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UNVEILING THE CURTAIN: THE METAMORPHOSIS OF ITALIAN THEATRE IN THE 21st CENTURY THROUGH THE LENS OF GLORY WALL

Victoria Ioannidou

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C os'è la censura? Ci sono dei campi più soggetti alla censura? E se sì perché? Qual è il limite da superare oggi, in Italia, per essere censurati? L'arte che disturba, scandalizza, crea disordine; la censura che si preoccupa dell'ordine sociale mantenendo l'ordine dell'immaginazione e di conseguenza l'ordinarietà dell'immaginazione. Il gioco è questo. Eppure non è ridicolo scandalizzarsi, spaventarsi e infine censurare qualcosa che non è reale? Perché ci si indigna di più a teatro? Il palco sembra amplificare significati e effetti di cose che nel mondo ci lasciano indifferenti. In effetti la cosa non è per niente ridicola, perché è nell'immaginazione che siamo più vulnerabili e continuamente soggetti alla più sottile e perfetta forma di censura, che è quella che sembra venire da noi stessi. De Sade dice che un limite c'è, tra ciò che è possibile immaginare e ciò che è possibile realizzare. Ma è un limite che alla censura non interessa. La censura colpisce la realtà ma il suo obiettivo è l'immaginazione. Il suo occhio è rivolto alla cronaca, ma la sua vera ambizione sono le anime.[1]

[What is censorship? Are there fields that are more susceptible to censorship? And if so, why? What is the threshold to be surpassed today, in Italy, to be censored? Art that disturbs, scandalizes, creates disorder; censorship that is concerned with social order by maintaining the order of imagination and consequently the ordinariness of imagination. That's the game. Yet, isn't it ridiculous to be scandalized, frightened, and ultimately censor something that isn't real? Why is there more outrage in theater? The stage seems to amplify the meanings and effects of things that leave us indifferent in the real world. Indeed, it is not at all ridiculous, because it is in the imagination that we are most vulnerable and continually subject to the most subtle and perfect form of censorship, which seems to come from ourselves. De Sade says that there is a limit between what is possible to imagine and what is possible to realize. But this is a limit that censorship does not care about. Censorship strikes

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[1] This paragraph is attributed to Leonardo Manzan, one of the directors of *Glory wall*. *Glory wall*, *Defilippo,* https://www.defilippo.it/2022/07/11/glory-wall-22-23/ [26.04.2024]. Leonardo Manzan, originally from Rome and trained in Milan, born in 1992, emerged as a young talent at the Venice Biennale Theatre. Following the success of *Cirano deve morire* at the 2018 Biennale College Theatre–Directors Under 30, his show *Glory wall* won Best Performance in the 2020 edition.

reality, but its target is the imagination. Its eye is directed at the news, but
its real ambition is the souls].

1. Censorship and its realm

Censorship, in its essence, is the exertion of control over the dissemination of
information, ideas, or artistic expression. Within the realm of Italian theatre,
censorship has historically been a multifaceted phenomenon, reflecting broader
societal, political, and cultural dynamics. At its core, censorship operates as a
mechanism of power, aiming to regulate the boundaries of acceptable discourse
and artistic representation. However, the nuances of censorship extend far beyond
mere suppression; they encompass a complex interplay of ideology, morality, and
socio-political exigencies.

Karl Kraus's question, «Is there a woman in the room before someone enters
to see her? Does the woman herself exist?» resonates profoundly through the
thematic pores of *Glory wall*, particularly concerning the state of theater. This
provocative inquiry draws into sharp relief the existential and ontological
questions about perception and reality, central themes in the play.

In *Glory wall*, the theater itself becomes a microcosm of society, where the
boundaries between the sacred and the profane are blurred, leading to a state
where nothing is scandalous anymore because nothing is sacred. The play explores
this demystification of the theater, a space historically revered and now humbled
by time and societal restrictions. The quote from Kraus deepens this exploration,
suggesting that like the unseen woman, the essence of theater might hinge on its
observers-does theater still hold its sacred aura if the societal gaze has shifted, if
the collective belief in its sanctity has diminished?

Moreover, the play's depiction of a theater that self-censors reflects a
poignant commentary on contemporary cultural dynamics. It suggests that even
in an era where it seems everything has been said, theater continues to self-censor,
perhaps out of a misplaced belief in its enduring relevance or perhaps as a critique
of the pervasive censorship that penetrates even the most liberal societies. This
self-censorship is a tragic irony, reflecting the internal conflicts and existential
dilemmas facing modern artistic venues, which struggle to balance artistic
integrity with societal expectations.

Through the metaphorical «holes» in the wall of *Glory wall,* the play invites
the audience to peer through to a fragmented view of what theater has become-a
once powerful medium now questioning its own existence and relevance in a
world where traditional paradigms of the sacred are continually being dismantled.
This staging choice serves not only as a narrative device but also as a philosophical
query into the nature of existence and perception, mirroring Kraus's existential
question about the woman in the room.

2. Balancing constraints and freedom in Italian theatre

Reflecting on the concept of total freedom of expression within Italian theatre
uncovers intricate insights into the interplay between artistic innovation and the

frameworks that both limit and foster creativity. Historically perceived as an obstacle, censorship paradoxically shapes the artistic landscape, serving not solely as a suppressor but also as a catalyst urging artists to challenge and transcend boundaries.

