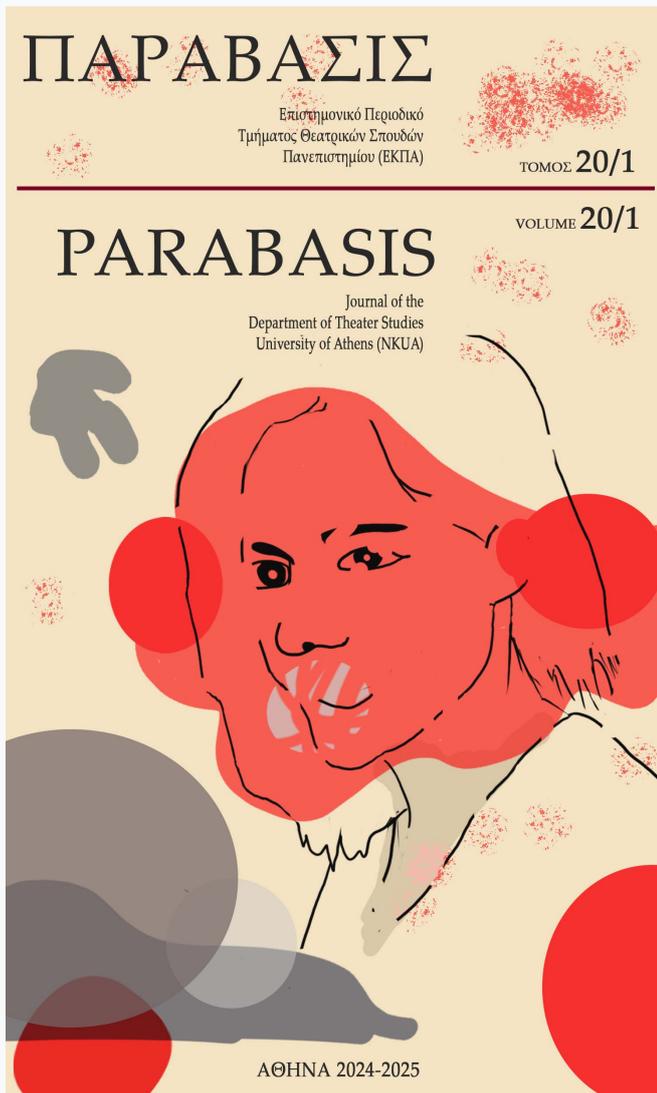


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Italian Theatre in the 21st Century (Special Issue)



### EDITORIAL: ITALIAN THEATRE IN THE 21st CENTURY

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ELINA DARAKLITSA

**EDITORIAL****ITALIAN THEATRE IN THE 21st CENTURY**

**T**he present tribute to Italian theatre of the 21st century, which is part of the 20th issue of the journal *Parabasis* of the Department of Theatre Studies of the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, includes ten original and fascinating scientific studies that penetrate the diverse spectrum of theatre in the neighbouring country, illuminating its many different and attractive, performative and dramatic manifestations.

This important work covers a wide range of ideas, themes, theatrical locations and scientific landscapes, starting from the written text and reaching the performance. More specifically, the following themes are explored: *Sul concetto di volto nel Figlio di Dio* di Romeo Castellucci: tra pietà e disgusto» («*On the concept of the face, regarding the Son of God* by Romeo Castellucci: between pity and disgust»), by Maddalena Mazzocut-Mis, «Tra Giorgio Strehler e Lluís Pasqual. La strada maestra della regia nel teatro d'opera (Giorgio Strehler and Lluís Pasqual. The ultimate direction of directing in the opera theatre)» by Paolo Bosisio, «Onlife versus online: the role of theater in the post-pandemic era» by Valentina Garavaglia, «Contemporary Synergies between Theatre and Environmental Humanities: The DOM-Project», by Ester Fuoco, «The landscape of Italian Theatre-Nature: artists, companies and festivals», by Emanuele Regi and Francesca Velardi, «Actors, screens and virtual reality: Pirandello's theatre on the stage of the new millennium», by Paola Ranzini, «Contemporary mass choreographies in Italy: Virgilio Sieni's "agoras" and "civic walks"», by Rossella Mazzaglia, «L'apparenza del sogno e dell'amore nella morsa della realtà: la condizione della donna e dell'umanità nell'opera di Luigi Pirandello e nelle sue rivisitazioni» («The appearance of dream and love in the grip of reality: the condition of women and humanity in Luigi Pirandello's work and its reinterpretations»), by Giuseppe Varone, «Unveiling the curtain: The metamorphosis of Italian theatre in the 21st century through the lens of *Glory wall*», by Victoria Ioannidou, and «From the "foreign infanticide" of Euripides to the merciless satire of the "new woman" by Franka Rame and Dario Fo» («Από την "ξένη παιδοκτόνο" του Ευριπίδη στην ανελέητη σάτιρα της "νέας γυναίκας" των Φράνκα Ράμε και Ντάριο Φο»), by Despoina Kosmopoulou.

The studies in the tribute show how, in an evolutionary way, new ways of thinking about theatre, performance, politics, community, resistance and active citizenship are being developed, while the important contribution of Italian theatre to international theatrical and ecological science, opera theatre, community theatre, new dramaturgical and performance forms is presented. It also highlights the renewed forms of performativity that emerged during the pandemic. It is my sincere hope that this special issue will make a refreshing contribution to the debate on the formation of new languages in theatre practice and dramaturgy.

