnation and opportunities for the future



JURE NOVAK

ROMANCING THE STONE – A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF THE IMPACT OF THE PANDEMIC ON THE SLOVENIAN (PERFORMING) ARTS SCENE

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In this presentation, I will attempt to give a brief overview of the impact of the pandemic on the Slovenian (Performing) arts scene. I will begin by broadly outlining the situation we were in when the pandemic hit, focusing on the disparities of (existential) security between the institutions, the NGOs and the individual artists. I will then present the (sparse) policies undertaken by the authorities and the initiatives and actions the scene itself took. These will be presented chronologically and divided into four sections: the initial panic and total lockdown, the declaration of victory over the disease, the reprieve of the long summer and the autumn, when the bill comes due. I will conclude by presenting a broader view of the realities and economics of the situation for the whole sector and connected industries and by hopefully making some good suggestions for the future.

BIO:

Jure Novak is a freelance theatre director, author and performer who dabbles in cultural politics.

He has written and translated literature and theory for a number of portals and publications at home and abroad.

**GIOVANNI BOCCIA ARTIERI, LAURA GEMINI, STEFANO BRILLI and
FRANCESCA GIULIANI**

**THE REINVENTION OF THEATRE SPACE DURING COVID-19: ANALYSIS OF THE
ITALIAN CASE**

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Italy is one of the first European countries to be deeply affected by COVID-19 and one of the first in Europe to have adopted lockdown measures. The lockdown required the suspension of all live performances and rehearsals, including the cancellation of seasons and festivals. Since the early stages of the lockdown, Italian theatres and companies have developed several online initiatives to counterbalance the suspension of their activities, such as circulating unpublished archive material, creating ad hoc domestic performances, engaging enthusiasts in collecting memories of past seasons and experimenting with plays on videoconferencing platforms. These efforts have aimed at maintaining contact with the remote theatre audiences, by extending the presence of artists, theatres, and performances in the online context. However, they have also provided an opportunity to reason about the digital transformations of performing arts.

This paper reflects on how we are researching the response of the theatrical sector to the lockdown from the perspective of sociology and media studies. Our aim is to contextualise the phenomenon within the processes of theatre mediatization and digital transformation of liveness, and to present what we think are the most urgent research questions in this direction. The first part of the presentation introduces the theoretical premises of the investigation, by analysing the processes of theatre mediatization. The second part will explore some of the most successful online initiatives of the theatre sector, observing how they fit into the previously introduced mediatization trajectories. To this end we have mapped 120 initiatives developed throughout

Italy between March and May 2020. Among these initiatives we have observed some recurring aesthetics and productive strategies such as *serialization*, *platform adaptation*, *participatory dramaturgy*, *recomposition of the event* and *recomposition of the sense of place*. The third part will observe how the online audiences responded to the social media initiatives of some of the main Italian theatres. In the conclusions, we will discuss which research questions we consider crucial to connect the analysis of this critical moment to the main themes of sociological and media studies research on performing arts.

BIO:

Giovanni Boccia Artieri, Ph.D. is Full Professor in Sociology of Communication and Digital Media and Head of the Department of Communication Sciences, Humanities and International Studies, of the University of Urbino Carlo Bo. His main research interests revolve around media theory, with a specific focus on social network society and participatory culture. Current research projects include social history of the Internet.

Laura Gemini (PhD) is Associate Professor of Sociology of Cultural and Communication Processes at the University of Urbino Carlo Bo, Department of Communication Sciences, Humanities and International Studies. Her research focuses on the contemporary media imagination and visual culture, with particular reference to cultural and artistic performance, especially theatre.

Stefano Brilli (PhD) is a Postdoctoral Researcher at the Department of Communication Sciences, Humanities and International Studies (DISCUI) of the University of Urbino Carlo Bo. His main areas of research include the study of irreverence in digital cultures, the relationship between performative practices and social media, and the study of live entertainment audiences.

Francesca Giuliani is a PhD student in Humanities at the Department of Communication Sciences, Humanities and International Studies (DISCUI) of the University of Urbino Carlo Bo. Her main areas of research include live performing arts, with particular attention to audiences and audience development.