This paradox embodies Paul Valéry's observation that «art lives on constraints and dies of freedom». Within the theatrical domain, imposed constraints-whether from censorship or other societal standards-frequently ignite rather than quench creative fervor. Artists faced with restrictions are compelled to discover innovative methods to convey proscribed themes, thereby enriching their art with deeper meanings and more sophisticated expressions. This phenomenon is vividly illustrated in productions like *Glory wall*, where the nuanced interplay of visibility and invisibility, presence and absence, prompts audiences to engage more deeply with the presented themes.

Additionally, the occurrence of self-censorship underscores the internalization of these restrictions. Anticipating potential criticisms or censorial actions, artists may adapt their work preemptively, a process influenced both by overt societal pressures and subtler, internalized standards. This self-regulation often confines artistic expression more stringently than external impositions, reflecting a profound acclimatization to the operative boundaries.

Exploring how Italian theatre addresses censorship and artistic liberty highlights the fragile equilibrium between the necessity for creative autonomy and the beneficial role of constraints as stimulants for artistic renewal. By traversing these intricate dynamics, Italian theatre not only mirrors but also questions and reshapes the societal norms that aim to delineate it, alongside the creative drives that strive to exceed these bounds.

3. Theoretical frameworks: Dramaturgical analysis and social dynamics

To explore why theater uniquely amplifies societal reactions more than other art forms, it's crucial to apply relevant sociological and psychological theories. These frameworks can offer insights into how theatrical performances engage audiences and provoke societal discourse at a deeper level.

Erving Goffman's theory of dramaturgy analyzes social interaction as if it were part of a theatrical performance. According to Goffman, individuals perform roles in everyday life, much like actors on a stage, which he describes in his seminal work, *The presentation of self in everyday life.*[2]

Incorporating Erving Goffman's dramaturgical theory into the analysis of *Glory wall* enhances our understanding of its approach to censorship-or its conspicuous absence. Goffman's concept, which views individuals as actors performing on the societal stage, aligns with how Leonardo's play reflects and critiques the roles individuals play within the frameworks of censorship. The play strips down these everyday performances to expose the societal norms and hidden conflicts, using the stage as a mirror to amplify and scrutinize the dynamics of censorship, and in some cases, the complete absence of it, challenging the audience

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[2] Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday* Life, The Overlook Press, New York 1959.

to reconsider the boundaries between performance and reality in societal governance. This dramatization serves as a potent critique of how public and private selves negotiate the visible and the invisible in a politically charged environment.

The delineation and interplay between public and private identities under the scope of censorship offers an interesting view on the utilization of performative techniques to challenge or reinforce societal norms. Goffman's theory, which posits social interaction as a theatrical performance, provides a robust framework for analyzing the characters' navigation of front and backstage personas. These concepts are instrumental in dissecting how individuals display or conceal their true selves in response to societal expectations and surveillance. By applying this analytical perspective, the study highlights the sophisticated mechanisms through which characters in *Glory wall* both conform to and subvert these dynamics, thus enriching our understanding of the complex interdependencies between individual agency and societal constraints in the realm of censorship. This analysis not only deepens our comprehension of the dramaturgical constructs in the play but also illuminates broader sociopolitical issues pertaining to visibility, performance, and power.

Simmel's concepts[3] of the stranger, social forms, and the web of group affiliations offer a framework to dissect the complex layers of censorship and societal dynamics portrayed in the play.

In *Glory wall,* the physical barrier-a 12-meter white wall-acts as a literal and metaphorical social form. This wall not only separates the actors from the audience but also represents the invisible barriers imposed by societal norms and censorship. Simmel's analysis of social forms, which focuses on the patterns and structures of interactions rather than their content,[4] helps us understand how these staging critiques the traditional roles of viewer and performer. The wall challenges the audience to reflect on their passive or active roles in the perpetuation of societal norms and censorship.

The concept of the stranger, as described by Simmel, is someone who is both part of the community and an outsider. This is reflected in how the audience, illuminated and visible, is invited to interact with the hidden action behind the wall. The play turns the audience into strangers within their own societal and theatrical settings, giving them a unique position to question and critique the norms they are usually subject to.[5] This positioning disrupts the typical dynamics of theatrical engagement, where the audience is usually passive.

Simmel's theory that conflict can be a form of societal integration rather than mere disruption applies aptly to *Glory wall.* The play provokes thought and discussion around censorship-a societal conflict-by making it a central theme and integrating it into the audience's experience. The play's provocations encourage

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[3] Georg Simmel, «The problem of sociology», *American Journal of Sociology* 15/3 (1909), p. 289-320.

[4] Deena Weinstein – Michael A. Weinstein, «Georg Simmel: Sociological flaneur bricoleur», *Theory, Culture & Society* 8/3 (1991), p. 151-168.

[5] Scott Lash, «Lebenssoziologie: Georg Simmel in the information age», *Theory, Culture & Society* 22/3 (2005), p. 1-23.

the audience to engage with the concept of censorship not just as an external force but as something interwoven with their own perceptions and actions.

The play's use of aesthetic elements like the wall, and the strategic visibility through small openings, serves as an artistic embodiment of Simmel's notion of the boundary. The boundary, a key theme in Simmel's work, is where different social circles intersect and where the complexities of individual and collective identities are negotiated. This boundary is not just a separator but a site of exchange and transformation, much like the wall in *Glory wall* that both obstructs and reveals.