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By taking a tour of the contemporary space of Italian theatre, it is possible to discern a fruitful osmosis of tradition and innovation. We are living in an era in which the rich heritage of Italian dramatic art is productively intertwined with contemporary and original themes, thus expanding the boundaries of performativity and redefining dramatic narratives.

Historically, Italy has been one of the cornerstones of the global theatrical edifice and this is demonstrated by a retrospective reference to the «renaissance genre» of *commedia dell'arte* and the timeless texts of its modern theatre, which have their roots in the rich subsoil of ancient Greek and Roman comedy.<sup>1</sup> In the 20th and 21st centuries, the Italian theatrical heritage in both comedy and drama is being nurtured by a new generation of playwrights, directors, visual artists and actors who not only preserve and strengthen the methodological tools of their predecessors, but also lay the foundations for new theatrical forms, generating a multitude of original artistic characteristics.

One of the most remarkable elements of contemporary Italian theatre is its fervent engagement with burning social<sup>2</sup> and political issues,<sup>3</sup> with the return to the primordial, natural environment of man, with climate change, with the penetration into the existential depth of the human soul, with the contact and thorough (re)understanding and recognition of true feelings and experiences. The above references of semantic extension concern both the environment of creative writing and the performance space – a phenomenon that seems to be taking shape in Greek and European theatre in general. Contemporary playwrights, such as Lina Prosa and Marco Martinelli,<sup>4</sup> for example, explore the themes of identity, migration

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<sup>1</sup> Elina Daraklitsa, *Οι μάσκες της commedia dell'arte. Η επιρροή από το αρχαίο ελληνικό και ρωμαϊκό θέατρο*, Otan, Athens 2023.

<sup>2</sup> About the social theatre, cf. James Thompson – Richard Schechner, «Why "Social Theatre"?», *TDR-The Drama Review* 3/48 (Autumn 2004), p. 11-16.

<sup>3</sup> About the political theatre, cf. Michael Kirby, «On Political Theatre», *TDR-The Drama Review. Political Theatre Issue* 2/19 (June 1975), p. 129-135; Philip Auslander, «Toward a Concept of the Political in Postmodern Theatre», *Theatre Journal. Theatrical Perception: Decay of the Aura* 1/39 (1987), p. 20-34; Tony Kushner, «Notes about Political Theater», *The Kenyon Review* 3-4/19 (Summer-Autumn, 1997), p. 19-34.

<sup>4</sup> Marco Martinelli, *Rumore di acque*, Editoria & Spettacolo, Roma 2010.

and social justice, to great acclaim from both their home and foreign audiences. Their plays often speak to the complexities of a rapidly changing society, illuminating the lives of characters who live and speak in the tenuous tones of the margins. In particular, the monologue *Rumore di acque* (*The Noise of Water*), written in 2010 by Martinelli, speaks of the adventures of thousands of migrants who, starting from the northern coast of Africa and sailing in unsuitable boats, ultimately fail to reach the shores of Europe, while the Mediterranean Sea is presented as a great lake of death. The play *Naufraghi senza volto* (*Faceless shipwrecks*) by Laura Curino and Renato Sarti, as well as many other theatrical texts that deserve a special study of their own. It is underlined that in the field of dramaturgy, many contemporary playwrights, both in Italy and in Greece, explore new stylistic structures, often breaking the traditional linear narrative, oriented towards linguistic abstraction.

Furthermore, the rise of digital technology has reshaped the way theatre is produced and consumed. The pandemic has prompted many artists to turn to digital platforms, which has resulted in the creation of innovative hybrid performances that combine live and virtual experiences. This violent and productively sudden -pandemic and post-pandemic- shift not only widened accessibility to theatre for all social groups, but above all shaped a new, globalised profile by inviting audiences into the now «familiar» environment of theatre, and in this case Italian theatre, strengthening international collaborations and opening up intercultural dialogue.

Another remarkable aspect of contemporary Italian theatre is the renaissance of physical theatre, as well as of visual installations that are increasingly theatrical in character and where the use of multimedia is often observed. Several theatre companies are experimenting with visual storytelling, incorporating elements of dance, visual arts and even virtual reality.<sup>5</sup> This multifaceted approach to theatre reflects a broader trend in the arts where the boundaries between genres and disciplines are blurring, creating immersive theatrical experiences that stimulate the mind of the contemporary spectator.

At the same time, theatre festivals<sup>6</sup> have gained prominence, presenting both established and emerging artists. Events such as the Venice Biennale, the Napoli Teatro Festival, the Polis Teatro Festival and other regional festivals highlight the diverse base and trend of contemporary Italian theatre.

It should be noted that the theatre of our days has become a platform for discussing thorny problems, while reflecting the complexity of contemporary Italian society. However, the obstacles it faces cannot be overlooked. Funding cuts and the effects of globalisation pose significant threats to the smaller theatre companies that often form the foundations of innovative theatre. The same phenomenon has become increasingly common in our country in recent decades as the number of theatres has increased. Despite this, proving their mettle, artists

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<sup>5</sup> Elizabeth B. Hunter, «Augmented Reality and Theatre», *Theatre Journal* 2/76 (2024), p. 177-195.

<sup>6</sup> Ric Knowles, *International Theatre Festivals and 21st-Century Interculturalism*. Theatre and Performance Theory Series, Cambridge University Press, New York 2022.

stay on the scene, generating new creative solutions, entering into partnerships with educational institutions, supervising research projects in the performing arts, and seeking alternative ways of funding.

