

# *Building Community. The Performing Arts in European Cultural Policies*

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## ABSTRACT

Although the term “performativity” does not appear in European cultural policies documents, the identification of culture as a “transformative force for community regeneration”<sup>1</sup> and the strategies outlined to promote a strong sense of community with economic and sustainable growth certainly do appear to rely to a significant degree upon the performative potential of culture and art. The use of the notion of performativity as a tool for interpreting those policies enables us to put in light certain theoretical points whose lack of explicit expression generates contradictions and ambiguities, and helps us to see how the recognition and the valorisation of the performative potential of culture and art facilitate the attainment of the goals set by those policies.

## KEYWORDS

Performativity, Performing Arts, Bodily Co-presence

## 1. *Performative, Performativity*

Coined by philosopher John Langshaw Austin during the William James Lectures *How to Do Things with Words*, held at Harvard in 1955, the word “performativity” – derived from the verb “to perform” – originally denotes the capacity of utterances to “perform actions”, i.e. to produce, by actualizing it, a state of reality. This is particularly evident in the expressions: “‘I do (sc. Take this woman to be my lawful wedded wife)’ [...] ‘I name this ship *Queen Elizabeth* [...] I declare war’”.<sup>2</sup> The extension of this concept to corporeal actions by the philosopher and feminist theorist Judith Butler has made clear the essential role of corporeal actions in the constitution of the identity (especially gender identity) of individuals<sup>3</sup> as Butler identifies the reiteration of a set of behavioural norms as what “enables the subject and constitutes the temporal condition

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<sup>1</sup> *A New European Agenda for Culture*, 2018, p. 3.

<sup>2</sup> Austin 1962, pp. 5-7.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Butler 1988, 1997, 2011.

of the subject”.<sup>4</sup> Identity thus depends on a set of “performative” acts which, in replicating patterns of behaviour, actualize novel applications of them, thus provoking a simultaneous transformation of them and of the reality in which they are performed. Communities themselves, as cultural anthropologist Christoph Wulf points out, “are formed and trans-formed in and through cultural processes and practices”<sup>5</sup> that are essentially performative, that is, through the implementation of “mimetic” processes that inform the “intangible cultural heritage”<sup>6</sup> and which, in reiterating “cultural forms of *mise-en-scène* [...] corporeal and linguistic practices”,<sup>7</sup> continuously engage them in a “transformative-generative” process that gives rise to ever new “performance communities”.<sup>8</sup> The link between corporeality and “performance”, understood as “staging”,<sup>9</sup> emphasizes the link – already identified by Butler – between corporeal action and the theatrical sphere and, in general, the sector of the so-called performing arts. These arts are those “whose material of construction is performative activity: theatre, dance and music in action [...] Not the objects to which they may give rise (literary or audio-visual texts) but essentially their – complex and stratified – active and practical dimension”.<sup>10</sup> Their characteristic feature resides, in fact, in the identification of the body as a “primary instrument of expression [...] as a privileged instrument [...] of the ideational-compositional moment”<sup>11</sup> that stages, continuously renewing it, a “knowledge of the body in action”,<sup>12</sup> whose action is

a “re-doing” of something that has been prepared and/or rehearsed [...] and which is [however] anything but a “copying” in the sense of “producing an identical” [...] for the “performative performance” [...] it is necessary to develop and cultivate a specific ability whose essential trait is the ability to conduct the action in the more

<sup>4</sup> Butler 2011, p. 60.

<sup>5</sup> Wulf 2018, p. 236, our transl.

<sup>6</sup> Wulf 2018, p. 238.

<sup>7</sup> Wulf 2018, p. 239.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> The centrality of the notion of performance within the “performance studies” inaugurated by Richard Schechner, the American theorist and director who founded the “Performance groups” in New York in 1965 and the “Performance Studies” department of the “Tisch School of the Arts”, must be highlighted. According to Schechner, who invites us to analyse social, religious, artistic and cultural practices as if they were performances, the meaning of this notion encompasses the three meanings of the verb “to perform”: “to provide a performance” (e.g. in business or sport), “to perform” in the sense of staging a theatrical, dance or musical work and, in everyday life, “to show” or “to illustrate what is shown” (Schechner 2013, p. 28). For a more in-depth discussion of the notion of performance and performance studies, see McKenzie (2001), Taylor (2006, 2015), Deriu (2012), Carlson (2018).

<sup>10</sup> Deriu 2012, p. 94, our transl.

<sup>11</sup> Deriu 2012, p. 98, our transl.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

or less narrow but densely rich margin of possibility that opens up between the preordained (score, script, notational text...) and the contingent understood as the concrete and unrepeatable occasion of each individual performance.<sup>13</sup>

It is therefore in the liminal space between the “preordained” and the “contingent” that we can find the capacity of the performing arts to put into expression ever new units of meaning that act in a “transformative” manner through an essentially “affective”, “proprio-corporeal”,<sup>14</sup> and pre-reflective involvement of performers and spectators.