Glory wall extends Simmel's insights into the social and aesthetic realms, illustrating how the theater can act as a microcosm for larger societal interactions and conflicts. The play's unique approach, by incorporating these elements of Simmel's theories, offers a profound commentary on how public and private selves negotiate visibility and invisibility in a politically charged environment, making the audience active participants in the dialogue on censorship and societal norms. Through this interaction, *Glory wall* does not just present a narrative but actively engages the audience in the sociological exploration of their roles within these structures, reflecting Simmel's ideas on the fluidity of social forms and the transformative potential of conflict in society.[6] The wall encourages the audience to reconsider their role in the theatrical experience, pushing them to reflect on the visible and invisible societal norms that govern their behavior.

4. Rancière's aesthetic theory applied

In exploring modern Italian theater's engagement with censorship, Jacques Rancière's concept of the «distribution of the sensible» provides a profound theoretical lens. According to Rancière,[7] aesthetics is a form of politics, where sensory experiences, as distributed through art, shape and redefine societal norms and perceptions. This framework is exemplified in *Glory wall*, a play that challenges traditional theatrical forms and content, embodying Rancière's idea by restructuring the audience's sensory landscape, thus making the act of viewing a form of political engagement.[8]

«Dissensus» is a concept primarily associated with the work of French philosopher Jacques Rancière. It refers to a fundamental disagreement or disruption of the apparent consensus about the social order and the distribution of roles, places, and forms of participation in society. Dissensus challenges the existing aesthetic or political norms and introduces new ways of seeing, understanding, and experiencing the world.

In Rancière's theory, dissensus is not simply a disagreement or conflict; it is a process that reconfigures the way individuals and groups participate in the

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6 Donald N. Levine, «Simmel as a resource for sociological metatheory», *Sociological Theory* 7/1 (1989), p. 83-94.
7 Jacques Rancière, *The politics of aesthetics*, Bloomsbury Publishing, London 2013.
8 Margus Vihalem, «Everyday aesthetics and Jacques Rancière: reconfiguring the common field of aesthetics and politics», *Journal of Aesthetics & Culture* 10/1 (2018), doi.org/10.1080/20004214.2018.1506209 [26.04.2024]

political and social spheres. It disrupts the usual ways of doing and being, the expected perceptions and understandings, by asserting the presence and perspective of those who are usually excluded or marginalized.

In the context of art and particularly in theater, dissensus manifests as a disruption of traditional forms and expectations. It allows for the emergence of new meanings and interpretations that challenge dominant narratives and hierarchies. Art becomes a space where the redistribution of the sensible, or the reconfiguration of what can be seen, said, and thought, takes place, thus creating opportunities for political and social change. This makes art a significant arena for testing and transforming the limits of what society acknowledges as the existing reality.

Glory wall not only disrupts conventional aesthetics but also actively questions and critiques societal norms around censorship. By integrating Rancière's ideas, we see that the play does more than entertain; it serves as a political act that redefines what is visible and sayable within the cultural space. This redistribution aligns with Rancière's notion of the aesthetic regime, where art merges into life, and every sensory experience, whether grand or mundane, carries political weight. The play's innovative approach can thus be viewed as a microcosm of aesthetic resistance, highlighting how theater becomes a battleground for reimagining and challenging the limits of what society deems sensible and permissible.

Through this analysis, *Glory wall* is not only a theatrical production but a critical reflection on the politics of aesthetics, where the boundaries between the stage and the societal arena dissolve, encouraging viewers to reassess their perceptions of censorship and freedom. This reevaluation is crucial for understanding the broader implications of theater in shaping and reflecting cultural and political discourse in contemporary Italy. The setting of the theatrical performance promotes a viewer's engagement that transcends mere observation to become a political dialogue. Leonardo Manzan practically uses the wall not only as an emphatic statement of division among society but also as to underscore and challenge the audience's imagination thus making a statement on censorship's limited authority.

5. Psychological theories to understand censorship's Impact on individual behavior and societal norms

In order to enhance the depth of our understanding of censorship within Italian theater, it is pivotal to integrate psychological theories that elucidate the subtle yet profound effects of censorship on individual behavior and broader societal norms. This analysis benefits from exploring the interface between psychological reactions to censorship and the broader sociocultural dynamics it engenders.

One of the key psychological frameworks applicable to this analysis is Leon Festinger's «Cognitive Dissonance Theory»,[9] which posits that individuals experience psychological discomfort when they hold contradictory beliefs or

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[9] Leon Festinger, *A theory of cognitive dissonance,* Stanford University Press, Stanford 1957.

behaviors. In the context of censorship, theatergoers and creators of plays like *Glory wall* may experience dissonance when their desire for artistic freedom conflicts with societal or governmental restrictions. This dissonance can lead to a change in beliefs, justification of censorship, or modification of one's own creative expressions to reduce discomfort.

Another interesting approach is Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann's «Spiral of Silence Theory»[10] which is also particularly relevant in discussing how censorship influences societal norms. In a theatrical context, this could result in a cultural climate where controversial topics are seldom explored in mainstream media. *Glory wall*, by challenging traditional theatrical forms and content, exemplifies how the staging and narrative disrupt conventional aesthetics and actively question and critique societal norms around censorship, thus pushing against the spiral of silence.