Although the aforementioned difficulties are frequent and multiple, the constant dialogue between tradition and modernity seems to be the main safety net of Italian theatre, making it remain relevant, while at the same time, the emergence of new and different directorial and dramatic voices leads to a fruitful exploration of uncharted and very interesting territories, pointing the way to a promising and diverse future.

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The study «*On the concept of the face, regarding the Son of God by Romeo Castellucci: between pity and disgust by Romeo Castellucci*», by Maddalena Mazzocut-Mis, explores the remarkable interplay between pity and disgust, especially through the prism of human suffering and the divine, in the work of Romeo Castellucci.

Romeo Castellucci, one of the most acclaimed Italian theatre directors, is known for his innovative and often provocative work that experiments with the themes of human existence, image and connected speech. His approach focuses, often in a symbolic style, on visual aesthetics, involving deep philosophical implications and making use of abstract figurative and dramatic narrative that can either disorientate the spectator or make them a participant in it.

His productions incorporate elements of visual arts and music in a dynamic way, while special emphasis is placed on the use of lighting in order to create multi-faceted characters, with captivating movement and, in general, presence, such as to overwhelm the soul and cognition of the audience.<sup>7</sup> He is known for his artistic synergy with the Societas Raffaello Sanzio, which he founded in 1981 with his sister Claudia Castellucci, but also with Chiara Guidi, Barbara Bertozzi, Letizia Biondi, Raffaele Wassen Tamburini, production director Gabriele Gosti, and Paolo Guidi<sup>8</sup> – who joins the company a year later. The purpose of this particular theatre group focuses on exploring the boundaries of traditional theatre, incorporating the human body and its movement into new performance forms and giving it a prominent role. The name of Societas Raffaello Sanzio refers to the great painter and architect of the late Renaissance Raphael (full Italian name: Raffaello Sanzio), whose work and artistic activity creatively inspires its members. Besides, as Romeo Castellucci himself has mentioned about the name of his multi-faceted artistic society, the use of Societas (Society) was chosen to indicate that the members consider themselves as a «community» and more specifically, as «a community of strangers».

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<sup>7</sup> Dana Tanner – Kennedy, «The Postsecular Theatre of Romeo Castellucci», *PAJ: A Journal of Performance and Art* 2/45 (2023), p. 105-117.

<sup>8</sup> Joe Kelleher – Nicholas Ridout – Claudia Castellucci – Chiara Guidi – Romeo Castellucci, *The Theatre of Societas Raffaello Sanzio*, Routledge, New York 2007.

Returning to Castellucci's theatrical creations, it is worth noting that although they are quite provocative, they sometimes touch on social issues, leaving the audience's thoughts floating on questions rather than answers; they often contain shocking or controversial scenes, highlighting issues such as violence and human suffering. In addition to *On the concept of the face, regarding the Son of God*, his well-known productions include *The four seasons restaurant*, *La democrazia in America*, *Resurrection* and *Parsifal*.<sup>9</sup> Each of the above creations highlights Castellucci's unique ability to combine the instinctive with the cerebral, generating powerful theatrical moments that resonate strongly with the audience's cognition and emotion even after the play is over.

His favourite figurative elements are the use of silence and stillness,<sup>10</sup> forcing the spectators to confront their feelings of embarrassment and discomfort, while the dramatic elements are religious and mythological meanderings. With this methodology he manages to engage in conversation with dogmas by critiquing them, but also explores existential structures, clearly setting the boundaries between belief and questioning. The stage is for him a space for critical thinking and not just entertainment.

More specifically, in *On the concept of the face, regarding the Son of God*, the concept of God's face becomes a powerful symbol representing the vulnerability of human existence and its bittersweet aspects. Castellucci likes illusionary games that blur the theatrical atmosphere where both beauty and horror reign, inviting the audience to confront their personal mental weaknesses. Pity arises from the recognition of suffering, while disgust can be born through the «visceral nature» of pain itself. The emotional and visual intensity forces spectators to confront their own fears, putting them in the persistent process of revising life and faith itself.

This performance encourages the audience to reflect on how they perceive pain and compassion, while raising questions about what it means to expose the «person» and the problem of the «other», while the condition of dramatic questioning about the existence or non-existence of the divine is pervasive.

The study «Tra Giorgio Strehler e Lluís Pasqual. La strada maestra della regia nel teatro d'opera (Giorgio Strehler and Lluís Pasqual. The ultimate direction of directing in the opera theatre)» by Paolo Bosisio comparatively examines the directorial work and the contribution to Italian opera theatre in general of two important creators, Giorgio Strehler and his artistic heir Lluís Pasqual.

Lluís Pasqual is a distinguished Spanish director whose productions often engage in a conversation with both classical and contemporary styles.<sup>11</sup> His

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<sup>9</sup> Romeo Castellucci – Joseph Cermatori. «Gather and Burn», *PAJ: A Journal of Performance and Art* 2/36 (2014), p. 22-25.

<sup>10</sup> Nicholas Ridout, «Regarding Theatre: Thoughts on Recent Work by Simon Vincenzi and Romeo Castellucci», *Theatre Journal* 3/66 (2014), p. 427-436.