THE ANTAGONISTIC CONTAGIOUSNESS OF THE PERFORMING BODY

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In this paper, I demonstrate the double antagonistic contagiousness of the performing body, which originates from its substantiality. The current epidemic highlights the sensibility, vulnerability and fragility of the performing body. While the performing body is not recognised as a creator or source of the COVID-19 virus, it is conceived as the virus's potential and actual host and transmitter. Despite the wide use of communication technology in modern society, which contributed to the disembodied culture of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, theatre's *differentia specifica* in the twenty-first century remains live communication between an on-stage actor/performer and an audience in an auditorium. While we consider the physical presence of actors and audience members in a theatre as a precondition for experiencing the full splendour of a play or performance, physical presence in a theatre also offers other features. It enables construction of a temporal theatre community, where one feels at home. Empathic relationship is grounded in the performing body's cognitive ability, when in close proximity, to trigger mirror neurons—an ability I refer to as cognitive theatre contagiousness—in all who are involved in a theatre community. However, with the recent COVID-19 pandemic, the close proximity of sensational performing bodies—actors or performers—to theatregoers is no longer considered safe. The physical performing body has become a suspicious agent of contagion, and theatres have had to temporarily close their doors. To theatre creators and theatregoers, this represents a severe antagonistic conflict between medical and cognitive theatre contagiousness.

BIO:

Dr Tomaž Krpič is a sociologist, theatre scholar, editor and research fellow at the Faculty of Social Sciences, Ljubljana University. His research interests concentrate on various aspects of the performing body, the spectator's creative engagement in theatre, social

construction of the theatre community and political theatre. He is currently working on a monograph about the performing body.

PIA BREZAVŠČEK

**IN THE OPEN. RETHINKING OUTSIDE LOCATIONS AS AUTONOMOUS AGENTS
IN *LABOUR OF PANIC* (*RAD PANIKE* BY BADCO)**

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The recent epidemiological measures have closed theatres down or severely reduced the audience and thus altered what was once a mutual experience. In order we preserve the critical mass that makes an event, this is an opportunity to rethink site specific outside locations for performances, which are of course nothing new, but their importance is rising due to pragmatic reasons in the new public health situation. This focus does not mean that I am arguing for open air theatres exclusively – public infrastructure for culture should be intangible as a public good. What is more, few performances made for theatre can survive outside their special laboratory conditions - without the apparatus, consisting of a black box, scenography, light system, conventions and discipline. What I want to do is, through an analysis of the last performance by the Croatian collective BadCo, *Rad panike (Labour of Panic)*, to rethink “the outside” with all its fierce tactile, olfactory, visible potential as not only a passive scenery, but an autonomous agent, that is not only integral to the performance, but has a life beyond it. There might be a readymade place and a timing for every setting. In *Rad panike*, the spectator enters this ambiguous natural scenography amidst the man-made infrastructure in Grobničko polje. She has earphones, which isolate her from other audience, that slowly disperse in the open field. There is a strong wind and it is becoming darker by the minute. Strange poetic texts are played and have sporadic references to the dancers’ doings or the concrete environment surroundings. Every step is choreographed by the bulges and stones in the soil. Why redo the feeling of how small and helpless a human is by

special theatrical effects, if one can be, all technological metaphors aside, simply placed in an open field?

BIO:

Pia Brezavšček is a PhD student, coediting Maska journal for performance art and www.neodvisni.art, an online medium for local performing arts. She is the president of The Contemporary Dance Association Slovenia.

JAMES ROWSON and HOLLY MAPLES

THEATRES IN THE DARK: COVID-19S IMPACT ON DIGITAL PERFORMANCE, ADVOCACY, AND THE ONLINE PUBLIC SPHERE IN UK THEATRE INDUSTRY

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During the 2020-2021 pandemic, the internet became an expansive terrain for the production of new hybrid performance models as well as a powerful tool for advocacy, activism, and skills-sharing in a time of social isolation. This chapter examples the blossoming of online platforms for the creation of new work, streaming, and industry-based support groups caused by the closures of the UK Theatres due to COVID-19 government restrictions. The movement to go online for members of the theatre community during the pandemic expand not only the way the creative industries engage with the public sphere, but also raise fundamental questions of the gap between live and virtual performance and what it means to be a theatre worker in the time of industry closure. By combining media reports, websites, and online platforms with personal testimony taken from a series of 100 interviews conducted with independent theatre workers from our Economic and Social Research Council funded study on COVID-19s impact on theatre artists in the UK, Freelancers in the Dark, the following chapter investigates the UK theatre

industry's use of digital and online space for community-building, support, and artistic innovation.