John Jost's «System Justification Theory»[11] provides another lens through which to view the impact of censorship. This theory proposes that people have a psychological need to view their existing social, economic, and political systems as legitimate and just. Consequently, even those disadvantaged by censorship may defend it as necessary for maintaining social order or national security. *Glory wall* serves as a critical reflection on the politics of aesthetics, where the boundaries between the stage and societal arena dissolve, challenging viewers to reassess their perceptions of censorship and freedom.

6. Historical context

To understand censorship in Italian theatre, it is imperative to consider its historical roots. Throughout Italy's tumultuous history, various entities, including religious authorities, political regimes, and cultural institutions, have wielded censorship as a means of maintaining social order and ideological control. From the ecclesiastical censorship of the Renaissance to the fascist censorship under Mussolini's regime, Italian theatre has navigated a labyrinth of restrictions and prohibitions, often at the expense of artistic autonomy and creative expression.

7. Renaissance to Enlightenment: Censorship in Italian theater

The Renaissance marked a profound cultural rebirth across Europe, particularly in Italy, where there was a flourishing of arts and sciences. This period heralded the rise of humanism, a philosophical stance that emphasized the value and agency of human beings individually and collectively. However, this cultural expansion often clashed with the rigid doctrines of the Catholic Church, which sought to maintain control over moral and religious expressions.

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[10] Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann, *The spiral of silence: Public opinion-Our social skin*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1993.
[11] Jhon T. Jost, Mahzarin R. Banaji, Brian A. Nosek, «A decade of system justification theory: Accumulated evidence of conscious and unconscious bolstering of the status quo», *Political Psychology* 6/25 (2004), p. 881-919.

During the Renaissance, the Catholic Church was a dominant force in Italian society, wielding considerable influence over cultural and intellectual life. One of its most notorious tools for maintaining control over religious and moral discourse was the Index Librorum Prohibitorum, established in the mid-16th century. This list of prohibited books included various works considered heretical, immoral, or contrary to the morals of the time, extending its reach to theatrical productions that conflicted with Church doctrines.[12]

Playwrights and performers in this era had to navigate a complex landscape of ecclesiastical censorship. The Church's moral and theological codes influenced the content and presentation of theatrical works, leading to modifications or outright bans of plays that were deemed to challenge religious authority or moral norms.[13] For example, plays that featured blasphemous content, criticized the clergy, or portrayed religious figures in a negative light were often censored or suppressed.

Some examples of the censored plays of this era include Giovanni Boccaccio's[14] *The Decameron*: Although primarily known as a written work, adaptations of Boccaccio's tales for the stage often faced scrutiny and censorship for their open criticism of clerical corruption and their sometimes-bawdy content, which clashed with the Church's call for decorum and piety and Niccolò Machiavelli's[15] *La mandragola*. This play, a sharp social commentary that includes critiques of corruption within religious institutions, navigated through the channels of censorship by masking its critiques with comedy and satire, reflecting the complex relationship between art and censorship during the Renaissance.

The mechanisms and justifications for censorship established during the Renaissance set a precedent that would extend well into the Enlightenment and beyond, affecting the development of Italian theater. The Church's persistent influence served as both a challenge and a catalyst for artistic expression, as playwrights and performers developed sophisticated methods to veil their critiques and satires to evade censorship.[16]

8. Fascist Italy: Censorship under Mussolini

Under Benito Mussolini's rule from 1922 to 1943, Italian theater experienced stringent censorship as the Fascist government sought to control the narrative and suppress dissent. This censorship was aimed at consolidating power and promoting Fascist ideologies through various cultural mediums, including theater.

The Ministry of Popular Culture (MinCulPop), established in 1937, was pivotal in enforcing censorship. This ministry vetted theatrical productions to

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[12] Cf. Paul F. Grendler, *The Roman Inquisition and the Venetian Press, 1540-1605*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 2015.

[13] Frederick McGinness, *Right thinking and sacred oratory in Counter-Reformation Rome*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 1995.

[14] Giuseppe Mazzotta, *The world at play in Boccaccio's Decameron*, Princeton University Press, New Jersey 2014.

[15] Silvia Ruffo – Fiore, *Niccolò Machiavelli*, Twayne, Boston 1982.

[16] Alberto Asor Rosa, *Scrittori e popolo*, vol. 3, Samonà e Savelli, Roma 1966.

ensure they aligned with Fascist values, using censorship to suppress any artistic expressions that could undermine the regime's authority. The regime employed various censorship tactics, including pre-approval of scripts, surveillance of performances, and strict guidelines that theater companies were forced to follow. The culture of self-censorship was also promoted, with playwrights and directors avoiding subjects that could invoke the wrath of the censors.[17]

Theater during the Fascist regime was utilized as a propaganda tool. Plays that glorified the Fascist regime and its ideologies were promoted, while those that critiqued the regime or diverged from its ideologies were altered or banned. Plays that contained political dissent or criticized the regime faced strict bans. A notable instance is the case of Roberto Bracco, a renowned playwright whose career was significantly impacted by his political stance. Bracco was a parliamentary member of the opposition and a signatory of the Manifesto of Anti-Fascist Intellectuals penned by Benedetto Croce.[18] His political activism led to his exclusion from the theatrical scene through the censorship enforced by local prefects. Furthermore, pro-Fascist intellectuals harshly criticized him as a representative of an «old theater» that was considered obsolete.[19]