<sup>11</sup> Lluís Pasqual has directed a total of 51 plays, among which are: Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and *The Tempest*, *Bernada Alba's House* and *Lorca's Blood Wedding*, several plays by Goldoni and Chekhov, while some of his opera theatre works are: Verdi's *Don Carlo*, Wagner's *Tristan and Isolde*, Mozart's *The Marriage of Figaro*, etc. Cf. Sharon G. Feldman, «Catalunya invisible: Contemporary Drama in Barcelona», *Arizona Journal of Hispanic Cultural Studies* 6 (2002), p. 269-287; Manuel Ángel

dramatic choices are inspired by texts from the world repertoire, which are ultimately presented in a modern and utterly authentic visual. He is known for his excellent handling in the creation of spectacular, dramatic images, rich in sounds, colours and emotions, often framed by the elements of physical theatre and multimedia applications. Pasqual's directorial work explores themes of society, culture, identity –racial and sexual–, forgetting and memory, and the human psyche, with a mood of intimacy and devotion towards the spectator. His performances do not lack political commentary, the presentation of the power of authority, but also the effects that social injustice has on the life of the citizen, while the contribution of the human heroes of the «margin» is highlighted. The springboard instrument of his art in general is the absolute acceptance of all people, races, nations and genders.<sup>12</sup>

Interaction and audience participation in the theatrical plot are his staging techniques, which cathartically affect the relationship of the space between the square and the stage, while his minimalist aesthetic is perceived as soon as the characters arrive on stage, until the play's conclusion. From the above it becomes clear that one of the common characteristics that can be discerned between Pasqual's and Castellucci's theatrical philosophy is the willingness to awaken the spectator's intellect, as well as the reflection regarding the diversity of people and the imposed social and religious mandates.

In the theatrical counterpoint of the previous directors is the earlier and pioneering work of Giorgio Strehler, an artist known for his innovative approach to classical texts and his immersion in the emotional truth of «dramatis personae».<sup>13</sup> His artistic contribution to Milan's Piccolo Teatro<sup>14</sup> is of historical importance when one considers the debut (1947), but also the long life of the production based on Goldoni's *The servant of two masters*, which Strehler conceived by giving it the new title *Arlecchino*. It was a show that was staged in 36 countries, 2,394 times up to 1997, the year of his death.

But Strehler also showed an interest in lyric theatre, which would later provide Lluís Pasqual with food for thought and creativity. Strehler's aim was to create a modern version of the classics, infusing them with mixtures of pure realism, thus pushing the boundaries of opera staging. He believed in the transformative power of the theatre and aimed to create holistic theatrical experiences, often drawing on historical and cultural contexts to provoke audience engagement and heighten interest.

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Conejero, «Three Productions of Shakespeare in Spain», *Shakespeare Quarterly* 35/4 (Winter 1984), p. 468-470.

<sup>12</sup> Lluís Pasqual, «Le Miroir et l'utopie», *Le Monde*, 10 Octobre 1991, p. 19; Maria M. Delgado, «Redefining Spanish Theatre: Lluís Pasqual on directing, Fabia Puigserver, and the Lliure», *Contemporary Theatre Review* 7/4 (1998), p. 81-109.

<sup>13</sup> About the work of Giorgio Strehler, Roberto Canziani (ed.), *Strehler privato. Carattere, affetti, passioni*, Comune di Trieste Civici Musei di Storia ed Arte, Trieste 2007; Gautam Dasgupta, «Italian Notes: Strehler, Fo, and the Venice Biennale», *PAJ: A Journal of Performance and Art* 1/20 (1998), p. 26-37.

<sup>14</sup> Elina Daraklitsa, «Piccolo Teatro di Milano-Θέατρο», *Highlights* 7 (November-December 2003), p. 116-119.

The common starting point of both directors, Pasqual and Strehler, is the deepening of the hidden meanings, messages and symbolisms of the texts, but also their thorough research into the characters of the protagonists, who are always given a post-modern façade, freed from their traditional and original structures. Of course, Strehler's grandiose and pompous operatic style contrasts with Pasqual's more subtle and abstractly introspective approach. Nevertheless, both contribute with their solid and multiform work to the reconstruction of the mosaic of contemporary opera staging, while at the same time highlighting the versatility and polysemy of their aesthetic writing.

The study entitled «Onlife versus online: the role of theatre in the post-pandemic era», by Valentina Garavaglia, deals with the conditions in the theatre sector during the post-pandemic era in Italy; conditions that will be shown to be quite similar to those prevailing in Greece but also in many other countries of the contemporary world.<sup>15</sup>

The theatre in the current era has assumed an important and multifaceted role, serving not only as a form of entertainment, but also as a means of healing psychological and social wounds; as a means of rebuilding communication in the community. For centuries, the educational and, secondarily, the therapeutic benefits of theatre have been recognised, as it contributes to the emotional expression and liberation of both groups involved in the creation of a theatrical (performing) event, i.e. the artists and the audience. It is noteworthy that the work of many theatres now aims to address the mental health issues that have become increasingly acute in the wake of the pandemic.<sup>16</sup>

From the data of the author's research, it is clear that theatre artists managed to contribute to the general cultural renaissance of their country with their creations. The performances and plays written by the playwrights often reflect contemporary issues, focusing on the themes of loneliness, power, violence, inequality, public health, political responsibility and social justice.<sup>17</sup> It is noted that many companies have engaged with local communities, involving them in productions and research workshops. This has strengthened links in the intra-community context, fostering a sense of «belonging».