In light of these considerations, it is clear that European cultural policies are leveraged precisely on the “performative” character of the cultural and creative industries (CCIs) underlying the dual value that is recognised as essential to them and which consists in “preserv[ing] and promot[ing] linguistic diversity, and strengthen[ing] European national, regional and local identities, while sustaining social cohesion and contributing substantially [...] to creativity, investment, innovation and acting as driver of sustainable economic growth in the EU and its Member States”.<sup>15</sup> In particular, the performative nature of the CCIs emerges in the capacity ascribed to art to overcome “barriers connected to race, religion, gender, age, nationality, culture and identity, by providing a counter-discourse and contesting privileged narratives and perspectives”,<sup>16</sup> whose impact on society, politics and the economy seems to be made possible by the staging of “performative” practices and the “emotional” involvement they provoke.

<sup>13</sup> Deriu 2012, pp. 96-7, our transl.

<sup>14</sup> These terms are intended to emphasize that the involvement of spectators and actors does not concern the physical body perceivable through the senses and which the philosophical tradition has long conceived as distinct from the mind, but rather the body that we feel we “are” rather than “have”, a corporeity that is constitutively interrelated with the surrounding world to which it belongs. This corporeal dimension, which emerges from the distinction between *Leib* (“living body”) and *Körper* (“physical body”) introduced by Edmund Husserl, plays a role of primary importance within phenomenology and, in particular, in the thinking of Merleau-Ponty, who highlights the essentially relational character of this corporeality, which he calls the “lived” body (Merleau-Ponty 2003). The theoretical perspective to which we will refer for further investigation, however, is the approach of Hermann Schmitz, the father of the “new phenomenology”, centred on the notion of the “felt body”. This is the affective and pre-reflective dimension of the body that cannot be located in the geometric space of the physical body, but in the “lived” space that precedes and grounds the geometric space. This dimension can be experienced during involuntary experiences, in particular corresponding to affective involvements – a sudden pain, a gust of wind – which provokes the coincidence of the moments “here, now, being, this and I”, thus guaranteeing access to “primitive presence” and, with it, to one’s “absolute identity” (Schmitz 2019, p. 64).

<sup>15</sup> *Report on a Coherent EU Policy for Cultural and Creative Industries*, 2016, p. 6.

<sup>16</sup> *Council Conclusions on the Work Plan for Culture 2019-2022*, 2018, p. 18.

Culture and art are thus inherent to an ambitious project that is itself “performative”, since it is designed to produce a socio-economic transformation that will change the way of “living” and experiencing the relationship to the “other”, and will stimulate a sense of cohesion and community under the banner of dialogue and inclusiveness. A clear indication of this can be found in the very definition of “Cultural and Creative Industries” set out in the *Report on a Coherent EU Policy for Cultural and Creative Industries* (2016):<sup>17</sup>

cultural and creative industries are those industries that are based on cultural values, cultural diversity, individual and/or collective creativity, skills and talent with the potential to generate innovation, wealth and jobs through the creation of social and economic value, in particular from intellectual property; they include the following sectors relying on cultural and creative inputs: architecture, archives and libraries, artistic crafts, audio-visual production (including film, television, software and video games, and multimedia and recorded music), cultural heritage, design, creativity-driven high-end industries and fashion, festivals, live music, performing arts, books and publishing (newspapers and magazines), radio and visual arts, and advertising.<sup>18</sup>

It is noteworthy that the detailed description of the positive effects that the creative and cultural industries are deemed capable of having on the social and economic level is not accompanied by an explanation of the “generative-transformative” (hence “performative”) component that makes the CCIs capable of exerting such an impact on socio-economic reality. The absence of an explicit reference to the notion of corporeality, which seems to play a guiding role in European cultural policies, seems to preclude an awareness of certain crucial points, first and foremost the inseparable link between performativity and corporeality. We therefore propose to conduct a critical analysis of the passages in the documents relating to the cultural and creative industries – in the absence of policies focused exclusively on the performing arts – in particular those in which the terms “performing arts” and “performance” appear.

<sup>17</sup> A definition of the “cultural and creative sectors” was already provided in the regulation establishing the *Creative Europe Programme for the Years 2014-2020* (Regulation (EU) No 1295/2013 of the European Parliament and Council of 11 December 2013 Establishing the Creative Europe Programme (2014 to 2020), 2013, p. 2. Since the definition of these sectors in the *Report on a Coherent EU Policy for Cultural and Creative Industries* (2016) makes their “innovative” potential in the social and economic spheres more explicit – thus rendering the implicit recognition of their “performative” scope tangible – it has been found preferable to give greater prominence to the latter.

<sup>18</sup> *Report on a Coherent EU Policy for Cultural and Creative Industries*, 2016, p. 10.

