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CONTEMPORARY SYNERGIES BETWEEN THEATRE AND ENVIRONMENTAL HUMANITIES: «THE DOM-Project»

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CONTEMPORARY SYNERGIES BETWEEN THEATRE AND ENVIRONMENTAL HUMANITIES: «THE DOM-Project»

1. Urban dance and the Environmental Humanities

Theatre, in its purest essence, is an art form inherently linked to the space and context in which it is performed; the corporeal co-presence of actors and spectators is what primarily enables a performance to occur and constitutes it.¹

For a performance to take place, actors and spectators must gather for a certain time in a certain place and accomplish something together. Spectators are no longer considered merely as sensitive or indifferent observers of the actions performed on stage by actors, actions to which they must assign certain meanings based on what they have observed, nor merely as those who intellectually decode the messages formulated with and by the actors' actions. The corporeal co-presence instead implies a relationship between entities, with spectators assuming the role of co-actors who, through their involvement in the scenic game –that is, through their bodily presence, their perceptions and their reactions– co-produce the performance. The performance, therefore, is constituted as a result of the interaction between actors and spectators.²

The evolution of contemporary theatrical practice has seen a growing interest in mesology³ and eco-sustainable productions, focusing on how environments influence and are influenced by performances. Urban walks, as an artistic expression, embody this intersection, transforming city streets or outdoor spaces

¹ Erika Fischer – Lichte, *The Transformative Power of Performance. A New Aesthetics* (tr. Saskya Iris Jain), Routledge, London – New York 2008, p. 56.

² *Ibid*, p. 56-57.

³ Mesology, a field of study derived from the Greek words «mesos» (middle) and «logos» (study), focuses on the analysis of the interactions between organisms and their surrounding environment. Within the theatrical context, this perspective considers the stage as a complex ecosystem where actors, scenic space, and the audience reciprocally influence each other. The interaction between these elements can manifest itself in multiple ways, from the actors' improvisation in response to environmental stimuli to the audience's emotional reactions to performances. Theatrical mesology explores how space contributes to the creation of meaning within the performance. Environmental elements such as sounds, smells, and temperature can enrich the narrative and convey specific emotions and atmospheres. Furthermore, the arrangement of objects on stage and the use of scenic space can symbolize key concepts and themes of the theatrical work.

into a living stage, probing the relationship between the individual, society, and the urban environment. The idea of geometric and structured spatiality declines and, following the phenomenon that occurred in the 60s where the choice of performance space fell on empty spaces or pre-existing spaces used for other purposes, we arrive at an idea of total theatre characterized by an atmospheric and synesthetic space.

The connection between theatre and nature is as ancient as the art of theatre itself but undergoes further evolution when the space of representation, which usually occupies a special area, becomes a free «scenic area». Devoid of a fixed scene and mobile, it allows spatial comings and goings, precise actions albeit not performed in a specific point. The scene contracts and expands and the action breathes, following the natural breath of the environment that envelops the action. The unique focal point, a fundamental characteristic of traditional theater, the dominance of frontality and mono-directionality, including in panoramic scenes, are embedded, even if not evident, as centers of attention around which everything else moves and are surpassed. Theoretically, the perception of one spectator is that of every other audience member. The Landscape Theatre does not eliminate such convention but multiplies the focal points, sometimes leading the spectator to have none that are identifiable. Adopting the mesological perspective in theatre has significant theoretical and practical implications. From a theoretical standpoint, this perspective challenges the traditional conceptions of theatre as an anthropocentric space, highlighting instead its interconnected and dynamic nature. This opens new opportunities to explore concepts such as performance ecology and the phenomenology of the scenic space. From a practical perspective, the mesological approach can inform the creation and production of theatre, encouraging collaboration between artists and designers to more organically integrate environmental elements into the performance.

From the mid-20th century, we witness on theatrical stages a different conception of the scene and artistic composition, marked by a transition from a logic of forms to a logic of intensity, highlighting the potential of gesture and the internal dynamics of the composition. The reciprocity of theatre in nature entails an irreducible gap, which becomes all the more effective in a spectatorial sense, as much as the spectator feels dislocated insofar as they do not have the scene «in front» of them but «around» them. And it is precisely this «being inside» at a consumptive level –exposing the reciprocity– that makes the space a landscape. An interactive and traversed landscape.