The climax of Bracco's censorship ordeal occurred with his play *I pazzi*. After years of artistic banishment, *I pazzi* premiered in Naples in June 1929, thanks to the intervention of actress Emma Gramatica, who used her favor with Mussolini to circumvent the censorship.[20] The play was initially well-received in Naples, highlighting the public's receptiveness to works from non-aligned authors. However, when *I pazzi* was staged in Rome, its success was perceived by radical Fascists as a display of intellectual anti-Fascism. This led to the abrupt interruption of the performance by Fascist «squadristi» –in the context of Fascist Italy, «squadristi» refers to members of the «squadrismo», which was a Fascist paramilitary group–, demonstrating the regime's direct interference to suppress dissenting cultural expressions.[21]

This example underscores the complex interplay between politics and art in Fascist Italy, where censorship was not only a tool of political repression but also a mechanism that dictated the cultural landscape. The case of Roberto Bracco illustrates the profound impacts of such censorship, where even successful and celebrated works could be stifled if they were seen as a threat to the regime's control or ideology.

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[17] Ruth Ben – Ghiat, «Italian Fascism and the Aesthetics of the'Third Woy'», *Journal of Contemporary History* 2/31 (1996), p. 293-316.
[18] Benedetto Croce, *Manifesto degli intellettuali antifascisti*, Passerino, Gaeta 2022.
[19] Enzo Traverso, «Intellectuals and anti-fascism: for a critical historization», *New Politics* 9/4 (2004), p. 91.
[20] Pasquale Iaccio, «Le carte private di Roberto Bracco: lo strano caso di un doppio archivio», Giovanni di Domenico – Fiammetta Sabba (eds), *Il privilegio della parola scritta. Gestione, conservazione e valorizzazione di carte e libri di persona*, Associazione italiana biblioteche, Roma 2020, p. 113-127.
[21] Pasquale Iaccio, *L'intellettuale intransigente: il fascismo e Roberto Bracco* (vol. 5), Guida Editori, Napoli 1992.

9. Post-World War II and modern era: Evolution of censorship in Italian theater

The legacy of Fascist censorship has been a subject of reflection in post-war Italian theater. Modern playwrights often explore themes of freedom, oppression, and the role of art in challenging authoritarianism, reflecting on the long-term impacts of such repressive practices. The examination of postmodern «impegno», as discussed by Ronchi Stefanati (2019), highlights how contemporary Italian literature and theater have navigated the complex interplay between ethical and political commitment, offering insights into the continuous struggle against remnants of authoritarian influence.[22]

After World War II, Italy transitioned from Fascist rule to a democratic republic,[23] which brought about a profound change in the cultural and political landscapes. This transformation allowed for greater artistic freedoms, significantly affecting the theater industry, which had previously been a medium of propaganda under Fascist censorship. The rise of the Christian Democrats,[24] who governed Italy for much of the post-war period, also influenced theatrical productions. While not overtly repressive like the fascist regime, the Christian Democratic government promoted a conservative agenda that favored traditional values. This political climate indirectly encouraged self-censorship among playwrights and theatre directors, who were cautious about challenging religious and moral conventions too openly.

With the dismantling of official censorship mechanisms, Italian theater embraced a period of vibrant creativity and experimentation. However, the legacy of censorship still influenced theatrical productions through informal practices shaped by lingering social norms and political pressures.

The works of Dario Fo[25] exemplify the challenges and opportunities during this era. His politically charged satires, such as *Accidental death of an anarchist*, faced both acclaim and controversy, reflecting the ongoing tensions between artistic freedom and societal norms. Fo's approach to theater not only entertained but also provoked public and legal scrutiny, underscoring the complex relationship between politics and art in post-war Italy.

The transition into the late 20th and early 21st centuries marked further shifts in the challenges faced by Italian theater, particularly concerning issues of funding and political correctness. The contemporary Italian theater scene has grappled with significant economic challenges, particularly in terms of state funding. Cavaglieri (2020) discusses how financial dependencies create indirect

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[22] Michele Ronchi Stefanati, *Origins of postmodern impegno: Ethical and political commitment in the works of Gianni Celati*. University College Cork, Ireland 2019.

[23] Beatrice Giuseppina Mabrey, *(Re)membering the past WWII-the years of lead in contemporary Italian literature, theater, and cinema*, University of Texas, Texas 2015.

[24] Chrostopher Cairns, «The Context to 1960», Ralph Yarrow (ed.), *Theatre and Performance in Italy: 1960-1990 (Routledge Revivals): Cross-Cultural Encounters*, Routledge, UK 2016, p. 110-130.

[25] Ewa Bal, «Toward a Broken Tradition: Dario Fo-Between Theatrical Illusion and Reality», *Theatre and its Double: Theatre and Engaged Literature in Contemporary Theory and Practice*, Routledge, UK 2010, p. 211-230.

forms of censorship, where theaters may shy away from controversial themes to secure funding.[26] This economic pressure has introduced a new layer of complexity to the discourse on censorship, merging financial sustainability with artistic expression.

10. Integrating theoretical insights

Glory wall, directed by Leonardo Manzan, serves as an exemplary study in how contemporary theater can utilize the staging and narrative to challenge and redistribute societal perceptions. The play's innovative use of a literal wall to obstruct and mediate the audience's view not only serves as a bold metaphor for censorship but also reconfigures how spectators engage with the work, echoing Rancière's idea of the aesthetic regime that disrupts traditional sensory experiences.