The pandemic has also prompted theatres to innovate, making use of different types of digital platforms and bringing hybrid performances to life, offering a live yet online show to their live and online audiences respectively.<sup>18</sup> This expansion in theatre technology and methodology has created an accessible and open horizon to all, giving a greater proportion of artists and people who love the arts the opportunity to engage in theatre. Moreover, the theatre industry, which is

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<sup>15</sup> Janine Sun Rogers – Metzger Sean, «A Period of Extreme Uncertainty: A Conversation on Pandemic Theatre by AAPI Companies in California», *Theatre Journal* 4/74 (2022), p. 89-100.

<sup>16</sup> Kelly I. Aliano, «Toward a Future Theatre: Conversations during a Pandemic», Svich Caridad (ed.), *Theatre Topics* 2/33 (2023), p. 115-116.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Peter Eckersall, «Political Theatre Reconsidered», *PAJ: A Journal of Performance and Art* 1/46 (2024), σ. 113-117.

<sup>18</sup> Alex Roe, «Port in a Storm: Arriving at a Virtual Theatre Through the Pandemic of 2020», *Eugene O'Neill Review* 1/42 (2021), p. 54-63; Katherine E. Kelly, «Pandemic and Performance: Ibsen and the Outbreak of Modernism», *South Central Review* 1/25 (2008), p. 12-35.

vital for the economy sector and its revitalisation, has provided Italy with the necessary space for the creation of new jobs, giving new impetus to tourism. Theatre festivals and related, involved events have re-emerged and multiplied, strengthening the cultural and economic environment of theatres and cities.

It follows from the above that theatre in the post-pandemic era in Italy has acted as a facilitator for its economy and for artistic creation, providing new methodological tools for experimentation and setting new parameters for reflection on the renewed and anticipated theatrical future.

Ester Fuoco's especially original study, «Contemporary Synergies between Theatre and Environmental Humanities The DOM-Project», addresses the partnership between theatre and a broader field of the humanities by examining the relationship between performance, ecological awareness and social responsibility in the context of the «DOM-Project». The new genre of «theatre ecology», and its entailing environmental narration, is also incorporated in this particular context. This new genre of theatre uses the narrative of themes drawn from contemporary everyday life in order to address various environmental issues. «Eco-dramaturgy» typically focuses on issues such as climate change, biodiversity loss and the conditions of the Anthropocene era, creating narratives that encourage audiences to reflect on their relationship with the environment.<sup>19</sup> Also, «eco-dramaturgy» tends to challenge the dominant ideologies of the Western world by highlighting alternative ways of knowing, being and coexisting on and with the Earth.<sup>20</sup>

A phenomenon of the time in Europe in general, is that many theatrical performances take place in natural environments, allowing the spectators to come into contact with the landscape through all their senses, freeing their instincts from the barriers of reason.<sup>21</sup> The interconnection of space, nature and human activity encourages a deeper engagement and understanding of environmental issues. A newly created and interesting factor that has emerged from this condition is the fact that theatre artists collaborate with environmental scientists, activists and scholars of the natural world. These synergies often result in influential performances that are driven by current ecological concerns.

Many companies are also increasingly adopting sustainable practices in their productions, using recyclable materials for sets, thus helping to reduce waste and energy consumption. This love of sustainability often extends to the issues addressed in their work, which is emblematic of the responsibility of all of society towards the environment. Theatre, after all, has a long history as a core of social change. Many contemporary productions not only raise awareness of environmental issues, but also motivate audiences to take action, either through direct activism or through community engagement.

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<sup>19</sup> Murray R. Schafer, «Eco-Theatre», *PAJ: A Journal of Performance and Art* 1/36 (2014), p. 35-44.

<sup>20</sup> Fabrizio Crisafulli, «Teatro dei luoghi: che cos'è?», *Teatro e Storia. Annali* 7/15 (2000), p. 427-436.

<sup>21</sup> Richard Schechner, «6 Axioms for Environmental Theatre», *The Drama Review* 3/12 (1968), p. 41-63.

Digital theatre, which has already been mentioned, has emerged as a means of rethinking and solving environmental problems. Digital performances and interactive experiences can reach spectators more easily, generating ecological discussions. It follows from the above that the synergy between theatre and environmental humanities testifies to the existence of a new and growing sub-power in the performing arts, an interdisciplinarity of exceptional originality that plays a vital role in raising awareness and inspiring action in the face of environmental challenges.

The study entitled «The landscape of Italian Theatre-Nature: artists, companies and festivals» by Emanuele Regi and Francesca Velardi, is thematically linked to the problematic of the above study. However, more specifically, it examines performance art and festivals that take place in the natural environment, making us aware of the revival of this cultural phenomenon in 21st century Italy, which also aims to highlight its stunning landscapes. It should be noted that in this type of performances, most of the time, the natural landscape is the scenic decoration of the play.<sup>22</sup>

More generally, for the performances in nature, a phenomenon that is quite widespread throughout Europe and more rarely found in Greece, mountains, forests and historical ruins are chosen, conditions that contribute to the formation of immersive experiences, while making the spectators, whose energetic coordination with the space is inevitable but also necessary, participants in the event. The themes of these performances focus on the relationship between humanity and nature, on the mental needs of the individual in modern society, while the cultural heritage of each country is also highlighted. Thiasos TeatroNatura, whose work is referred to in the study by Regi and Velardi, also deals with this type of performances.

This genre of dramaturgy and performance can sometimes not be thematically linked to nature, but can be a staging for a perfect performance of a work from the international repertoire. Theatrical texts of this type of performance often involve and depict historical-spatial references, such as the Alps or the Mediterranean, but also various rural environments.

