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editorial

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Theatre and technology: two words that together tend to create a certain friction, sometimes even reticence, and that always, in any case, provoke reflection. It seems clear to me that today technology represents the hegemonic mode of expression of mass culture; in contrast, theatre is perhaps the cultural medium from which the masses have distanced themselves most clearly. This is also why those who could be called *apocalyptic* champion today a theatre of the body and physical presence that is forcefully opposed to the virtuality of image and sound; while those *integrated*, in contrast, celebrate the increasingly evident ease with which technological languages are welcomed on stage. But the truth is that dichotomously contrasting theatre and technology would be a mistake. First, because theatre and technology have long been involved in a complex and fruitful dialectical relationship, which feeds back into each other, and second, because theatre is also a form of technology. If it is true that — and here I quote Marc Villanueva, whose words you will read shortly — “both voice and writing are examples of technologies that have drastically changed the way we understand and explain the world to ourselves,” then the set of gestures and words that we use in performance could also be considered a form of technology, which makes our daily lives easier and our view of things and ourselves evolve. From this perspective, technology would be nothing more than one of the ways in which human activity is expressed in the search for a meaning that justifies our own existence on this planet. But to avoid reducing everything to an aseptic positivist evolutionism, we must separate the concept of technology from its etymological root. *Techne*, in Greek, which we translate as “art”, actually only referred to those human practices that implied rules and that, through the knowledge of these rules, allowed the production of the artistic object and its understanding in the intellectual sphere. This is something that — I like to think — theatre can fortunately still avoid by taking refuge in the irrational; what is certain is that theatre continues to be an eminently human practice, hence its profound mystery, which no technology will ever be able to unravel.

The idea of dedicating a symposium to this topic had been around for some time. It had been raised by Anna Solanilla at an editorial meeting a couple of years ago and, a few months later, it became a reality. The symposium “Live Art and Uncertain Technologies” took place on 3 and 4 October 2024 and focused on the relationship between the performing arts and those technologies that we have defined as “uncertain” due to their hybrid nature, the indeterminacy of their use and their propensity for rapid evolution, with special attention to the digital world and virtual reality. We were interested in researching the theatrical potential of these technical innovations: what possibilities they offer when expanding the concepts of *theatricality* and *performativity*, and how virtuality can dialogue with the presence of theatre. The symposium therefore aimed to open a shared space for reflection and dialogue based on these themes in order to draw theoretical lines and imagine possible future horizons.

The Organising Committee comprised Anna Solanilla, professor in the Department of Stage Design at the Institut del Teatre in Barcelona; Aleix Soler, Director of ESTAE (Escola Superior de Tècniques de les Arts de l'Espectacle); and Xesca Salvà and Marc Villanueva, who coordinate the Postgraduate Degree in Performance and Digital Technology at the Institut del Teatre in Barcelona and who were responsible for programming the event. However, we had the valuable collaboration of UPC-Barcelona Tech, thanks above all to the availability of Carles Sora, Director of the CITM (Center for Image and Multimedia Technology). It should go without saying, but is always good to recall, that without the executive and logistical production of Ona Salvat and Marta Borrás, neither the symposium nor this issue of the journal would have been possible.

The vast majority of the articles you will find in this issue are the “literary versions” of the presentations and papers that were given during those two days, where international guests such as Chris Van Goethem, Kris Verdonck and Lena Newton, the latter only online, alternated with familiar personalities from Catalonia or even related to the Institute, such as (in strict alphabetical order) Bani Brusadin, Jorge Caballero, Jaume Ferrete, María García Vera, Anna Giralt Gris, Citlali Hernández, Clara Laguillo, the two artists Mercè Lledós and Júlia Rossinyol, and also Nil Martín, Núria Nia, Àlvaro Pastor, Mercè Saumell and Ferran Utzet, as well as the group Estampa and FRAU-recerques visuals, the studio created by Helena Pielias and Vicenç Viaplana Ventura. All of them have developed interesting discourses that intersect live art, science and philosophy. These are exciting and complex topics, it must be acknowledged, but it is this very complexity that will help us decipher the complex times we live in. I suggest reading this issue by following the symposium’s report written by Marc Villanueva, which we provide here as an introduction to the dossier or as a kind of guide, given that, while impeccably presenting the aforementioned protagonists, it will help you orient yourself in this jungle of names and concepts.