Before presenting the chosen case study, finally, it is necessary to lay some theoretical foundations of reference for the interdisciplinary analysis conducted. In a rhizomatic manner, aesthetic theories (conceived not in an ontological but an ecological sense) and phenomenological as well as performance studies have been drawn upon.

The theatrical event is a complex social interweave, a network of expectations and obligations, the exchange of stimuli-either sensory or ideational or both-is the root of theatre.⁴

Between the late 19th century and the early 20th, Peter Behrens and Georg Fuchs advocated for theatre to once again become an event, a celebration, a process of returning to its origins that gradually took off, leading to the performative work as an event characteristic of the contemporary performance art conception. Art and reality were no longer seen as opposites. Among the thinkers and practitioners of this artistic genre, we find Richard Schechner, who, along with others, endeavoured to construct performances that dissolved the opposition between the aesthetic and social, and the aesthetic and political, in a constant movement between the state of spectators and that of participants.

In re-evaluating the theatrical experience through the lens of environmental theatre, Schechner's innovative approach not only challenges conventional spatial dynamics but also places significant emphasis on the embodied experience of the audience. This shift towards a more immersive form of spectatorship encourages direct engagement with the performance space, facilitating a deeper, more nuanced understanding of the theatrical event. By incorporating the concept of «walking» or active movement within the performance environment, Schechner not only redefines the role of the audience but also highlights the significance of the space itself as a dynamic participant in the theatrical narrative. This focus on embodied perception aligns with Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological perspective, which posits the primacy of perception in our understanding of the world.⁵ Through the act of moving within the performance space, the audience partakes in a form of embodied cognition, wherein knowledge and understanding are constructed not merely intellectually but also through the entire sensorium. This approach is in line with recent studies in cognitive science that emphasize the role of embodiment in perception and cognition, suggesting that our bodily interactions with the environment play a pivotal role in how we comprehend and interpret our experiences.

In nature, a deconditioning of perception occurs, as we are normally programmed such that our attention registers only the stimuli that are in agreement with the world image we have learned. If the daily and habitual body techniques, specific to a certain culture, are suspended, this suspension is in itself a conditioning of perception, returning us to a childlike state. We experience astonishment in a subjective time that extraordinarily coincides with the external time, providing a sensation almost of estrangement, of suspension or dilation of the ordinary time. We experience an absent present, a time made up of a succession of entities-instants in which the persistence of the object in dynamism

⁴ Richard Schechner, «6 Axioms for an Environmental Theatre», *The Drama Review* 12/3, Architecture/Environment (Spring, 1968), p. 41-64, Cambridge University Press, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1144353> [20/3/2024].

⁵ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, Routledge, London 2010 (1945).

is a cognitive illusion, activating a phenomenological gaze.⁶ Not an ordinary present, but an «atopical moment» in the absolute and present instant in which the act occurs.⁷ Indeed, in many contemporary performances, rhythm holds a particular significance concerning the organization and structuring of time, relating corporeality, spatiality, and sonority, and regulating their appearance as well as their disappearance.

Expanding on the insights provided by Varela in *The Embodied Mind: Cognitive Science and Human Experience*,⁸ it becomes clear that the principles of embodied cognition offer a powerful lens through which to view and understand environmental theatre and its connection to site-specific theatre and urban dance.⁹ This framework posits that cognitive processes are deeply rooted in the body's interactions with the world, suggesting that our understanding and perception are fundamentally shaped by our physical engagement with our environment. This perspective is particularly relevant to environmental theatre, where the physical and sensory engagement of the audience with the performance space is emphasized. The concept of embodied cognition, in fact, underscores the importance of the physical presence and movement of the audience within the theatrical space, aligning closely with the practices of site-specific theatre and urban dance. Site-specific theatre, which designs performances for particular locations outside traditional theatre venues, thrives on the unique characteristics and histories of its chosen spaces. The audience's movement and interaction with these spaces become an integral part of the performance, enriching their sensory experience and deepening their engagement with the narrative.

Similarly, urban dance,¹⁰ characterized by its use of urban environments as stages and inspiration, embodies the principles of embodied cognition by engaging directly with the physical and cultural landscapes of the city. Dancers interact with architectural elements, public spaces, and the urban atmosphere, creating performances that are not only visually striking but also deeply embedded in the context of their environment. This engagement with the urban landscape encourages viewers to perceive familiar spaces in new and unexpected ways, transforming their understanding of the environment and their relationship to it.