At festivals such as the Festival della Natura where audiences come into contact with elements of Northern Italy bordering Switzerland, the participating performances aim to stimulate the senses of the audience through tactile experiences, but also to strengthen the bond of community. A significant contribution to the creation of these theatrical events is the involvement of visual arts and music, often performed by the local residents themselves.

It should be noted that the Teatro di Roma-Teatro Nazionale, a major theatre organisation in Italy, as well as the Piccolo Teatro in Milan, occasionally presents plays exploring the relationship between man and nature, while the Compagnia della Fortezza,<sup>23</sup> or the National Centre for Theatre and Prison in Volterra, Italy, under the direction of Armando Punzo, since August 1988 –the year of its

<sup>22</sup> Mike Pearson, *Site-specific Performance*, Palgrave MacMillan, Basingstoke 2010.

<sup>23</sup> Elina Daraklitsa, «Teatro della Fortezza-Θέατρο», *Highlights (Διμηνιαία Έκδοση για τις Τέχνες και τον Πολιτισμό)* 14 (January–February 2005), p. 150-154.

foundation- until today, has been offering its innovative theatrical proposals to Italian and international audiences, focusing on the interaction between nature and human emotions and performing outdoors. Teatro della Fortezza has been hosted in recent years in several important international festivals, leaving its traces by activating the project of the «Impractical Theatre», which promotes the recreation of the natural theatre space and the safeguarding of its primary needs. As unattainable as utopia and the unknown tours of the mind, it sets its sights on the elaboration of an investigation of the body and speech through nature in search of «ideal» theatrical expression.

In addition, worthy of mention are the Festival Internazionali del Teatro in Piazza, which take place in various Italian cities hosting outdoor performances where theatrical action cathartically invades the natural and urban landscape. One such festival is the Santarcangelo Festival Internazionale del Teatro in Piazza, as well as the Ravenna Festival, which is distinguished for its interdisciplinary research into performances exploring themes of nature and the environment.

In conclusion, the natural and at the same time figurative landscape of this genre of theatre, highlights the deep roots of the geophysical and folkloric traditions of Italy,<sup>24</sup> while at the same time, it can deal with contemporary issues, which makes it a dynamic field of co-creation and research for both artists and audience.

The study entitled «Contemporary mass choreographies in Italy: Virgilio Sieni's "agoras" and "civic walks"», by Rossella Mazzaglia, deals with the highly interesting and contemporary phenomenon of mass choreographies that spatially depict the «market», walks in historically emblematic sites, and the work of the artist who mainly deals with this genre of dance, mass, performance, Virgilio Sieni.

Virgilio Sieni is a prominent figure in contemporary dance in Italy, known for his innovative methodology in his approach to choreography that often embodies social and political themes. His works, and more specifically, his «agoras» and «civic walks», emphasize the connection between dance and public space, thus creating a dialogue between the performers and their host communities.<sup>25</sup>

Sieni's «agoras» are performances inspired by the ancient Greek «agora», just as it was conceived and manifested by our ancient Greek ancestors.<sup>26</sup> The «agora» –as we know– was an open space where the male inhabitants of the city gathered, a place usually located in the central courtyard of the city where commercial transactions took place, but also the economic, administrative, social and, above all, spiritual centre of the city.

Drawing inspiration from Ancient Greece, Sieni creates performances, inviting participants from different walks of life to engage in a bodily expression

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<sup>24</sup> Roland Sarti, «Folk Drama and the Secularization of Rural Culture in the Italian Apennines», *Journal of Social History* 3/14 (Spring 1981), p. 465-479; Alberto M. Cirese, «Folklore in Italy: A Historical and Systematic Profile and Bibliography», *Journal of the Folklore Institute* 1-2/11 (Jun.-Aug. 1974), p. 7-79.

<sup>25</sup> Susanne Franco, «Danza, performance e museo: riflessioni e prospettive in mostra», *Danza e ricerca. Laboratorio di studi, scritture, visioni* 12 (2020), p. 217-236.

<sup>26</sup> Homer A. Thompson – Richard Ernest Wycherley, «The Agora of Athens: The History, Shape and Uses of an Ancient City Center», *The Athenian Agora* 14 (1972), p. 2, 5, 7, 23-257.

that reflects their personal and collective experiences.<sup>27</sup> The choreography often incorporates elements of improvisation and interaction, allowing for a fluid and changing artistic conversation between dancers and audience. This kind of choreographic approach democratizes dance, but also promotes a sense of belonging and shared identity within a microcosm.

The «civic walks» are another innovative invention of Sieni. In the «walks» the dance is embedded in the fabric of everyday life. These performances take place in urban environments, encouraging participants to explore the landscape through their physical movement. In this way, public spaces are transformed into improvised scenes. Sieni never forgets to emphasize the importance of place and encourage spectators to reconsider both their relationship with each other and that with the environment. The «walks», understandably, often involve the inhabitants of the area in question, helping to break down the boundaries between performer and spectator.

The impact of Sieni's works is great as the main thematic driver is the interdependence of art and society. One of the most characteristic features of these performances is the dismantling of the traditional structures of a performance, since the whole is created ad hoc with the assistance of citizens, visitors to the cities and artists. Performed dance in the public context contributes to a broader understanding of movement as a means of communication and (re)construction of the individual's contacts. Virgilio Sieni's mass choreographies are a remarkable example of how dance can transcend the conventional boundaries of theatre and its «laws», becoming a tool for social dialogue, while enriching the cultural landscape of Italy and beyond.