## 2. “Performing arts”

A problematic aspect of the term “performing arts” is that it does not specify which art forms it covers, a fundamental specification which would make it possible to understand why music is listed separately from the performing arts. Moreover, while the description of the actions included in the performing arts lists theatre, there is no mention of dance. This leads one to suppose that the proposals concerning the theatre also apply to this art form, regardless of whether the potential of dance requires *ad hoc* actions. The absence of a specific reflection on the art of dance seems to be a determining factor in the failure to recognise the strength of the link between performativity and corporeity.

Another particularly problematic aspect, on which it seems appropriate to dwell, concerns the inclusion of the performing arts within the “cultural industries”. The above-mentioned *Report on a Coherent EU Policy for Cultural and Creative Industries* (2016) states:

Whilst most areas of cultural industries are an obvious pillar of the sector and as such easy to classify within it (artistic and monumental heritage, archives, libraries, books, publishing and press, visual arts, architecture, performing arts, multimedia and audio-visual services), for the creative industries that is less evident because, as a matter of fact, any innovative activity could bear a creative character and rely on creative input.<sup>19</sup>

Before analysing the place of the performing arts among the cultural industries rather than among the creative industries, a few considerations are in order. The link between creativity and innovation which, in this passage, seems to constitute the criterion for distinguishing between them at all, placing among the latter any activity generically defined as “innovative”, appears to be in contrast with the previous attribution of an innovative potential indiscriminately to all CCIs. Comparing this passage with the previous one, it appears that the distinction between these two sectors seems to be the type of “input” underpinning them: where the cultural industries are based on a “cultural” input, the “creative” industries are based on a “creative” input. However, the criterion identified here does not seem to be confirmed by the *Green Paper. Unlocking the Potential of Cultural and Creative Industries* (2010), where the meaning given to “cultural” and “creative” in the above quotation is explained:

<sup>19</sup> *Report on a Coherent EU Policy for Cultural and Creative Industries*, 2016, 22.

“Cultural industries” are those industries producing and distributing goods or services which at the time they are developed are considered to have a specific attribute, use or purpose which embodies or conveys cultural expressions, irrespective of the commercial value they may have. Besides the traditional arts sectors (performing arts, visual arts, cultural heritage – including the public sector), they include film, DVD and video, television and radio, video games, new media, music, books and press [...] “Creative industries” are those industries which use culture as an input and have a cultural dimension, although their outputs are mainly functional. They include architecture and design, which integrate creative elements into wider processes, as well as subsectors such as graphic design, fashion design or advertising.<sup>20</sup>

What differentiates the creative industries from the cultural ones is therefore not the input, which is always “cultural”, but the output, which in the case of the creative industries is “functional”; thus, the instrumental value of the creative industries emerges, their use within society for purposes other than the incorporation and transmission of cultural expression, which instead are the primary concern of the cultural industries. This has a number of important consequences with regard to both the performing arts and the notion of performativity related to them. The meaning assumed here by the term “creative”, in fact, does not account for the role played by the process of conceiving content and implementing operational strategies in applying the changes desired by cultural policies to the socio-economic sphere and which see both cultural and creative industries as the leading actors. The absence of a characterisation of creativity that distinguishes the innovative activities included among the creative industries not only fails to express the potentially underlying relationship between the creative process and innovation, but also seems to exclude CCIs from the latter category.

An analysis of the constituent features of the sectors included in the creative industries would lead one to understand that the “generative-transformative” value assigned to them essentially informs the “performing arts”, whose capacity to positively affect the socio-economic reality risks losing visibility and consistency, if one does not recognise the unavoidable innovative and transformative potential attributed to the cultural and creative industries by “performative execution”,<sup>21</sup> of which the performing arts are the emblem. To this end, a key concept that could be leveraged is that of the “embodiment” of cultural expression, which would make manifest the inescapable corporeal component without which the innovative potential usually acknowledged to both categories of CCIs could not be realised.

<sup>20</sup> *Green Paper. Unlocking the Potential of Cultural and Creative Industries*, 2010, pp. 5-6.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