Within the diversity of its forms, the participation of the spectator emerges as a dominant imperative on the contemporary scene, with environmental theatre, site-specific theatre, and urban dance challenging the audience to become active participants, not merely passive observers, thereby fostering a more immersive

⁶ Edmund Husserl, *Ideas for a Pure Phenomenology and Phenomenological Philosophy. First book: General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology*, Hachette Publishing Co, Inc, New York 2014 (¹1913).

⁷ Luciano Mariti, «Inconsueti aspetti dell'estetica teatrale. Atmosfere, estasi, ascolto negli spettacoli di O Thiasos TeatroNatura», Maia Giacobbe Borelli (ed.) *TeatroNatura – il teatro nel paesaggio di Sista Bramini e il Progetto “Mila di Codra”*, Editoria & Spettacolo, Roma 2015, p. 71-113.

⁸ Francisco J. Varela – Evan Thompson – Eleonor Rosch, *The Embodied Mind. Cognitive Science and Human Experience*, MIT Press, Cambridge (MA) – London 1991.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ Katie D. Schank – Marta Jecu (eds) *The City as a Stage: Strategies for the Arts in Urban Contexts*, Routledge, London –New York 2016.

and interactive form of theatrical engagement. This approach not only enriches the audience's perceptual and cognitive experience but also underscores the transformative potential of performance as a means to explore and reimagine the relationship between individuals and their environments. This perspective calls for a «re-evaluation» of traditional notions of spectatorship, inviting audiences to engage with performances in a more direct and physically engaged manner. These genres can be positioned within the broad and transdisciplinary category of the Environmental Humanities,¹¹ following the Ecocritical current that focuses on the literary and cultural analysis of natural environments and the representations of the environment in works of art, literature, and media, questioning how these representations influence public perception and behavior towards the environment.

Furthermore, the dissolution of traditional boundaries between performer and audience, and the integration of the audience into the performance space, reflect a postmodern critique of the classical aesthetic foundations. This critique is exemplified in Hans-Thies Lehmann's concept of post-dramatic theatre,¹² which posits a departure from the narrative and representational conventions of traditional drama towards a theatrical experience characterized by fragmentation, plurality, and the blurring of boundaries between art and life. In this context, Environmental Theatre can be seen as a radical form of «theatre ecology» that explores the interconnectedness of all elements within the performance environment. This perspective is further enriched by the work of theorists like Erika Fischer-Lichte, who emphasizes the transformative potential of performance as an event that can alter perceptions and relationships between participants.¹³ By focusing on the interactive and immersive aspects of performance, environmental theatre fosters a communal experience that highlights the fluidity and dynamism of the theatrical space.

The DOM- artistic project serves as a significant example of how the tension between permanence and transience can generate new practices of dwelling related to the space and time of artistic production. By experimenting with the boundaries between art and life, DOM- contributes to a broader reflection on the meaning of inhabiting in a contemporary context characterized by mobility and transitoriness. Through the case study chosen, a fertile field of inquiry opens up on the potential of artistic practice as a mode of exploration and reinterpretation of everyday living spaces, offering valuable insights for a renewed dialogue between art, society, and culture. The uniqueness of DOM- lies in its ability to

¹¹ Environmental Humanities is an emerging interdisciplinary field situated at the crossroads of the humanities, the arts, and environmental disciplines. This area of study is dedicated to exploring and understanding the relationships between humans and the environment from a perspective that integrates knowledge from literature, history, philosophy, anthropology, cultural studies, ecocriticism, and other humanities disciplines, cf. Greg Garrard, *Ecocriticism*, Routledge, London 2023' Robert S. Emmett, David E. Nye, *The Environmental Humanities: A Critical Introduction*, MIT Press, Cambridge (MA) – London 2017' Timothy Morton, *The Ecological Thought*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge (MA) – London 2010.

¹² Hans – Thies Lehmann, *Postdramatic Theatre*, Routledge, London 1999.

¹³ Fischer – Lichte, *The Transformative Power of Performance: A New Aesthetics*. *Ibid.*

experiment with the forms of dwelling, highlighting the tension between being rooted in a physical space (permanence) and continuously traversing new contexts (nomadism). This tension is reflected in the creation of lived spaces that are simultaneously sites of artistic production and daily existence. Therefore, the dwelling practices developed by DOM- are not mere spatial configurations but are genuine performative acts that question and redefine the boundaries between art and life.