In *Glory wall,* the strategic use of disruptive staging and interactive elements powerfully illustrates Jacques Rancière's concepts of dissensus and the redistribution of the sensible. This approach in the play serves to challenge the traditional roles of audience and performer by breaking down conventional barriers and encouraging a more dynamic form of spectatorship. Such elements provoke audiences to reconsider their perceptions and roles within the theatrical experience and, by extension, their place within societal structures. The interactive nature of the staging effectively redistributes the sensory experiences of the audience, aligning perfectly with Rancière's theory that art can reshape societal understandings and expectations, thus creating a space for political and social interrogation and dialogue. This method not only enriches the audience's engagement but also highlights the transformative potential of theater as a medium for critical reflection and societal change.

Glory wall masterfully embodies «Cognitive Dissonance Theory» by placing the audience in a position where they confront their expectations versus the reality of the play's constrained expressions. The physical barrier of the wall, which partially obscures the performance, may create discomfort among viewers as they struggle between their anticipation of a traditional theater experience and the reality of censored or incomplete artistic expressions. This experience prompts the audience to either adjust their perceptions of what theater should embody or reconcile with the restrictions placed, reflecting the psychological discomfort predicted by Festinger's theory.

In the context of *Glory wall,* the «Spiral of Silence Theory» is particularly poignant. By engaging with taboo or censored subjects in a visible public forum, the play challenges the prevailing norms that might typically discourage such discussions. The theatrical setting allows for a temporary suspension of societal norms, where audience members, influenced by the collective reception of the play, might feel more empowered to discuss and dissent against mainstream

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[26] Livia Cavaglieri, «Memoria e Stabilità: i racconti della costruzione del teatro pubblico italiano», Donatella Orecchia – Livia Cavaglieri (eds), *Fonti orali e teatro. Memoria, storia e performance*, Bologna 2018, p. 137-146.

censorship views. This breaks the typical silence that might pervade society regarding sensitive or controversial subjects, suggesting that art can be a powerful medium to counteract the spiral of silence.

Glory wall also taps into «System Justification Theory» by presenting a narrative that questions the justifications for censorship. The play invites the audience to question and potentially reject the justifications for societal and political systems that impose censorship. By blending reality with performance and inviting audience interaction, *Glory wall* blurs the lines between acceptance of societal norms and the quest for artistic and expressive freedom, challenging individuals to reconsider their own complicity in sustaining such systems.

Erving Goffman's theory of dramaturgy offers a lens to view *Glory wall* as a reflection of societal performances, where the boundary between audience and stage blurs, reflecting back the roles individuals play within the larger context of censorship and power dynamics. The play's approach-using a wall and engaging the audience through small openings-amplifies the performative aspects of societal censorship and the public's complicity or resistance in these dynamics.

Analyzing *Glory wall* through the sociological lens of Georg Simmel offers a profound understanding of the play's thematic exploration of societal boundaries and individual roles within public and private spheres. Simmel's theories on social forms and the stranger provide a useful framework for interpreting the play's use of a physical wall as both a barrier and a mediator of social interaction. In *Glory wall*, the wall represents more than just a physical division; it symbolizes the complex social boundaries that individuals navigate within their communities. This staging embodies Simmel's concept of the stranger – a figure who is simultaneously part of the society but set apart, an observer and a participant. This dual role is mirrored in the audience's experience as they interact with the play through the wall's openings, positioned uniquely to both view and influence the unfolding drama, much like Simmel's stranger who influences social groups while remaining distinct from them. Additionally, Simmel's ideas on the web of group affiliations resonate with the play's narrative, which challenges the audience to question their complicity and role in perpetuating societal norms and censorship. This interaction effectively turns the theatrical space into a microcosm for Simmel's societal theories, reflecting his belief that society is a complex structure of individual interactions where boundaries are both formed and contested.

11. Themes and motifs in censorship

Contemporary Italian theatre vividly reflects the nation's rich tapestry of cultural, political, and social dynamics. It is a vibrant landscape marked by an array of thematic expressions and innovative staging techniques, as discussed by Roberto Canziani.[27] Italian theatre, with its decentralized and diverse character, engages

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[27] Roberto Canziani, «Italian theatre today: Not a system, and so many transformations», *Critical Stages/Scènes Critiques* 20 (2019), https://www.critical-stages.org/20/italian-theatre-today-not-a-system-and-so-many-transformations/ [26.04.2024]

deeply with themes such as censorship, political dissent, and social inequality, often challenging traditional boundaries and societal norms.

The motif of the wall in *Glory wall*, as highlighted in the play's analysis, serves as a powerful symbol of both literal and metaphorical barriers to communication and free expression. This staging choice embodies the broader themes of censorship that Italian theatre frequently grapples with themes that echo the complex interaction between artistic freedom and societal constraints. Judith Butler's exploration of performative politics provides a theoretical framework to understand how these motifs not only reflect but also actively challenge prevailing societal norms, potentially inciting controversy and dialogue.

Throughout the 21st century, Italian theatre has continued to evolve, with playwrights and directors like Dario Fo using satire and farce to critique political corruption, thereby influencing newer generations of theatre professionals. The introduction of digital media and globalization has further complicated the discourse on censorship, extending the reach and impact of Italian theatrical productions beyond traditional geographic and cultural limits. This global exposure has introduced Italian theatre to a variety of censorship challenges, from digital surveillance to cultural sensitivities that vary across audiences worldwide.