Of particular relevance, in this regard, is the description that theatre theorist Erika Fischer-Lichte provides of this experience, contextually with the “aesthetic theory of performance”,<sup>22</sup> elaborated in light of the performative turn that, in the 1960s, involved the arts. In particular, Fischer-Lichte focuses on the artistic genre of “performance art” or “action art”, which arose under the influence of this pivot point. At the heart of performance art is the intention to challenge both the notion of the work of art as a codifiable artefact that can be passed on, that is always open to new interpretations and that exists independently of the artist and the spectator,<sup>23</sup> and the theatrical convention of representing imaginary characters. On the contrary, “performance art” shows are “events” that take place in a real space and time, *hic et nunc* situations in which performers appear in their “‘real’ presence”<sup>24</sup> by implementing precise staging strategies – the switching of roles, the formation of a community and the interaction between performers and spectators<sup>25</sup> – that invites spectators to participate actively in the performance. In this way, the spectacle is produced by the creation of a “self-referential and autopoietic feedback loop”<sup>26</sup> between performers and spectators, whose interaction is marked by the production of energy emanating from the performers and coincides with the production of their own phenomenal living body as an “energetic [body]”<sup>27</sup> understood as the union of mind and body or “embodied mind”.<sup>28</sup> The production of this energy involves the spectators to the point of inducing them “to bring[...] forth their body as energetic and thus generates presence, [...] appear[ing] as embodied mind”<sup>29</sup> and, at times, to experience themselves and the performers simultaneously as “an embodied mind” and perceive the energy circulating between them as the “transformative and vital energy”<sup>30</sup> to which they owe the shared overcoming of the dichotomy between mind and body.<sup>31</sup>

This phenomenon, which seems to characterise every artistic performance to varying degrees, shows how the notion of performa-

<sup>22</sup> Fischer-Lichte 2008, p. 29.

<sup>23</sup> Fischer-Lichte 2008, pp. 16-17.

<sup>24</sup> Fischer-Lichte 2008, p. 97.

<sup>25</sup> Fischer-Lichte 2008, pp. 37-67.

<sup>26</sup> Fischer-Lichte 2008, p. 39.

<sup>27</sup> Fischer-Lichte 2008, p. 98.

<sup>28</sup> Here Fischer-Lichte draws on the theses of Eugenio Barba (Barba 1985, 1991).

<sup>29</sup> Fischer-Lichte 2008, p. 98.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> It is a phenomenon of “radical” presence, characterised by the “intense” presence of performers and spectators (Fischer-Lichte 2008, p. 99). The discussion of the concept of “presence” and its relation to performativity, which we propose to explore in more detail, is left for another venue.



tivity can prompt a radical rethinking of the traditional concept of fruition. Far from being mere passive reception of what is staged, it becomes an essential element of the conditions of possibility of an artistic performance. Indeed, the degree of energy produced by the spectator not only reflects the performers' capacity to generate a "transformative" force, but also contributes strongly to the production of this force, influencing in an essential way the development of the performance. Moreover, Fischer-Lichte's reflections clearly highlight the inseparability of the performers and spectators' co-production of energy from their bodily co-presence. As will become clear later, the failure to recognise this link in policies relating to the cultural and creative industries is the aspect that most compromises the effectiveness of the actions proposed.

If the potential of the performing arts is to be fully exploited, the initial step could be to include an explicit reference to the performing arts in the document outlining the *Creative Europe 2014-2020 Programme*. These measures mainly focus on "audience development" – defined as "a planned, organisation-wide approach of extending the range and nature of the relationship with the public by focusing on their needs".<sup>32</sup> Concentrating on increasing the active participation of the public in the production of cultural and creative works – of which the public can thus become "co-producer" rather than mere "consumer" – this approach ensures that the socio-economic renewal desired by cultural organisations is actually achieved.

In this context, digital technologies play a major role, seen as a fundamental resource for the introduction of new ways of interaction between cultural organisations and their audiences, whose expansion, diversification and retention is sought. Conceived as an opportunity but also as a challenge, requiring the acquisition of new skills and knowledge, digital technologies seem to be the unifying feature between audience development and the other two objectives of cultural policies, i.e. increasing the international and transnational circulation of cultural and creative works and acquiring skills related to digitisation, new business models and education. In fact, the audio-visual transmission of cultural and creative content makes it possible to reach an increasingly wider audience also thanks to the acquisition of the above-mentioned skills, which contribute significantly to the introduction of interactive modes of relating to a diversified public.<sup>33</sup> The numerous possibilities of interaction with the public made pos-

<sup>32</sup> *Council Conclusions on Promoting Access to Culture via Digital Means with a Focus on Audience Development*, 2017, p. 4.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. *Council Conclusions on Promoting Access to Culture via Digital Means with a Focus on Audience Development*, 2017, p. 17.



sible by digital technologies appear, in European cultural policies, as an effective strategy, especially among the younger generations, to “foster their creativity and develop skills that are important for their future employability, active citizenship and social inclusion”.<sup>34</sup> The lack of a characterisation of the skills that should guarantee a positive impact on the socio-economic reality makes the very nature of this impact obscure, as it is unclear how these skills can be rendered operational. In this regard, it would be of fundamental importance to investigate, in light of the considerations on the link between performativity and fruition, the changes brought about by digital technologies in the fruition experience. This would make it possible to understand whether the outcomes intended in the socio-economic sphere can actually disregard the bodily co-presence of performers and spectators. Such an investigation could prevent us from making an unreflective use of digital technologies and misrepresenting the true needs of the public, whose expectations of art and culture have gradually changed following the spread of increasingly pervasive forms of interaction conveyed by digital technologies.