2. Environmental Aesthetics and the DOM- Project

Performance art, with its ephemeral and action-based nature, particularly embodies Arnold Berleant's concept of «art without objects».¹⁴ This artistic genre is distinguished by its emphasis on performance as a live and dynamic experience that unfolds over time and space, directly involving artists and the audience. In this context, the artwork does not materialize as a fixed object to be contemplated but emerges from the interaction between the performance, the environment in which it takes place, and the audience's perception. Thus, performative art can be seen as a living extension of Berleant's critique of aesthetic distance: it invites the audience to actively participate in the artwork, blurring the boundaries between artist and spectator, subject and object, art and life. This direct and immersive interaction with performative art enriches the aesthetic experience, making it more personal and intense, and underscores the crucial role of the environment be it a theatrical space, an urban landscape, or a natural setting – in shaping the artistic experience.

The integration of performative art with Arnold Berleant's concept of environmental aesthetics finds a concrete and enlightening example in the «Porpora che cammina» project. This urban dance work, in which the artist immerses themselves in a journey through diverse spaces, profoundly embodies the notion of art as a dynamic and participatory experience. In this project, the environment is not merely a backdrop but an active participant that influences both the artwork itself and the experience of those involved. The DOM- project reflects the idea that art can arise and develop in the context of movement and interaction with physical and social spaces.¹⁵ This work highlights how, through

¹⁴ Arnold Berleant, «Art without object», Raphael Stern – Philip Rodman – Joseph Cobitz (eds), *Creation and Interpretation*, Haven, New York 1985, p. 63-72.

¹⁵ DOM- is a research project born in 2013 from the collaboration of the artists Leonardo Delogu and Valerio Sirna. Over the years other artists and researchers has gathered the collective, changing its shape depending on the project: Hélène Gautier, Mael Veisse, Arianna Lodeserto. DOM- investigates the language of performing arts, contaminating it with the «Environmental Humanities'» militant approach and the issues and imaginaries of feminist and queer ecologies. Its practice revolves around the relation between bodies and landscapes, questioning the tangle of permeability, and observing how power, nature and marginality interact in the public space. It engages in the transmission of peculiar in-habiting practices, linked to the space and time of artistic creation and territorial planning. The interest of DOM- is often directed to the exploration of hybrid formats that arise from synergy and listening to the forces in the field, human and non-human, meteorological and compositional, mythological and future. DOM- builds performances, workshops, walks, gardens, audio-visual projects, dj-sets and parties. Some works of the past years,

the process of walking, everyday spaces transform into places laden with aesthetic significance, where the boundary between observer and participant blurs. The performance becomes a shared journey, a collective inquiry that explores the aesthetic potentials of the urban and natural environment. The example of «Porpora che cammina»¹⁶ reinforces Berleant's argument on the dissolution of aesthetic distance, demonstrating how a landscape performance can serve as a bridge between the individual and the environment. The aesthetic event is an experience.

«Porpora che cammina» is a landscape performance, a four-hour walking journey for 15/18 spectators at a time. A shadowy and elusive figure traverses the city on foot, eventually losing itself in a dream reverting to the past. Through its journey, the landscape both reveals and conceals itself to the audience following from a distance, as if spying on it, hovering between identification and detachment. Originating from «The Man Who Walks», the work with which DOM- debuted in 2015 and continued on tour in various Italian and international cities, the collective now invites Porpora Marcasciano¹⁷ to be the protagonist of the Bolognese remake, and to narrate through the streets of the city in which she lives.

This work represents an invitation to recognize and appreciate the aesthetic experiences that emerge from direct interaction with our living world, emphasizing the importance of an aesthetic approach that fully embraces the bodily and sensory dimensions of the artistic experience. Ultimately, it not only exemplifies Berleant's vision of an objectless art but also connects to Nicola Perullo's aesthetics without (s)ubjects: «an aesthetics of the passerby, which does not fixate on objects, and of passage, the continuous crossing through their fissures».¹⁸ A performative process that celebrates immersion, participation, and interaction.

We enter the bus station, ascend stairs we had never noticed before, cross through a labyrinth of empty and damp rooms, in one hangs a map of Bologna, we reach an elevated waiting room, from a glass window we observe the

such as *L'uomo che cammina*, *Désert/rituals for landscapes*, *MU/metafisica urbana*, *MAMMA ROMA*, *Esplorazioni urbane/Pratiche della percezione*, *Moto celeste* have been presented in several national and international festivals. DOM-DOM-DOM-DOM- cf. <http://www.casadom.org/> [20/3/2024].