Reflections on recent legislative changes and the diverse artistic directions illustrate how modern productions are shaped by both historical legacies and contemporary innovations. The evolution of stage direction also marks a significant shift from the traditional «regia critica» model (Italian directorial approach where the director deeply interprets and shapes the play, often acting as a co-author who challenges and redefines traditional staging and narratives) to more contemporary practices that blend various artistic disciplines. Influential directors like Luca Ronconi and contemporary figures like Romeo Castellucci and Emma Dante are noted for their innovative approaches to theatre that challenge traditional forms and content, further enriching the Italian theatrical landscape.

The dynamic interplay of these elements in Italian theatre not only mirrors but also actively influences public discourse on key societal issues such as freedom, restriction, and the power dynamics of censorship. Through innovative motifs like the wall in *Glory wall*, and the diverse thematic engagements of plays across the country, Italian theatre continues to be a vital part of the national conversation about censorship, democracy, and social change, reflecting a complex, ever-evolving narrative that resonates with both local and international audiences.

12. Contemporary dynamics of censorship in digital media

The rise of digital media has transformed traditional censorship, expanding content dissemination and allowing works like *Glory wall* to reach global audiences. Philip Auslander (2008) notes that while digital platforms circumvent traditional censorship, they introduce challenges like digital surveillance. Additionally, John Tomlinson (1999) highlights how globalization fosters complex interactions between local laws and global cultural norms, often leading artists to practice self-censorship to avoid international backlash.

Digital media not only broadens the audience but also complicates how artists navigate the intersection of local censorship laws and global cultural sensitivities. This global exposure forces artists to balance the need for expression against the risk of offending diverse cultural audiences, potentially inciting international controversy.

Moreover, Italian theatre must negotiate both domestic censorship practices and a spectrum of international norms, requiring a nuanced approach to artistic expression to resonate across different cultural and legal frameworks. These global dynamics signify a major shift in the mechanisms of censorship, introducing both challenges and opportunities that redefine the reception and mediation of artistic works.

13. Restricting imagination: The invisible frontiers of censorship

Marquis de Sade's provocative assertion that the boundary between what is imaginable and what is achievable defines the true realm of censorship. Far from merely suppressing visible dissent, censorship extends its influence into the boundless domain of the imagination. This subtle form of control, often manifested as self-censorship, operates deep within the psyche, shaping both artistic expression and broader societal discourse.

Censorship functions as a social control mechanism that polices the boundaries of thought and expression, deeming certain ideas too dangerous or disruptive for public dissemination. By restricting what can be imagined, censorship not only limits what is expressed but also stifles innovation and intellectual curiosity. This dynamic highlight a profound conflict between the potential of the human mind and the restrictive norms imposed by societal structures.

Self-censorship represents a particularly insidious aspect of this control. As noted by psychologists Greenwald and Banaji, societal expectations can profoundly influence personal beliefs and biases, often leading individuals to censor their own thoughts to align with perceived social norms.[28] This internal censorship is reinforced by a deep-seated human need to belong, as discussed by Baumeister and Leary, which compels individuals to conform to avoid exclusion.[29]

While legal and institutional mechanisms explicitly enforce external censorship, self-censorship operates subconsciously, subtly shaping personal and creative autonomy. This phenomenon is further explored by Foucault, who suggests that power structures maintain control through the perpetuation of accepted discourses, subtly dictating the limits of acceptable thought and discussion.[30]

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[28] Antony G. Greenwald – Mahzarin R. Banaji, «Implicit social cognition: Attitudes, self-esteem, and stereotypes», *Psychological Review* 1/102 (1995), p. 4-27.
[29] Roy F. Baumeister, *The need to belong: Desire for interpersonal attachments as a fundamental human motivation*, Routledge, London 2007.
[30] Michael Foulcault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-79*, Colin Gordon (ed.), Pantheon, New York 1980.

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The role of media in shaping public discourse and reinforcing self-censorship is critical, as Couldry points out, by promoting narratives that conform to societal norms and marginalizing dissenting voices.[31]

To navigate and challenge these constraints, individuals must engage in critical self-reflection and assert their creative freedoms against the pressures of conformity. This process not only involves recognizing the forces of censorship but also actively resisting them to foster a culture of diversity in thought and artistic freedom.

In the realm of artistic expression, confronting censorship's gaze on the imagination reveals how deeply embedded constraints can shape, and potentially stifle, creativity. By critically examining these mechanisms, artists and audiences can better understand the tension between freedom and conformity. Furthermore, challenging these boundaries allows for a richer engagement with complex themes, ultimately contributing to a more dynamic and reflective society.

Understanding the full impact of censorship on imagination highlights its role not just as a barrier to free expression but also as an unintended catalyst for creative resilience. Artists, compelled by these restrictions, often find innovative ways to circumvent censorship, enriching their art forms and engaging more profoundly with societal challenges. This paradox underscores the need to continually question and push against the limits imposed on artistic and intellectual exploration to ensure a vibrant, democratic society.