The risk – evident in the unclear use of an ambiguous lexicon<sup>35</sup> – of responding to these expectations as to those of a consumer of material goods, by adapting artistic and cultural productions to the market logic of supply and demand, seems very high, due to the lack of specific indications on how to weave together policies related to the cultural and creative industries and policies concerning the “Digital Humanities”. If, on the one hand, there is full recognition of the opportunities offered by this combination – which seems fundamental in light of the radical transformation caused by the “digital shift” in the production, distribution and access of artistic and cultural productions<sup>36</sup> – in the artistic and cultural sphere, with the introduction of “new and innovative possibilities of art and culture in terms of access, expression, preservation, dissemination and consumption”,<sup>37</sup> on the other, there does not seem to be an equally clear understanding of the precise role of digital technologies in implementing these innovative possibilities.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> The terminology chosen to refer to artistic and cultural activity – described in terms of “production” and “distribution” of “consumer” products, the degree of whose acceptance depends on the changing “tastes” (*Green Paper. Unlocking the Potential of Cultural and Creative Industries*, 2010, p. 9) of “citizens/consumers” (*Green Paper. Unlocking the Potential of Cultural and Creative Industries*, 2010, p. 18) – appears misleading and unable to account for the autonomous and independent character of this activity.

<sup>36</sup> *Council Conclusions on Promoting Access to Culture via Digital Means with a Focus on Audience Development*, 2017, p. 19.

<sup>37</sup> *Council Conclusions on Promoting Access to Culture via Digital Means with a Focus on Audience Development*, 2017, p. 13.

Clarification on this point seems particularly urgent in the context of the performing arts, for which it appears necessary to specify in which phase or phases of the artistic activity – the compositional process in the studio, the staging, the diffusion, the preservation of the performance – and to what degree the intervention of digital technologies is envisaged and can best contribute to their renewal and to the deployment of their “generative-transformative” potential. The urgency of such indications lies in the fact that, as previously pointed out, the “performative” scope of these art forms strictly depends on the bodily co-presence of spectators and performers.

### 3. “Performance”

An examination of the meanings attributed to the term “performance” – in the sense of “staging”, “execution”, correlated to the performing arts – makes it possible to identify a number of critical points, the thematisation of which helps to explain how digital technologies can be integrated with the performing arts and contribute to the enhancement of their “transformative” action.<sup>38</sup>

The document *2020 Annual Programme for the Implementation of the Creative Europe Programme* (2019) illustrates two actions specifically concerning the performing arts: the facilitation and increase of the circulation of European performing arts and the development of policies concerning the theatre sector. Regarding the former, the designation of artistic performances as “live performances” is emblematic, a specification that attests to a recognition of the inseparability of the impact of the performing arts from their “live” fruition, understood as the bodily co-presence of spectators and performers. At the heart of this action, in fact, is the intention to outline a mobility scheme for artists and to foster their mobility; there is also a desire to overcome the potential obstacles – from the language barrier, in the case of theatre, to travel costs – to their “physical” circulation beyond national and transnational borders. It should be noted that there is no mention of the use of digital technologies as a solution to overcome these obstacles, which makes it clear the desire to preserve the essentially “live” dimension of the performing arts.

<sup>38</sup> A clarification of this aspect would be fully in line with the objectives of European cultural policies, within which, in the context of the “Digital4Culture” strategy envisaged by the *Digital Europe Programme*, the adoption of interactive technologies is considered functional to the enrichment of the experience of cultural and educational content. The nature of this enrichment, however, is not made explicit; a plausible explanation for this aspect seems to come from the analysis of the project “European Theatre Lab: Drama Goes Digital”, on which we will dwell.

The relationship between digital technologies and the performing arts is implicitly referred to in the second proposed action, in which the support to the theatre sector consists of adopting the approach that characterised the “Music Moves Europe” project, based on the identification of the sector’s difficulties and the outlining of responses at European level aimed at supporting “circulation, training, professionalisation, digital theatre, data collection, education, social integration, audience development, international promotion etc”.<sup>39</sup> The concept of “digital theatre” merits special attention, as is not the subject of any explanation, elaboration or reference within the research project “European Theatre Lab: Drama Goes Digital” conducted under the guidance of the *European Theatre Convention* (ETC)<sup>40</sup> from October 2016 to June 2018. The relationship between theatre and digital technologies is indeed a central issue for the *European Theatre Convention*, whose main objective in this respect is to promote live theatre experiences as well as to initiate a reflection on the possibilities and limits of theatre.