¹⁶ A kind of process of «Performing Memory», a term coined by Liedeke Plate and Anneke Smelik, Cultural Studies researchers. Practicing performing memory, according to the two Dutch scholars, consists of using theatre as an artistic medium to revive the memory of a community rooted in the historical and geographical peculiarities that have constructed and changed its landscape. A performative process that therefore remembers and gives rise to new questions. Porpora Marcasciano is a sociologist, human rights activist, and honorary president of the Transsexual Identity Movement. Cf. Liedeke Plate – Anneke Smelik (eds), *Performing Memory in Art and Popular Culture*, Routledge, London-New York 2013.

¹⁷ Porpora Marcasciano is a sociologist, human rights activist, and honorary president of the Transsexual Identity Movement.

¹⁸ Nicola Perullo, *Estetica senza (s)oggetti. Per una nuova ecologia del percepire*, DeriveApprodi, Roma 2013.

departures and arrivals, the bustling of people. Beneath the windows lie the remains of desiccated bees, reduced to exoskeletons. From a speaker, we hear a voice, she's Porpora; now we see her emerge from the shelters, wearing a bright purple t-shirt. She reflects on the past forty years, on the necessity of «never staying still, never solidifying anything, holding on to as little as possible», she questions the sense of hostility that pervades her when she thinks about the present and the future; a second voice invites her to shed the contemplative tone and immerse herself in the world. We depart with her.¹⁹

At the bus station, still not crowded, twenty itinerant spectators begin an unusual journey, blending in among the other bodies in the square. Seen by strangers, they might appear as tourists, but the experience they share is of another order. They do not merely follow: by immersing themselves in the performer's reality, they experience the city from another perspective, observing with different eyes. This sharing creates a unique experience of perception, leading them into a parallel dimension where familiarity is transformed, guided by memories and the experiences of others. Each visited place, from the public park of Montagnola to historic Bologna, from the modern Kenzo towers to the everyday life of Bolognina, up to the banks of the Reno river, acquires new and profound significance, opening spaces for unexpected reflections. It vividly shows how, through performative art, we can explore new modes of connection and understanding of the fabric of our environment, inviting spectators to become co-creators of a shared aesthetic experience.²⁰

On a journey through the city center, spectators follow the figure of Porpora, a guide who, through daily gestures, reveals fragments of her being and past. Each stop, each movement, becomes a window onto themes such as gender, counterculture, nostalgia, and activism. The path weaves through symbolic places, from the market to the university area, juxtaposing the bittersweet memory of a song with moments of reflection in front of expressive murals and historical memory sites. The walk transforms into a theatrical experience that enters reality, where spectators, immersed in a form of mediated perception, witness changes in atmosphere induced by ambient music or Porpora's observations that challenge conventional categories of identity. This performative journey brings them to be witnesses, and sometimes intruders, in a silent dialogue between the performer and the city, between public spaces and intimate moments.

The journey becomes a fabric of personal and collective stories that resonate in places laden with political and social significance, reflecting on the role of art in cities and the ways in which it can mirror and question reality not by seeking consensus but by promoting dialogue. This unique experience, unfolding from the central streets to the urban margins and third landscapes, raises ecological and social reflections, inviting a new awareness of the urban and natural fabric. After hours of walking, spectators find themselves in an airport

¹⁹ Lorenzo Donati – Alex Giuzio, «Porpora che cammina. A Bologna nel terzo paesaggio», *Doppiozero*,

<https://www.doppiozero.com/porpora-che-cammina-bologna-nel-terzo-paesaggio> [20/3/2024]

²⁰ *Ibid.*

transformed into a stage, where the end of the path confronts them with the choice of their next destiny, reminding them of the profound connection between the personal, the political, and the environmental.

3. Time, Space, and Eco-Theatrical Participation

Urban performances represent a unique fusion of art, performance and eco-sensitive exploration of the urban environment. These are shows that require no lights, microphones, or artifice, only the exposed bodies of the performer-actors. They constitute a moment for the community witnessing the artistic event, in a here and now capable of opening an elsewhere. A performative experience of transit and passage, and the chromatic and sonic variations that incessantly traverse our surrounding environment and define its atmosphere. A theatrical aesthetic of perception rather than vision that various artists transform into an urban experience, into an intimate and personal performance, in which the participant is guided through a sound path that challenges the perception of the surrounding reality or into a collective, communal, and itinerant performance. Similarly, the practice of «derive» theorized by the Situationists in the 1950s, centered on the wandering exploration of the city, reflects a mesological investigation of the interaction between the individual and urban space. This approach emphasizes the importance of the aesthetic experience as an intersubjective and collective process, manifesting in specific contexts such as outdoor theatre and urban walks. The landscape as a manifestation of one's culture, of one's way of relating to one's vital spaces up to perceiving its atmosphere and sensing in it the living presence of the human, the presence of the participant who becomes a witness and actor and who bursts into the landscape precisely because of the planned scenic action.