The study entitled «Actors, screens and virtual reality: Pirandello's theatre on the stage of the new millennium» by Paola Ranzini examines some of the latest performances of Pirandello's plays that make use of video, cinema and, in general, virtual reality.

Luigi Pirandello's exploration of contemporary time and identity in his plays offers itself as a fascinating lens through which to view the themes of theatre, and in particular the variable and dependent relationship between actors and roles, truth and falsehood. The screens and the virtual reality that emanates from them have embraced the performing arts of our time, because they can act as a tool to illuminate the symbols of the texts and the director's work.<sup>28</sup> The use of digital technology in this regard in the works of the greatest Italian dramatist of the 20th century in performances of our days, on the one hand, is of great interest for the way in which the concepts and hidden messages of Pirandellian drama and the «aesthetics of his humour»<sup>29</sup> can be rendered, and on the other hand, it acts as a

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<sup>27</sup> Virgilio Sieni, «Atlas of the Gesture», *PAJ: A Journal of Performance and Art* 2/40 (2018), p. 72-77.

<sup>28</sup> Fabrizio Crisafulli, «Digitale a matrice scenica: il teatro che genera cinema», Anna Barsotti – Carlo Titomanlio (eds), *Teatro e media*, Felici, Ghezzano 2012, p. 279-298 and Scott deLahunta, «Virtual Reality and Performance», *PAJ: A Journal of Performance and Art* 1/24 (2002), p. 105-114.

<sup>29</sup> Elina Daraklitsa, «Εισαγωγική μελέτη στην «Αισθητική του Χιούμορ», *Η αισθητική του χιούμορ του Luigi Pirandello*, Polytropon, Athens 2016 (<sup>1</sup>2005), p. 9-76 and Elina Daraklitsa, «Το

lever for strengthening the boundaries of the opposition between fiction and realism. The research shows that the aforementioned condition can easily find accessible refuge in the digital landscape of our times.

It is well known that Pirandellian characters struggle with themselves and the search for their true existence. They are dual personalities who often confuse the elements of their character with those imposed by society, and this difficulty of identifying the outer and inner self, the dual personality, clouds their thoughts and therefore their actions. They themselves do not know whether they are impersonating themselves or their role. This interesting and challenging condition is what actors who are called upon to interpret the multiple Pirandellian characters are confronted with today. Moreover, by observing more closely the multiplicity of the «egos», and their resulting complexity, we can see that in the era of social media, we are surrounded by countless virtual personalities, just as there are countless personalities in Pirandello's «dramatis personae». The pressure to create a public identity may reflect the existential dilemmas faced by Pirandellian characters, making the exploration of the self both relevant and urgent.

Also, the proliferation of screens in our lives has reshaped the way stories are told and experienced. In contemporary stagings of Pirandello's plays, the concept of «theatre within the theatre» takes on an additional symbolism as it points to our screen-saturated culture. The use of projections, live broadcasts and digital backdrops can create layers of reality that echo the existential themes of Pirandello's duality. Technology allows for a new kind of audience participation, whereby spectators interactively live with the represented roles, thus deepening their understanding of identity and illusion.<sup>30</sup>

Virtual reality (VR) introduces another dimension to the exploration of Pirandellian reality. In a VR environment, spectators can enter directly into the world of the characters, experiencing first-hand their struggle with identity and existence or non-existence. This aesthetic line balances with Pirandello's idea that reality is subjective and multifaceted, inviting participants to question their perceptions and re-examine the nature of their own identity while navigating the artificial environments.

In any case, Pirandello's dramaturgy remains deeply relevant as contemporary theatre struggles with the otherness of identity in the digital age. The interplay between actors, screens and virtual situations invites us to rethink what it means to be «real» in a world increasingly shaped by technology. As we explore these issues on the stage of the new millennium, Pirandello's legacy offers a rich resource for understanding the evolving nature of performance, and of human existence.

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“χιουμοριστικό” θέατρο του Πιραντέλλο. Ο «Τσετσέ», μια διαδρομή από τη φιλοσοφία στο θέατρο», in Elina Daraklitsa (ed.) *Acts of The International Congress Luigi Pirandello: η διαδρομή από τη λογοτεχνία και τη φιλοσοφία στο θέατρο*, Italian Cultural Institute of Greece, Athens 22/3/2016, p. 4-10.

<sup>30</sup> Nick Kaye – Gabriella Giannachi, «Acts of Presence: Performance, Mediation, Virtual Reality», *TDR- The Drama Review* 4/55 (2011), p. 88-95.

The study entitled «L'apparenza del sogno e dell'amore nella morsa della realtà: la condizione della donna e dell'umanità nell'opera di Luigi Pirandello e nelle sue rivisitazioni» («The appearance of dream and love in the grip of reality: the condition of women and humanity in Luigi Pirandello's work and his reinterpretations») by Giuseppe Varone examines the contradictions of life which are presented in Pirandello's plays mainly through specific characters; the humble and unhappy female figures – although endowed with characteristics of universal dimension–, capable of transcending time and historical events.