The critical slant of this reflection is reflected in the volume *Digital Theatre. A Casebook*, documenting in detail the steps in which the above-mentioned project was articulated through the account of the experiences and suggestions provided by the representatives of the theatre sector involved. Conceived with the aim of “expand[ing] access to the arts via new technology”<sup>41</sup> i.e. to foster and support – also in economic terms<sup>42</sup> – the aims that the theatre sector sets itself by widening its range of action and its “transformative” scope, this project did not focus on overcoming the “live” dimension but, rather, on its integration with new technologies – installations, virtual and augmented reality, audio technology, video mapping and 3D sounds. In this way, the project allows us to experiment with the ways in which these “interfaces” contribute to creating the theatre

<sup>39</sup> 2020 *Annual Programme for the Implementation of the Creative Europe Programme*, 2019, p. 15.

<sup>40</sup> It is the largest network of public theatres founded in 1988, with more than forty European members from over twenty countries, having the aim of promoting European theatre as a “vital platform for dialogue, democracy and interaction that responds to, reflects and engages with today’s diverse audiences and changing societies” (*Press Release “Sectorial Support for Theatre Included in the Creative Europe Work Programme 2020”*, 2020).

<sup>41</sup> Pfaud & Dusol & Wiley 2018, p. 5.

<sup>42</sup> In the introductory pages, it is stated that digital can constitute “a great medium for low-cost experimentation” (Pfaud & Dusol & Wiley 2018, p. 13). This assertion is contradicted in the concluding remarks, where the tendency to underestimate the expected costs of projects like this and the technical support required is highlighted. As will emerge later, the costs required by new technologies should be considered more carefully from the perspective not only of those responsible for artistic and cultural productions but also of the public.

space, to interacting in new ways with the audience and realising “screened performances”, in which other performers than those on stage are in different physical/virtual locations.

#### 4. “Liveliness” and Digital Technologies

Although these technologies have been introduced into performances that almost entirely involve the bodily co-presence of performers and spectators, it is appropriate to question the nature of the “live” experience they propose; the twentieth-century debate on the concept of “liveliness” has highlighted some significant aspects in this regard. The decisive element here is the radical questioning of the ontological difference between “live” performance and “mediatised” performance carried out by the scholar Philip Auslander in *Liveliness. Performance in a Mediatized Culture* (1999). According to Auslander, the notion of “liveliness” was born as a consequence of the development of recording technologies, which caused a different perception of existing performances and led viewers to mark them as “live” performances.<sup>43</sup> The influence of the increasingly pervasive technological mediatization of social and cultural communication has made artistic performances completely “mediatised”, not only because of the introduction of specific technological devices<sup>44</sup> but also because their realisation is conceived with a view to their media reproduction. While Peggy Phelan rejects this thesis, identifying in the theatrical performance an essentially eventual character that makes it refractory to any media reproduction (Phelan 1993), Fischer-Lichte agrees with Auslander on the genesis of the concept of “liveliness”. Nevertheless, Fischer-Lichte points out that the introduction on the stage of the technologies mentioned by Auslander not only does not deny but presupposes the bodily co-presence of performers and spectators; moreover, in her opinion, there is no way to prove that performances are realised according to the model of the “mediatised” spectacle. While acknowledging that theatrical performances often engage in dialogue with mediatization – alternating between a critical and a more “playful” attitude over the years – Fischer-Lichte

<sup>43</sup> To confirm this, Auslander notes that the term “live” in reference to performances and shows only appears in the *Oxford English Dictionary* from 1934, in relation to radio broadcasts.

<sup>44</sup> From electric voice amplification, sound and lighting effects to mega-screens that show spectators in the far rows a close-up image of singers or actors, and “instant replays” that allow spectators at sporting events to see the best action on the pitch over again in close-up.

seems to reject the idea that the use of technological media on stage denies the “live” experience, preserved by the subsistence of the bodily co-presence between performers and spectators. This position appears to be the most convincing, provided it is accompanied by the awareness that it is appropriate to investigate, from time to time, how the “mediatisation” of the interaction between spectators and performers affects the co-production of the “organic and energetic living body”.<sup>45</sup>

This is precisely the aspect that would require further investigation within European cultural policies, for which the reflections contained in the book *Digital Theatre. A Casebook*. In this text, in fact, the enrichment brought by digital technologies to the fruition experience seems to reside in the introduction – both in the composition phase and in the staging – of tools that, instead of putting an end to the bodily co-presence between spectators and actors, solicit at a “proprioceptive” level, a diversified experience that needs to be further investigated.<sup>46</sup>

<sup>45</sup> An effective rendering of the “liveliness” that characterises contemporary performances is proposed by Fabrizio Deriu, who suggests designating the performing arts as “dynamic arts” and referring to performance with the term “performático”. In the expression “dynamic arts” – coined by Carlo Sini (2004) to refer to the imitative arts of ancient Greece (dance, music and poetry) – Deriu sees the rehabilitation of the “oral” dimension and the “formative” value that originally characterised the arts. In order to highlight the essentially corporeal nature of the system of learning, storage and transmission of knowledge constituted by these arts, Deriu places the term “dynamic arts” alongside the term “performático” introduced into the vocabulary of performance studies by Diana Taylor (Taylor 2003) to highlight the non-propositional character of the performing arts (cf. Deriu 2012, pp. 151-9).