It is therefore legitimate to ask whether the paradigm of spectator participation in the scenic context follows specific perspectives, whether it is a trend with ethical or social values or predominantly aesthetic ones. From a theoretical point of view, we have seen how this project – along with previous ones by DOM- fits into a broader discourse on the role of space and time in artistic production. Henri Lefebvre's theory of space²¹ and Michel Foucault's notion of heterotopia²² provide critical tools for understanding how DOM- enacts a continuous renegotiation of inhabited spaces, transforming them into arenas of creative expression. Concurrently, reflection on time, inspired by Henri Bergson's studies on duration,²³ allows us to grasp the temporal dimension intrinsic to DOM-'s dwelling practices, where time is not linear but is experienced as a series of intense moments of creation and life.

²¹ Christian Schmid, *Henri Lefebvre and the Theory of the Production of Space*, Verso Book, London – New York 2022.

²² Michel Foucault, *Des espaces autres*. Retrieved, (1984) foucault.info/documents/heteroTopia/foucault.heteroTopia.en.html [12.3.2024]

²³ Henri Bergson, *Duration and Simultaneity: Bergson and the Einsteinian Universe*, Clinamen Press, Manchester 1999.

The conception of time undergoes a significant transformation during an urban walk, a moment when the ordinary flow of hours takes on new contours, expanding into a unique experiential dimension. This phenomenon, which can be defined as «dilated time», allows individuals to experience the city not merely as a backdrop to daily frenzy but as a theatre of layered and multiple experiences. In this context, time is no longer marked by the mechanical ticking of clocks or the linear succession of appointments and deadlines. Instead, it expands and contracts in response to the quality of lived experiences, sensory perceptions, and human interactions. The urban walk thus becomes an act of temporal rediscovery, where every step can reveal stories hidden in the folds of buildings, provoke reflections born from observing scenes of daily life, or result from an unexpected encounter with street art. This experience of dilated time during the urban walk emerges as a form of resistance to the homogeneous and accelerated temporality of modernity, offering spaces for reflection, contemplation, and human connection. In this alternative dimension, the walker is invited to tune into more authentic and personal rhythms, rediscovering the pleasure of detail, sensory immersion, and slowness. The city, with its rhythms and spaces, becomes an accomplice in this temporal exploration, unveiling unexpected potentials and offering new interpretations of the urban fabric and the relationships that animate it.

There is a suspended listening and waiting in the audience, the void and inaction generate flows of energy and tension. Listening, from an anthropological perspective, is the very essence of space and time: One accesses a dimension of waiting and active passivity that leaves open what one is waiting for, without prefiguring it and immobilizing it in an expectation. What Aristotle²⁴ defined as potential and act, potential in the body invisible to our eyes but perceivable in its energy of presence, and act as being stretched «towards to», predisposed to take shape, to act. A cyclical exchange occurs between the power of the spectator who undergoes and that of the leading actor who changes and takes form, virtual as much in the concrete of a landscape. The participation is an inherent datum, though often not enacted, of what defines the theatrical relationship and the spectator's condition. Having said that, it can certainly be seen as a conventional participation linked to the presence of the audience or an active participation, hence not tied to the mere sharing of the event with other people. In creating a dramaturgy of movement, as required by an itinerant show such as DOM-'s, careful attention must be paid to the placement of the spectator in relation to denunciation and enunciation, thus being able to have a complete, active and predictive theatrical competence.

4. Art in Motion

To sum up, it can be affirmed that to make an ecological performative experience transformative and to stop it being anthropocentric, it is not always necessary to resort to technology or to the idea of a post-human body but to return to being

²⁴ Aristotle, *De anima*, Trans. J. Sachs. Focus Publishing/R. Pullins Co, Newburyport, MA 2011.