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ΠΕΡΙΛΗΨΗ

ΡΙΧΝΟΝΤΑΣ ΤΟ ΠΑΡΑΠΕΤΑΣΜΑ:
Η ΜΕΤΑΜΟΡΦΩΣΗ ΤΟΥ ΙΤΑΛΙΚΟΥ ΘΕΑΤΡΟΥ
ΚΑΤΑ ΤΟΝ 21ο ΑΙΩΝΑ ΜΕΣΩ ΤΟΥ ΦΑΚΟΥ ΤΟΥ *GLORY WALL*

Το ιταλικό θέατρο του 21ου αιώνα έχει γνωρίσει σημαντικές αλλαγές στη διαχείριση της λογοκρισίας και της ελευθερίας του λόγου. Η μελέτη αυτή εξετάζει την εξέλιξη του ιταλικού θεατρικού τοπίου, εστιάζοντας στην εμβληματική περίπτωση του *Glory wall*, νικητή της Μπιενάλε Θεάτρου στη Βενετία το 2020. Μέσω μιας εμβριθούς ανάλυσης αυτής της παράστασης, εξετάζουμε τη μετάβαση από την παραδοσιακή λογοκρισία στην πλήρη απουσία της στο σύγχρονο ιταλικό θέατρο και τις επιπτώσεις αυτής της μεταμόρφωσης για τους καλλιτέχνες, το κοινό και την κοινωνία στο σύνολό της. Επιπλέον, θα εστιάσουμε στην έννοια της απόλυτης ελευθερίας του λόγου και στον ρόλο της λογοκρισίας στη διαμόρφωση του καλλιτεχνικού τοπίου, καθώς και στο φαινόμενο της αυτολογοκρισίας. Όπως είπε ο Πωλ Βαλερύ, «η τέχνη ζει με τους περιορισμούς και

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[31] Nick Couldry, *Social theory and digital media practice*, Polity, Cambridge 2012.

πεθαίνει από την ελευθερία», υπογραμμίζοντας τη λεπτή ισορροπία μεταξύ καλλιτεχνικών περιορισμών και δημιουργικής ελευθερίας στο θέατρο.

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ABSTRACT

UNVEILING THE CURTAIN:
THE METAMORPHOSIS OF ITALIAN THEATRE
IN THE 21st CENTURY THROUGH THE LENS OF *GLORY WALL*

Italian theatre in the 21st century has witnessed significant changes in the management of censorship and freedom of expression. This study explores the evolution of the Italian theatre landscape, focusing on the emblematic case of *Glory wall*, winner of the 2020 Theatre Biennale in Venice. Through an in-depth analysis of this case, we examine the transition from traditional censorship to its total absence in contemporary Italian theatre and the implications of this transformation for artists, audiences, and society as a whole. Additionally, we will reflect on the concept of total freedom of expression and the role of censorship in shaping the artistic landscape, as well as the phenomenon of self-censorship. As Paul Valéry famously said, «art lives on constraints and dies of freedom», underscoring the delicate balance between artistic constraints and creative freedom in the theatre.

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Η ΣΥΓΓΡΑΦΕΑΣ

Η Βικτώρια Ιωαννίδου είναι δασκάλα Ιταλικών με έδρα τη Θεσσαλονίκη. Αυτή τη στιγμή ολοκληρώνει το διδακτορικό της στο Αριστοτέλειο Πανεπιστήμιο Θεσσαλονίκης, επικεντρώνοντας τις μελέτες της σε θέματα σχετικά με την ταυτότητα, τη φιλοσοφία και την κοινωνιολογία του δικαίου στο αφηγηματικό πλαίσιο, δείχνοντας ιδιαίτερο ενδιαφέρον στη λογοτεχνία του εικοστού αιώνα και στην κρίση του «εγώ».

Κατά τη διάρκεια των σπουδών της στην Ιταλική Γλώσσα και Λογοτεχνία, έχει λάβει διάφορες διακρίσεις συμμετέχοντας σε ιταλικούς διαγωνισμούς για διηγήματα και ποιήματα. Έχει συνεργαστεί με καθηγητές στην οργάνωση και παρουσίαση συνεδρίων στη Θεσσαλονίκη και έχει συμμετάσχει σε συνέδρια με ομιλίες που αφορούν τη μνήμη στη λογοτεχνία και τον ρόλο των γυναικών «σαλονιέρων» κατά τη διάρκεια της Ιταλικής Παλιγγενεσίας.

Ενσωματώνοντας την κοινωνική πτυχή του πρώτου της πτυχίου της Νομικής στις λογοτεχνικές της σπουδές, πιστεύει πως η διασύνδεση των επιστημών, μια ευρύτερη και πιο βαθιά κατανόηση της λογοτεχνίας, της ταυτότητας και των κοινωνικών δυναμικών στο σύγχρονο πλαίσιο, μπορούν να προσφέρουν μια ολιστική προσέγγιση στη γνώση.

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THE AUTHOR

Victoria Ioannidou is an Italian language teacher based in Thessaloniki. She is currently completing her PhD at Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, focusing her studies on issues related to identity, philosophy, and the sociology of law in the narrative context, with a particular interest in 20th-century literature and the crisis of the self.

During her studies in Italian Language and Literature, she has received various distinctions by participating in Italian competitions for short stories and poetry. She has collaborated with professors in organizing and presenting conferences in Thessaloniki and has participated with presentations on conferences related to memory in literature and the role of women «salonnières» during the Risorgimento.

Integrating the social aspect of her first degree in Law into her literary studies, she firmly believes that the interconnection between disciplines, a broader and more in-depth understanding of literature, identity, and social dynamics in the contemporary context can offer a holistic approach to knowledge.