Pirandello's apprenticeship in dreams and love, experienced through a difficult everyday life, gave him a broad opinion and understanding of the female psyche and the human psyche in general. His plays often speak of characters who break ties with themselves and the social entrenchments that determine their behaviour (*Henry IV*, *In the Exit*, *Tonight we improvise*, *Lazarus*, etc.). Also, the themes of alienation and existential angst are particularly dear to the author.<sup>31</sup>

In the play *Tonight we improvise*, Pirandello, in the words of the director's character, states that theatre is a spectacle that actors must present in the best possible way, based on the text of the play, while also reminding them that they must separate the emotions of the characters from their personal, already experienced ones. The director guides his actors who are to play characters immersed in the illusion of their dreams, in the illusory world they have created and in which they wish to live.<sup>32</sup> In the female faces, this characteristic is painted in even more vivid colours. The women in Pirandello's plays often embody personalities that resist their deep instincts, subordinate to the social image they must adopt. Characters such as Marta in the novel *The Man with the Flower in His Mouth* (*L'uomo dal fiore in bocca*), depict the way women experience love, often facing frustration and existential despair. Through the experiences of his female characters, Pirandello critiques the social restrictions placed on women, highlighting their resilience and versatility.

Contemporary stage adaptations of Pirandello's plays often emphasize the above themes, focusing on the psychological aspects of his characters, revealing the deeper layers of their emotional state and of course –as mentioned above– the social responsibility that weighs on them. To sum up, Pirandello's works feed a fruitful ongoing dialogue between artists, offering a rich mosaic of themes related to the existential existence of women and all of humanity. Through the nuanced portrayal of dreams and love, the audience reflects on individual and true identity, and imposed social roles.

The study entitled «Unveiling the curtain: The metamorphosis of Italian theatre in the 21st century through the lens of *Glory wall*» by Victoria Ioannidou, examines the iconic performance *Glory wall* which was awarded at the 2020 Venice Biennale Teatro.

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<sup>31</sup> Claudio Meldolesi, «Mettere in scena Pirandello. Il valore della trasmutabilità», *Fra Totò e Gadda. Sei invenzioni spreccate dal teatro italiano*, Bulzoni, Roma 1987, p. 153-157.

<sup>32</sup> Elina Daraklitsa, *Τέχνη και αμφισβήτηση στη σύγχρονη Ιταλία (1909-2017). Τα ρεύματα της πρωτοπορίας*, Polytropon, Athens 2018, p. 118.

It has already been noted that the image of Italian theatre in the 21st century is reconstructed through the dynamic coupling of tradition and innovation, an element particularly evident in plays such as *Glory wall*. This production exemplifies how contemporary theatre has evolved to address crucial social issues while incorporating diverse artistic styles and forms of technologies. The play deals with the issue of censorship, raising many questions about it and providing answers through the mouth of the censor, to whom it gives flesh and voice.<sup>33</sup> It also delves into the theme of refugeeism, much loved by the dramatists of our times, as well as the impact of social dogmas on the individual life of the modern citizen. Nationalism and globalization are also addressed, encouraging viewers to reflect on their roles within specific narrative contexts.

The stage direction adopted a provocative style making use of multimedia elements aimed at the audience's emotional participation.<sup>34</sup> The integration of video projections, live music and interaction with the audience brought to life a multifaceted and emotional experience, aiming to represent the chaotic nature of modern life as it evolves away from authenticity and truth, elements that refer thematically to the aforementioned Pirandellian dramaturgy.

The study entitled «From the “foreign infanticide” of Euripides to the merciless satire of the “new woman” by Franca Rame and Dario Fo» («Από την “ξένη παιδοκτόνο” του Ευριπίδη στην ανελέητη σάτιρα της “νέας γυναίκας” των Φράνκα Ράμε και Ντάριο Φο») by Despina Kosmopoulou, deals with the issue of «foreign infanticide» in Euripides, especially in the play *Medea*,<sup>35</sup> highlighting the manifestations of the confrontation between emotional extremity and moral conflict. Medea, a foreign woman, commits a horrific act on her children, raising questions about loyalty, betrayal, and the consequences of unchaste passion.

In contrast, in the play of Dario Fo and Franca Rame, humorous depictions of the «new woman» echo the exploration of contemporary gender roles, also projecting the social expectations of their characters under the rule of a sharp critique.<sup>36</sup> Fo and Rame challenge outmoded notions of femininity, positing characters who are dynamic and assertive and live with self-denial in a patriarchal society.<sup>37</sup>

Both the plays of the ancient tragic poet and that of the contemporary Fo and Rame, starting from different narrative starting points, encompass the struggles of women, focusing on them intently, either through the lens of tragedy or through that of satire. Euripides locates his interest in women's psychological disorder and moral instability, while Fo and Rame use satire to deconstruct the social norms

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<sup>33</sup> See generally for the theme: Adam Parkes. *Modernism and the Theater of Censorship*, Oxford UP, New York 1996.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. Annette Wannamaker – Wojick-Andrews (eds), «Media and Theater», *Children's Literature Association Quarterly* 2/21 (1996), p. 88-89.

<sup>35</sup> Dario Fo – Franca Rame, *Venticinque monologhi per una donna*, Einaudi, Torino 1989.

<sup>36</sup> Elin Diamond, «Female Parts: An Open Couple, the Rape, Medea by Franca Rame, Dario Fo», *Theatre Journal* 1/40 (Mar. 1988), p. 102-105.

<sup>37</sup> Marga Cottino – Jones, «Franca Rame on Stage. The Militant Voice of a Resisting Woman», *Italica* 3/72 (Autumn 1995), p. 323-339.



