

**Masking in Contemporary Theater:
A recontextualization of the operation of masking within the frame of postdramatic
theater, dramaturgy and contemporary debate in theater studies.**

Tomás Montes Massa
Student Number: 6116752
MA: Contemporary Theater,
Dance & Dramaturgy.
Thesis Advisor: Dr. Sigrid Merx
Second Reader: Dr. Liesbeth Groot Nibbelink
University of Utrecht
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Abstract

The present research strives for a recontextualization of the operation of masking within the frame of postdramatic theater practice and academic debate, with a special eye for how the dramaturgical functions of masking have been rearranged in the contemporary stage that is no longer structured under the hierarchy of dramatic text. The first chapter maps the role of masking within XXth century theater studies and a range of acting techniques, then to present postdramatic theater as the overall context of this research. The second chapter elaborates on how dramaturgy will function as an analytical apparatus to comprehend the functions masking can perform in contemporary staging. It also presents an interdisciplinary conceptual framework to relate masking to topics such as intentionality in human-technology relations, embodiment, self-staging practices and social interaction. The third chapter consists of the dramaturgical analysis of four performances in order to test this interdisciplinary and recontextualised analytical apparatus around masking in postdramatic theater. The cases of study are *Bimbo* (Boogaerdt & van der Schoot, 2012), *Vortex* (Menard, 2011), *Pandora's Dropbox* (Heitmann, 2017) and *Remote Santiago* (Rimini Protokoll, 2015). One relevant conclusion deals with how exhaustion (including its physical, material and ideological meanings) and masking meet in postdramatic stagings. Other conclusion presents future opportunities for theater studies in which a recontextualised lecture of masking can allow for further interdisciplinary collaborations.

Chapter I. (Re)Contextualizing Masking in Theater Studies and Practice.

Introduction: multiple functions of masking.

The roots of the word mask are various and uncertain. The ancient Hebrew term Masekha meant 'veil'. In ancient Greek, the word *máskā* (μάσκα) meant both 'mask' and 'person'. In Latin, *masca* designated 'witch', 'specter' and 'nightmare', whereas in ancient Arabic *maskahrah* signaled 'buffoon' and 'mockery' (Online Etymology Dictionary, 2018). In middle French (16c.), *masque* is a covering to hide or guard the face. According to the Oxford Living Dictionaries (2018), the noun has various meanings: firstly, a covering for all or part of the face, worn as a disguise, with the purpose to amuse or frighten others. Another definition refers to a covering, fitting over mouth and nose, to prevent the inhalation of air pollutants or contamination of the patient (i.e. in surgery). Similarly, mask also designates protective coverings in sports, such as fencing and ice hockey. A third meaning for the word is given in the field of photography and optics, where the mask is a piece of material (such as a card) used to cover a part of an image that is not required when exposing a print. Finally, mask is also a term in electronics, namely a patterned metal film used in the manufacture of microcircuits to allow selective modification of the underlying material. Consequently, if one searches for 'mask', 'masking' or 'mask performance' in Google Scholar, many first-result articles deal with technological advances in microscope-design and optics, digital imagery systems, medical technology, nursing equipment, plastic surgery, software design, even cognitive psychology. Against what could be common sense, mask is a term used far beyond the theater and is present heterogenous specter of fields, mostly defined by the *function it performs*: to conceal, disguise, scare, amuse, protect, to prevent contamination, to select, to contain, to mold. What is at stake in this thesis is how masks *operate*.

Dramatic Theater: Mask as Characterization

Masks have been present throughout theatrical history. In the tradition of dramatic theater, masks function importantly in terms of *representation*. A masked actor within Aristotelian theater necessarily implies a *character*, a figure that plays a role within the structure of the plot, the ascension of conflict and the unfolding of the storyline. The mask is a convention for the fictional, a sign of what the 'real' performer *is not* but rather of what he *impersonates*. In terms of dramatic acting technique, a masked actor should create a congruent whole, where the process of *characterization* implies the *unification* of vocal gesture, bodily architecture and sequence of action and stands for a verosimil and recognizable character. In his world-

famous title *Building a Character* (2013, 24) Konstantin Stanislavski states that "characterization is the mask that hides the actor-individual. Protected by it he can lay his bare soul down to the last intimate detail." The Russian director, founder of realist method-acting, relates mask to its already mentioned functions of *hiding* and *protecting* the 'soul of the individual'. If the actor is successful, the audience accepts this performative construction *as if* it were real, granting the performer with the blessing of illusion. This is the *dramatic function of masking*.