I will limit myself to the task of introducing two supplementary articles, which form part of the dossier although they are not the direct result of the symposium. In “Co-Individuality through Liminality”, Carla Molins-Pitarch

examines the concept of Co-Individuality; in other words, “the dynamic interplay between individual identities within liminal spaces created by both real and fictional borders.” Victor Turner had already made it clear that the two fundamental characteristics of liminality are ambiguity and transformative potential, features that virtual space clearly shows it has made its own: Molins-Pitarch’s project exploits a liminal digital space where different individuals can participate in co-individual collaborative experiences, rethinking their identities in a way that would be difficult to achieve in the physical world, exploring new forms of expression and connection.

In “*Sampling: Sound Embodiment and Dancing sounds. A Choreographic Duo*”, Nicolas Hermansen analyses a piece that transcends the conventional framework of a dance solo accompanied by sound. *Sampling* is approached as a true dance duo, where the sound takes on the role of a performer who establishes a dialogue with the dancer through her movement. This implies recognising sound as an autonomous language, which precisely because of its autonomy works with other languages within the piece in which it operates. Central to this analysis are the concepts of embodiment and corporeality: the dancer’s gestures and sound merge in a dynamic interaction, where each element shapes and feeds back into the other. This dialectic somehow invalidates the conventional roles of choreography and sound accompaniment, creating a new paradigm of shared embodiment.

Beyond the dossier, we present two personal reflections by Jolanta Rękawek and Carles Cabrera Vilalonga on two figures in the recent history of Catalan theatre. In the first, the Brazilian researcher outlines a kind of retrospective on the multifaceted Albert Vidal — performer, musician, theatre man —, who condenses his holistic vision of the world in his activity. For the Catalan artist, theatre has to do with the loss of borders between human beings, animals and bodies; the complete opposite to the approach of mimetic-representative theatre, which concerns the uncrossable borders of the subject with their surroundings. This stance derives, among other things, from the lessons of Jaques Lecoq and Kazuo Ohno, but it is also the result of a choice as radical as that of abandoning the society of the spectacle at the age of thirty to live life “otherly”. Fleeing the normal *cursus honorum* of an acting career, Vidal dedicated himself to experimenting, hybridising and inventing surprising and indefinable performative events, revealing the “character of art as an existential, unique, and unrepeatable experience.”

For his part, with “An Approach to the Theatre of Xesc Forteza”, Carles Cabrera writes the first academic study on the theatre of the Majorcan actor, creator and director, where he highlights his facet as a playwright, from his experiences with *regional theatre* during the early Franco years to the creation of his own company in Palma de Mallorca, including the music hall of the Paral·lel in the sixties. Forteza was the great benchmark of popular theatre of Majorca during the dictatorship, the Transition and the first period of democracy, until his death in 1999 and the dissolution of the company a few years later. With a style capable of connecting with the audience through laughter and involvement, Forteza remains an essential figure in Balearic theatre, an excellent example of how theatre has been able to dialogue

with society, responding to the various challenges posed by the complicated politics of this country.

And, to conclude, the painstaking and elegant review (only available in Catalan) of the volume *El debat teatral a Catalunya*, by Professor Miquel M. Gibert, who introduces us to this anthology of texts on dramatic theory and criticism edited by Ramon Aran, Aïda Ayats, Enric Gallén, Gerard Guerra and Martí Romani, which we have just published at the Institut del Teatre in the collection “Escrips Teòrics”.

And here I leave you with this editorial material, uncertain and for that even more interesting, yet still a product of the best technology that human beings have ever enjoyed: critical thinking.

Happy reading!

Davide Carnevali