<sup>46</sup> One would most likely perceive an alteration of the theatrical space, as in the case of screened performances, where, since only some of the performers are virtually present, bodily co-presence seems to be preserved. A particularly relevant field of investigation would be exactly the impact of the interaction modalities introduced by digital technologies on the “lived body”, which could be experienced in a new way. In particular, it would be interesting to analyse which “felt-bodily” reactions would arise in cases of direct interaction with technological devices; one could think of the eventuality in which the spectators would be asked to enter the stage space and determine themselves the functioning of the technologies present there, thus making themselves responsible for a remodulation of the relationship with the performers and the other spectators. It would also be necessary to consider the hypothesis that the increasing solicitation of “mediatised” forms of interaction between spectators and performers may accentuate the sense of unease on the part of spectators who do not wish to be involved. It would therefore be significant to investigate how this sense of unease and, in general, of refusal of a “mediatised” interaction, manifests itself in the “felt body” of those who experience it. An interpretative tool that would allow to effectively account for the “affective” involvement of spectators and performers during these “mediatised” performances is constituted by the notion of “felt-bodily resonance” elaborated by Tonino Griffero, within the “atmospheric” theory he inaugurated (Griffero 2010, 2013, 2014a 2014b, 2017, 2020). The recourse to this notion – based on Schmitz’ category of “felt-bodily communication” – would make it possible to identify, in the interaction between spectators and performers, the emergence of this type of communication from the generation of “atmospheric” feelings for which the “felt body” of the performers and spectators acts as a sounding board.

The reason why digital technologies seem to blend well with the theatrical experience resides in the fact that, in the performances realised within this project, they are considered tools and not ends. The contribution of digital technologies to theatre – evident in the introduction of new forms of interaction with the audience, in the incorporation of narratives drawn, for example, from the structures of video games, and in the realisation of international cooperation – is precisely the theatre’s ability to turn the potential of digital technologies to its advantage. The effectiveness of this approach derives from the assumption of a specific stance towards digital technologies, which emerges in particular from the reflections of Amund Ulvestad, a Norwegian multimedia artist, musician and composer, according to whom the advent of the new technologies is comparable to the invention of the wheel, in that it constitutes, like the wheel, the emblem of the needs of a society in constant evolution, at the same time allowing for the potential uses that may be discovered in the future. So, it is not just the novelty of digital technologies that attracts artists; to take full advantage of them, it is essential to be familiar with them to the point where they are no longer considered “new”. The artists’ exploration of the potential of digital technologies must focus precisely on their ability to make the “technologies” that characterise human history into useful tools for their own purposes, that is, to make them “any sort of tool or machine that would have potential in an artistic context”.<sup>47</sup>

The maintenance, in the performances that took place within the project “European Theatre Lab: Drama Goes Digital”, of the bodily co-presence of spectators and performers, which constitutes the condition of possibility to increase the active participation of the spectator through the establishment of new forms of interaction, is an invitation to imagine the awareness of the inseparability of the effectiveness of the performance from such co-presence. This aspect is effectively highlighted by the manifesto *Power of the Performing Arts in Europe* (2019) produced by the “International network for contemporary performing arts” (IETM) and endorsed by the associations: “Circostrada. European Network Circus and Street Arts”, “IN SITU”, “European Dancehouse Network” (EDN) and the

<sup>47</sup> Pfaud & Dusol & Wiley 2018, p. 77. In this regard, it seems appropriate to refer to a consideration in the last pages of “Digital theatre. A casebook”, attributed to the scholar Joris Weijdom: “Audiences should leave talking about the story, not the technology employed in telling it. Make the story interesting enough that they are still thinking about it a week later” (Pfaud & Dusol & Wiley 2018, p. 87). It is suggested that this statement should be considered as a guideline within European cultural policies as it undermines the tendency to consider the use of technology as an end in itself and emphasizes its instrumental value.

“European Theatre Convention” (ETC). In this document, there is not only a list of performing arts – rarely found in documents on CCIs<sup>48</sup> – but also special emphasis on the experiential dimension:

The performing art form [...] confronts people with unexpected messages, non-mediated und unframed, and invites the spectator to a unique physical proximity; the performing arts trigger [...] the ability to “identify with the “other”, to empathise with the character of the body on the stage, all the more when the spectator turns into an active participant of the performance, which is a vital practice of immersive and participatory theatre [...] performing arts have an inherent power to promote humanitarian values. They enable citizens to break out the increasingly predominant simplistic us-against-them discourse and develop the free forms of accepting and understanding of different points of view which are essential for a healthy democracy. Today, in these digital times, when the access to information is easy and the patterns of comprehending reality are being simplified, the performing arts remain one of the few mediums of critical thought on the complexity of the environment we are living in.<sup>49</sup>