«human» by approaching and reclaiming concepts such as ritual and community through the implementation of effective participatory paradigms. The tool of theatre applied in the context of environmental humanities is justified by the premise that the environmental, climatic, political crisis is itself a crisis of perception because it is linked to a loss of control also in a perceptive sense. This crisis spills over into art and inevitably into performative art, which has always been a mirror of the society in which it is realized and produced. At this point, it is then necessary to understand what perception is in the many meanings attributed to this term; we can simply define it as the manifestation of consciousness, «what happens through and with consciousness». Indeed, humans are conscious because they experience, and they experience because they are conscious, an awareness that is not inherent in machines and that perhaps can be attributed to part of the animal world. The uniqueness of the DOM- project lies in its ability to experiment with forms of dwelling, highlighting the tension between being rooted in a physical space (permanence) and continuously crossing new contexts (nomadism). This tension is reflected in the creation of lived spaces that are simultaneously places of artistic production and daily existence. The dwelling practices developed by DOM- are thus not mere spatial configurations but genuine performative acts that question and redefine the boundaries between art and life.

It is possible to move away from an ontological, perceptive, and phenomenological subjugation to the visible; theatre always proves to be the only instrument capable of animating and enlivening an experience. Humans are indeed driven by this urgency and necessity to act and not merely to be acted upon, and this form of activism is increasingly evident in urban performative art as in the case analyzed here. The detachment sought by the artists mentioned is surely a reaction to the attempt to control not mere objects but areas such as knowledge and culture, in an action where the audience is guided by an intention defined in the specialist literature as «agency», which is not the ultimate goal of perception as sometimes thought when outdoor shows or urban performances are mentioned.

The artistic research described is thus founded on seeking a correspondence with the environment, freed from image pollution and the emotional exploitation linked to a perceptual dependence on devices. Going beyond the concept of coexistence and reaching an active cohabitation in which the mind/world dualism is diminished, participants become part of a reality stirred by diverse perspectives. Is there a way not just to make the world habitable but to inhabit the world? Perhaps, in a theatre where one must not only look but also see, and not only listen but also understand, a sort of agreement in seeking to bring out the invisible behind the visible action; considering that the perceptions of a material space are important factors in human action. Using theatre as an experiential, meditative opportunity for the community that witnesses it.

ΠΕΡΙΛΗΨΗ

**ΣΥΓΧΡΟΝΕΣ ΣΥΝΕΡΓΕΙΕΣ ΜΕΤΑΞΥ ΘΕΑΤΡΟΥ ΚΑΙ ΠΕΡΙΒΑΛΛΟΝΤΙΚΩΝ
ΑΝΘΡΩΠΙΣΤΙΚΩΝ ΕΠΙΣΤΗΜΩΝ: ΤΟ ΠΡΟΓΡΑΜΜΑ «DOM-Project»**

Η παρούσα μελέτη διερευνά τη σύνδεση του αστικού χορού και των περιβαλλοντικών ανθρωπιστικών επιστημών, προβάλλοντας την καινοτόμα ιταλική έρευνα «DOM-project «Porpora che cammina» ως έναν παραδειγματικό τρόπο μέσω του οποίου οι σύγχρονες θεατρικές πρακτικές ενσωματώνουν την οικολογική συνείδηση στον ιστό των αστικών τοπίων. Εξετάζοντας την ενσωμάτωση της μεσολογίας και της οικολογικής βιωσιμότητας στις παραστατικές τέχνες, η εργασία διερευνά τη μέθοδο με την οποία τα αστικά περιβάλλοντα μετατρέπονται σε ζωντανές σκηνές που διερωτώνται για τις σχέσεις μεταξύ ατόμων, κοινωνίας και αστικότητας. Βασιζόμενη στις αρχές του «περιβαλλοντικού θεάτρου» του Richard Schechner και της φαινομενολογικής προσέγγισης του Maurice Merleau-Ponty, καθώς και σε νέες αισθητικές θεωρίες, η έρευνα αναδεικνύει τη σημασία της ενσώματης εμπειρίας και της εμπλοκής του κοινού στον επαναπροσδιορισμό των αντιλήψεων για τους αστικούς χώρους. Τονίζει επίσης την ανάγκη για μια πρισματική και διεπιστημονική ανάλυση που δεν περιορίζεται πλέον μόνο στις θεατρικές σπουδές. Το έργο «DOM-project» μπορεί να λειτουργήσει ως εργαλείο για την απεικόνιση της δυναμικής αλληλεπίδρασης μεταξύ μονιμότητας και παροδικότητας σε αστικά περιβάλλοντα, προσφέροντας ιδέες για τους τρόπους με τους οποίους οι καλλιτεχνικές πρακτικές μπορούν να προωθήσουν τη βαθύτερη σύνδεση με το περιβάλλον. Τέλος, η έρευνα αναδεικνύει τον καθοριστικό ρόλο των παραστατικών τεχνών στην προώθηση της περιβαλλοντικής συνείδησης, υποδεικνύοντας τη φόρμα του «site-specific theatre» και του αστικού χορού προκειμένου να επαναπροσδιοριστεί η θεαματικότητα και να ενισχυθεί η εμπλοκή στο αστικό οικοσύστημα.