BIO:

James Rowson is a Postdoctoral Researcher at East 15 Acting School, University of Essex. He is a member of the UKRI ESRC funded project 'Freelancers in the Dark', a study that explores the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on freelance theatre-makers in the United Kingdom. He received his PhD from the Department of Drama, Theatre and Dance at Royal Holloway, University of London. He is also an editorial assistant for *Contemporary Theatre Review*.

Holly Maples is a Senior Lecturer and Director of Postgraduate Research at East 15 School of Acting, University of Essex. She is the Primary Investigator of the UKRI ESRC funded COVID-19 Rapid Response project, 'Freelancers in the Dark,' investigating the social, cultural, and economic impact of COVID-19 on Independent Arts Workers in the United Kingdom. She is a theatre maker and director as well as researcher. Her research includes Immersive Heritage Performance, Decolonizing Museum Spaces, Audience Research, Cultural Trauma, and investigations into the UK theatre industry in a changing world. She received her PhD at Trinity College Dublin.

ROK VEVAR

VIDIKI JAVNEGA ČASA: SCENSKE UMETNOSTI, KULTURA IN UMETNOST V ČASU COVIDA / ASPECTS OF PUBLIC TIME: PERFORMING ARTS, CULTURE AND ART IN THE TIME OF COVID

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Po zaprtju, ki smo mu bili priča ob razglasitvi pandemije Covid-19, se je več generacij umetnic in umetnikov, kulturnih delavk in delavcev prvič srečalo z globalno zdravstveno krizo, ki sta se ji pridružili še ekonomska ter v večjem ali manjšem obsegu na različnih koncih sveta tudi politične krize. Zaprtje javnih prostorov pomeni za sodobni ples velik produkcijski in ustvarjalni udarec, saj je vrsta plesnih praks v temelju odvisna od dotikov ali stikov teles. A če se ozremo na zgodovino sodobnega plesa ugotovimo, da aktualna zdravstvena kriza za sodobni ples še zdaleč ni nikakršna novost. Zdravstvene krize (epidemije ali pandemije) ter različni vidiki ekonomskih in političnih kriz so zelo temeljno določali načine proizvodnje te umetniške prakse, ekonomski in politični vidiki kriz pa so imeli zanj v različnih kontekstih in obdobjih tako zelo negativne, kakor tudi zelo pozitivne posledice. Pandemije tuberkuloze in AIDSa, obe svetovni vojni in hladna vojna, propad industrij v posameznih kontekstih, različni tipi migracij, socialni korektivi v krizah različnih držav, nacionalizacije in mariginalizacije itn. so ključno diktrirali dinamike razvoja kulturno-političnih sistemov in kontekstov, v katerih se je sodobni ples razvijal, vznikal, izginjal in se selil. Moje predavanje bo skušalo osvetliti posamezne presenetljive primere v preteklem stoletju.

BIO:

Rok Vevar je zgodovinar in arhivar sodobnega plesa. Ustanovitelj Začasnega slovenskega plesnega arhiva (2012, od 2017 v MSUM). Je avtor knjig Rok za oddajo - izbor kritik in člankov, Dan, noč + človek = ritem: Antologija slovenske sodobnoplesne publicistike in Ksenija, Xenia: Londonska plesna leta Ksenije Hribar, 1960-1978. Je član Nomad Dance Academy Slovenija in sokurator CoFestivala, mednarodnega festivala sodobnega plesa.