The capacity attributed here to the performing arts to account for the complexity of reality, rehabilitating it from the operation of excessive simplification caused by the immediate access to information guaranteed by digital technologies, appears to be closely linked to the possibility of directly experiencing, in all its nuances, the encounter, acceptance and understanding of otherness offered by the physical proximity between spectators and performers. This experience seems to coincide with the occurrence, during the “energetic” interaction by Fischer-Lichte, of simultaneously overcoming of the dichotomy between mind and body and between the self and the “other”. In making oneself co-responsible for the common “performative” production of the “living organic energetic body” of the other, in fact, not only does one experience a unique and unrepeatable sense of cohesion but, welcoming the transformation that he or she operates in me, forms the basis for the development of what Christoph Wulf designates as “the ability to make the other the starting point of our thinking, that is [...] to learn to think heterologically”.<sup>50</sup> In this way, the link between performativity and community emerges, as the warp on which European policies are woven and whose enhancement could have significant effects. These crucial aspects are not mentioned in the *Creative Europe 2021 Programme* – which, however, reports the IETM’s calls for recognition of the crucial role of the performing arts in fostering dialogue be-

<sup>48</sup> “Types of performing arts are theatre, dance, opera, performance art, live music, magic, illusion, mime, spoken word, storytelling, puppetry, circus arts, streets arts” (*Power of the Performing Arts in Europe*, 2019). Note that in this list – unlike in European policies – live music is included in the performing arts.

<sup>49</sup> *Power of the Performing Arts in Europe*, 2019.

<sup>50</sup> Wulf 2018, p. 239, our transl.



tween different identities, mentalities and realities and highlights the precarious state in which artists find themselves, and the need to give culture and the arts the same importance as, for example, scientific research, education, climate action and the environment.

Complementary to the above-mentioned manifesto is the document *On the European Stage 2019-2024. Priorities for the Live Performance Sector* (2019) signed by the Pearle\* association, which consists of fifty European and non-European organisations related to the live performance sector. The document makes it clear that the creative potential exploited by live performance organisations lies in the production of “breath-taking and exciting live experiences”<sup>51</sup> and emblematically states that live performance experiences “are in great demand by audiences, not least by the young generations who grew up with social media and digital communication”.<sup>52</sup> An aspect that is usually ignored, yet full of meaning, thus clearly emerges, namely the fact that, precisely because of the increasingly pervasive intervention of digital technologies in communication, the need for “live” experiences – in the sense of experiences based on the bodily co-presence of spectators and performers – seems to be intensifying more than ever, as if to compensate for an “experiential gap” that the younger generations in particular are suffering from.

An in-depth reflection on the relationship between performing arts, digital technologies and new generations would be particularly significant in light of the intention expressed in the *Horizon Europe Work Programme 2021-2022, 5. Culture, Creativity and Inclusive Society* (2021) to bring about a “digital transformation” of cultural heritage, i.e. to ensure the preservation, safeguard and broad access to cultural heritage and the arts through the implementation of the use of existing cutting-edge technologies such as virtual and augmented reality or artificial intelligence. In this way, it will be possible to provide cultural and creative industries, which have been severely affected by the pandemic caused by the spread of the COVID-19 virus, with socio-economic sustainability and, in general, “sustainable applications and solutions to strengthen their innovative potential as well as manage future crises”.<sup>53</sup> The aim of “facilitating and widening access to cultural assets through digital and cutting-edge technologies and tools, in parallel or as an alternative to physical access to cultural heritage”,<sup>54</sup> in fact, strictly depends on

<sup>51</sup> *On the European Stage 2019-2024. Priorities for the Live Performance Sector*, 2019.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>53</sup> *Horizon Europe Work Programme 2021-2022, 5. Culture, Creativity and Inclusive Society*, 2021, p. 48.

<sup>54</sup> *Horizon Europe Work Programme 2021-2022, 5. Culture, Creativity and Inclusive Society*, 2021, p. 46.

the full manifestation of the resources of digital technologies following the massive recourse to them – 3D/4D simulations, virtual and augmented reality technologies – by arts and cultural organisations during the quarantine period.

However, while there is no doubt about the contribution of digital technologies<sup>55</sup> to the preservation and large-scale distribution of artistic and performing arts content, there seems to be a strong potential risk in making digital fruition an alternative to physical access to culture and art. Not only would this accentuate the inequality between those who have the means to access the services offered by digital technologies – thus violating the universal character of culture and art – but it would also preclude the “felt-bodily” experience of “performative” production of a constitutively relational corporeity, which is the sole source of that sense of cohesion without which a community “united in diversity” could not be formed.

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<sup>55</sup> One need only think of the significant positive impact on the environment caused by the absence of travel by the artists, as well as the reduction of the related costs, which were one of the factors hindering the mobility of artistic performances.

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