ABSTRACT

**CONTEMPORARY SYNERGIES BETWEEN THEATRE
AND ENVIRONMENTAL HUMANITIES: «THE DOM-Project»**

This study explores the nexus of urban dance and the environmental humanities, spotlighting the innovative Italian «DOM-project «Porpora che cammina» as a paradigmatic example of how contemporary theatrical practices are weaving ecological awareness into the urban landscapes. By scrutinizing the integration of mesology and eco-sustainability within performing arts, the paper investigates how urban environments transform into vibrant stages that interrogate the relationships among individuals, society and urbanity. Drawing on the principles of Richard Schechner's «Environmental Theatre» and Maurice Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological approach, as well as emerging aesthetic theories, the research highlights the importance of embodied experience and audience engagement in redefining perceptions of urban spaces. It also emphasizes the need for a prismatic and interdisciplinary analysis, no longer confined solely to theatre

studies. The «DOM-project» serves as a case study to illustrate the dynamic interplay between permanence and transience in urban settings, offering insights into the ways artistic practices can foster a deeper connection with the environment. This inquiry highlights the role of performative arts in promoting environmental consciousness, demonstrating the potential of «site-specific theatre» and urban dance to redefine spectatorship and enhance our engagement with the urban ecosystem.



Η ΣΥΓΓΡΑΦΕΑΣ

Η Δρ. Ester Fuoco (διδάκτωρ στις Ψηφιακές Ανθρωπιστικές Επιστήμες) είναι Ανώτερη Ερευνήτρια (RTDb) Παραστατικών Τεχνών στο Πανεπιστήμιο IULM (International University of Languages and Media) του Μιλάνου και καθηγήτρια Λογοτεχνίας Θεάτρου και Φιλοσοφίας στην Ακαδημία Καλών Τεχνών Brera. Από το 2021 έως το 2023 διατέλεσε υπότροφος ερευνήτρια στο Ινστιτούτο Βιορομποτικής της Ανώτατης Σχολής Σπουδών Sant'Anna της Πίζας και στο Πανεπιστήμιο IULM, όπου συνέβαλε σε διεπιστημονικά έργα που εστιάζουν στην εφαρμογή της ρομποτικής και της τεχνητής νοημοσύνης στις παραστατικές τέχνες.

Η έρευνά της διερευνά την ενσωμάτωση προηγμένων τεχνολογιών στις πρακτικές της παράστασης, με ιδιαίτερη έμφαση στην ανθρωπολογία του θεάτρου και στη διαρκώς εξελισσόμενη σχέση μεταξύ ανθρώπινων και μη ανθρώπινων παραγόντων στη σκηνή. Από το 2025 είναι διευθύντρια της επιστημονικής σειράς βιβλίων SINAPSI – Knowledge, Innovation, Arts, Thought, Science, Interconnections (εκδόσεις Puntum Edizioni), η οποία είναι αφιερωμένη στη διερεύνηση της σχέσης μεταξύ καλλιτεχνικής δημιουργικότητας και τεχνολογικής καινοτομίας. Οι πρόσφατες δημοσιεύσεις της περιλαμβάνουν τις μονογραφίες: *Esplorazioni intermediali nel teatro di Amir Reza Koohestani. La ricerca della libertà tra iperrealità e tradizione* (Mimesis, 2025), *Deviations in Contemporary Theatrical Anthropology: New Myths and Performative Rituals between XR, Robots and AI* (Routledge, 2024) και *Né qui, né ora. Peripezie mediali della performance contemporanea* (Ledizioni, 2022).



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Her research explores the integration of advanced technologies into performance practices, with particular attention to theatrical anthropology and the evolving relationship between human and non-human agents on stage. Since 2025 she has served as the director of the scientific book series SINAPSI – Knowledge, Innovation, Arts, Thought, Science, Interconnections (Forthcoming for Puntum Edizioni), which is dedicated to investigating the intersections between artistic creativity and technological

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