JASMINA ZALOŽNIK

SODOBNI PLES V IZOLACIJI / CONTEMPORARY DANCE IN ISOLATION

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Eastern Europe, is strongly opposed to those contemporary performing arts practices (including contemporary dance) that are based on the generation or perception of material, bodily experiences. However, it is precisely these practices that, by their very existence, confirm the incompleteness of the arts that were institutionalized in these geo-cultural spaces. Contemporary dance was most often associated with alternative, marginal and non-institutionalized artistic practices, seeking in them its close allies and became a bearer of meanings and innovations in production, creativity, reception and artistic and cultural subjectivations in their areas. Within this framework, contemporary dance has always been subject to various cultural isolations, while at the same time always representing a persistent element in the production of specific artistic experiential values that the public has not received elsewhere. The experience of bodily affect, expression, material (in)directness, as well as spatial and social compositions and constructs entered the urban cultural public much more intensively through contemporary dance than in the case of institutionalized stage practices. Other physical presences were with contemporary dance, with various forms of performance art works, including body art, etc. more intense witnesses of modern and contemporary experience of cultural heterogeneity than with any other form of artistic symbolization. In this lecture, I will focus on the thesis that the crisis is inherent in contemporary dance and that the current pandemic has not found itself in any area that is not familiar to it. Problematizations of material bodily positions, crises, and criticism have always provided this practice with vitality, uncertainty, attention, and focus.

BIO:

Dr. Jasmina Založnik je dramaturginja, teatrologinja, rezenzentka/kritičarka *in* producentka.

Prvenstveno deluje na področju sodobnega plesa; posveča se njegovemu zgodovinjenu, motrenju in ustvarjanju spodbudnejših pogojev. Je članica kolektiva Nomad Dance Academy Slovenija in Mesta žensk. Je članica uredniškega odbora revije Maska in Dialogi. Končala je doktorski študij vizualne kulture na Univerze v Aberdeenu.

UNA BAUER

ON SENSORIALITY OF ASYNCHRONOUS AND SYNCHRONOUS BUT MEDIATED EXPERIENCES: TWO CASE STUDIES

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Through an analysis of two theatre pieces, Bobo Jelčić's *The Cherry Orchard in the Cherry Orchard* (De Facto Theatre Company, 2020) and *Chinchilla Arschlock, was was* (Rimini Protokoll, 2018), one conceived as "a theatre production performed in the virtual space" and the other as a recording of a live theatre production, the author wants to emphasize the sensorial qualities of online un-presence, of imagining of sensations, smells, spaces and surfaces, and at the same time wants to address the uncomfortable nature of being alive as more often than not, not being *in the now*, which has repercussions for our understanding of the particularity of theatre experience.

BIO:

Dr Una Bauer is associate professor at the Academy of Dramatic Art (Zagreb). Her research interests include dance, physical theatre and experimental performative practices, history of ideas, theories of affect, networked publics, travel writing, community, death studies and disability studies. Her first book on theatre and everything else, including tea cosies and bicycles, *Pridite bliže: o kazalištu i drugim radostima* (Come Closer: on Theatre and other Joys) was published in 2015. Her forthcoming book is a dialogical "monograph", a series of conversations with and on the work of Croatian dance and theatre collective BADco.

OPHELIA JIADAI HUANG

A DYNAMIC JUNGLE: THEATRE, ARTISTS AND MARKET OF CHINA IN A CHANGING TIME

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Almost 20 years later since the market-oriented shift for performing arts in China, both theatres and artists are once again at crossroad because of the pandemic. This article reflects on how the ecosystem of performing arts scene had evolved in mainland China in the past decades at policy level, and how artists and theatres, the two key players in the scene, are dealing with the current challenges in relation to market and society. Through examining the COVID-19 measures in mainland China with impacts on performing arts since Jan 2020, and examples of how some artists respond to the situation with creativity, it argues that the dynamics between theatre and artists in China have further changed, with technology played a role in it.

BIO:

Ophelia Jiadai Huang is a cultural worker, artist and dramaturg based in Shanghai, working currently as Director of International Projects in Shanghai Dramatic Arts Center and Programme Director of ACT Shanghai International Theatre Festival. With a decade of experience working for international cultural agency in China, her area of interests often sits the intersection of performance, cultural policy and international relations. Ophelia received MAs from University of Warwick and University of Arts in Belgrade

RENIDA BALTRUŠAITYTĖ

THE STORY OF SUCCESS: CONTEMPORARY CIRCUS FESTIVAL CIRKULIACIJA IN 2020 DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

“Cirkuliacija” is an educational and an international contemporary circus festival that grows bigger since 2015 and attracts new and various audiences with each year. The main goal of the festival is to introduce contemporary circus to more people and to show its subtle and unique language by letting to experience its educational and social capabilities. The specificity of this festival is to bring the contemporary circus to spaces that are in a distance with the city centre and by this to enable abandoned buildings and spaces with contemporary culture and communal activities. Moreover, this annual festival is lasting for two weeks during summertime.

