

**Riku Roihankorpi**, PhD, The University of Tampere (Finland)

Member of the Advisory Board

Leader of the Centre for Practice as Research in Theatre T7

Senior Lecturer in Theatre and Drama Research and Media Culture

Dear Donatella - the chief editor - and all editors of the *Arti dello Spettacolo / Performing Arts* journal, Dear advisory and editorial board, Dear colleagues in Rome and worldwide,

As the leader of the Centre for Practice as Research in Theatre T7, and therefore on behalf of our centre, it is a great privilege for me to be virtually present at the launch of the *Arti dello Spettacolo* journal and the international collaboration its ethos rests upon. This initiative to preserve, analyse, translate and relive the often unattainable cultural heritage of the performing arts, serves to define, encourage and develop the fields and the processes of research treasured by those who see performance as a living engine of the future and the past of human culture. It goes hand in hand with our understanding of performance as a means of societal influence, a preserver of cultural employment and a site of artistic, material and technical change.

As an example of these changes, the use of new and untapped Digital Humanities methods has encouraged us to study the history of performative subjectivity in many unforeseen ways, all the way to the present and beyond. Working with 3D real time Performance Capture (PeCap) technology, for example, now allows us to replicate performances in bygone theatre venues, to navigate and transform human interactions and material conditions no longer available to us. It enables simultaneous virtual, intermedial and physical performances of past productions by performing arts professionals and students in a PeCap studio environment, as well as spherical (360-degree) recordings of the performance data.

These kinds of recent advances in embodied digital technologies have provided humanities disciplines with radical ways to expand the range of research questions that they can examine. In theatre and performance research, they now allow us to relive and hypothesise with histories and

material situations that are beyond our reach, and to assess the conditions of our current and future lifeworld on the basis of this. We may use the practices and material affordances of historical performances as a means to scrutinise and reinvent embodied experiences of modern subjectivity from contemporary and future perspectives.

We can reconstruct historical performances in real time, and with practically unlimited ways to create, define and validate the meanings implicit in past practices and artefacts. This strategy surpasses the earlier methods of analysing forms of performative media that offer no first hand experience of historically relevant embodied data. It enables immediate study of multiple and contradictory paths of action, and therefore demonstrates the different uses and potential misuses of historical data – the problems pertinent to transnational dynamics of memory and the role of culture as a global influence.

Theatrical texts, performances and production processes not only reflect the identity politics of a certain era, but also pass their cultural and embodied premises on to future performances by means of *intermediality* and virtual ways of *identification* specific to each performance. The *subjectivities* implicit in these performances change throughout the ages and articulate different notions of realism and gestural politics. Current technologies and the research that wishes to make the intangible cultural heritage tangible once again, now allow us to examine how this identification takes place under different political and cultural circumstances, and how the process affects our present or future understanding of ourselves.

Therefore, reliving the embodied evolution of modern subjectivity is essential to any attempt to understand our current ways of producing the largely digital lifeworld and knowledge society. The freedom promoted by the interchangeability of norms has become a central component of digital subjectivities, which identify themselves with pervasive, constantly transforming but still situational *agencies* that are thoroughly performative. As national and political shifts affect these processes, they need to be construed with a transnational alliance of experts representing diverse cultural premises - such as the one present today.

Philosopher Emmanuel Levinas states that:

[a]n abandoned temple is still inhabited by its god, an old house falling into disrepair is still haunted by the ghosts of those who lived there, but an empty theater is terribly deserted. We can still sense the presence of Sara Bernhardt or Coquelin who acted in it, but Phaedra or Cyrano de Bergerac have left nothing of their despair or their sorrow. They have dissipated like pale clouds intermingling, affected by that nothingness which constitutes the essential atmosphere of a theater after a performance.

With the launch of this new journal, and with the international collaboration that understands art as a language that crosses the boundaries between nations, cultural preferences, as well as the digital-analogue or the virtual-real divide, we may say that the nothingness occupying a theater after a performance is there only to be filled with its cultural influence and its heritage that upholds our understanding of who we are and where we come from.

So I thank you for your trust, for this opportunity to sail the ship of arts in international waters with you, and most of all, thank you for making this significant effort of sharing knowledge on the cultures of performance with so many of us.