But. The summer of 2020 was different for the whole world. Lithuania acquainted quarantine and the challenges which it brought to the culture sector. However, the quarantine started in March of 2020, but the festival needed to be organized in June. During March, there was no way to know what is going to happen and what kind of requirements from the government will need to be fulfilled after several months. Nevertheless, organisers decided to make a plan B and to change the festival schedule and form – everything that has already been decided in September of 2019.

This presentation will acquaint with the successful case of the possibilities for performing arts festival to adapt to the COVID-19 situation. The participants will be introduced to how it was successfully done, what were the negative and positive consequences and how all of this adaptation inspired the organizers to make permanent changes to the festival program.

BIO:

Renida Baltrušaitytė, sociologist and coordinator of the Contemporary Circus Festival Cirkuliacija

IVAN MEDENICA

ON BITEF, THE PANDEMIC, AND NEW FORMS

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The idea of this paper is to present three exemplary projects which were shown or will be shown at Bitef (Belgrade International theatre festival) and which map three *generic* responses by contemporary theatre to limitations caused by the coronavirus pandemic, but also to the challenges imposed by the global ecological crisis. It must not be forgotten that this pandemic have resulted from the destruction of the global ecosystem. Besides their causal relation, the ecological crisis and the pandemic are linked, from the point of view of theatre and festivals, by the similar restrictions they impose. Apart from the risk of physical gathering yet another challenge are international travels, especially by airplane. The three *exemplary* theatre responses to ecological crisis and the pandemic are: a) franchise performances, b) performances on the Internet, and c) substituting live bodies with robots.

BIO:

Ivan Medenica, PhD, works at the Faculty of Dramatic Arts (Belgrade) as a professor of The History of World Drama and Theatre and The Introduction to Theater and Performance Studies. Medenica has given guest lectures at Humboldt University (Berlin), The Yale School of Drama (USA)... Medenica is an active theater critic and has received six times the national award for the best theatre criticism. His book *The Tragedy of Initiation or the Inconstant Prince* was also awarded as the best book on theater published in Serbia (2017) and translated into Slovenian and Macedonian. He was the Artistic Director of Sterijino Pozorje in Novi Sad, and one of the main editors of the journal Teatron. He is a member of the International Association of Theater Critics' Executive Committee and the Director of its conferences. Medenica is the artistic director of BITEF since 2015.

RICHARD SCHECHNER

BIO:

Richard Schechner, Professor Emeritus, one of the founders of Performance Studies, is a performance theorist, theater director, author, editor of *The Drama Review* and the *Enactments* book series, University Professor, and Professor of Performance Studies. Schechner combines his work in performance theory with innovative approaches to the broad spectrum of performance including theatre, play, ritual, dance, music, popular entertainments, sports, politics, performance in everyday life, etc. in order to understand performative behavior not just as an object of study, but also as an active artistic-intellectual practice. He founded The Performance Group and East Coast Artists. His theatre productions include *Dionysus in 69*, *Commune*, *The Tooth of Crime*, *Mother Courage and Her Children*, *Seneca's Oedipus*, *Faust/gastronome*, *Three Sisters*, *Hamlet*, *The Oresteia*, *Yokasta*, *Swimming to Spalding*, and *Imagining O*. His books include *Public Domain*, *Environmental Theater*, *Performance Theory*, *The Future of Ritual*, *Between Theater and Anthropology*, *Performance Studies: An Introduction*, and *Performed Imaginaries*. He has directed performance workshops and lectured on every continent except Antarctica. He has been awarded numerous fellowships including Guggenheim, NEH, ACLS, and fellowships at Dartmouth, Cornell, Yale, Princeton, and the Central School of Speech and Drama, London.