Fig. 1: The Royal Shakespeare Company, (1959) *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Oberon and Titania quarrel, Act 2 Scene 1. Source: <https://www.rsc.org.uk/a-midsummer-nights-dream/past-productions/productions-1920---2008>

XXth Century: Autonomization, Decomposition, Retheatricalization

During the twentieth century, theater as an artform grew increasingly independent from the hierarchy of the dramatic text as its hegemonic structuring element of the stage. In his groundbreaking title "Postdramatic Theater" (2006), Hans-Thies Lehmann describes the

process of autonomization of theater from Aristotelian drama as a fruitful age of experimentation (50). This retheatricalization of theater had both to do with the overall art revolution context of the avant-garde period, as well as with the emergence of film and the dawn of mass-media culture. The author suggests that, just as it occurred to painting with the apparition of photography, theater as the old medium found the necessity to reinvent itself by becoming self-reflective, where the decomposition of the whole of the genre developed an accelerated search for new languages of form that rose from the separation of the components of the stage (51). Body, movement, light, sound, image, objects, space, architecture, text, time: all became available elements of theater that could be rethought and experimented with, given the sudden freedom from dramatic structure. With the acceleration of technology and mass-media culture during the XXth century, technological devices and screens started entering the stage, responding to the cultural shift from a previously text-based culture to a new media age of image and sound.

The exploration of new theatrical possibilities also reinforced the practice of dramaturgy and expanded the horizon of theater studies. How to alter and understand space? Image? Sound? How to tell a visual story? How to use the body? Do we want to create an illusion for the spectator? Mobilize it? Disturb it? Please it? How to redefine spectatorship? All these new, exciting questions and possibilities rose importantly during the XXth century, more or less simultaneously in academy as on stage. What is then, the role of masking within a postdramatic context of theatrical practice and theory? Has the mask been part of this retheatricalization of theater, of its autonomization from drama? What happened to the mask during the twentieth century? Can the theatrical mask be autonomous of its dramatic function? Has anyone already written about masks in postdramatic theater? If so, why would that be relevant? This initial pool of inquiries are a strong drive for this research. Plenty of theatrical elements have been recontextualised, updated and rethought within a postdramatic and contemporary thinking environment. Has that occurred yet with masks?

Research Question

How to re-contextualize the operation of masking, in terms of its dramaturgical functions, within the frame of postdramatic theater and contemporary debate of theater studies?

This is the question that drives the present research. To further unpack this leading question, I hereby offer a branch of sub-questions that will hopefully shed a light on the *analytical approach* necessary for the updating of masking framed in a postdramatic context of theater practice and academic discussion:

- a. How can masking be understood from the post phenomenological debate on human-technological interactions? How is masking a negotiation of human and object *intentionality*?
- b. How does the mask *function* on the performing *body*? How does the operation of masking relate to the *economy of energy and movement*?
- c. How does masking operate as a *social function*? What are the implications of masking in a *mediatized* and *self-staging* society?

Research Stages

In order to answer these questions, several steps must be taken. I will commence by mapping the historical development of masking as a subject within theater studies and also in acting technique during the twentieth century, in order to collect and diagnose a possible "state of the art of masking". In chapter two, I will dive into the characteristics of the postdramatic context of theater that the contemporary field is walking through, postdramatic theater as both a theoretical and practical context, a highly mediatized material and conceptual environment in which theater is coming into existence today. Then, I will suggest dramaturgy as an analytical lens with which masking in postdramatic theater will be approached. After that, I will display a flexible and interdisciplinary conceptual framework that will hopefully allow for a recontextualization of the functions of masking within postdramatic theater and contemporary theater studies debates. At the end of chapter two, the performances (case studies) will be presented, hopefully a heterogeneous universe of art pieces that mingle with different subjects and staging strategies. Chapter three will be the dramaturgical and contextual analysis in which all this previously constructed conceptual apparatus will be tested, to see how this research allows (or does not) for a recontextualization of the dramaturgy of masking within a postdramatic scenario.

Masks in 20th century theater studies

During the twentieth century, period in which the art of theater gained autonomy from dramatic literature in western tradition, masking appeared as an object of research in theatrical studies, mostly addressed in terms of dramatic representation, as done by Konstantin Stanislavski. However, groundbreaking writers such as Artaud, Brecht and Barthes manifested great interest in certain *effects* produced by masking within various genres of Asian theater. For the first time in theater studies, the dramaturgical implications of masking were topic of discussion: *the mask as a theatrical tool or strategy which was not*

intrinsically united to characterization. Below a comparative overview of their approaches to the subject. For instance, Antonin Artaud was excited by Indonesian Wayang Theater, a hybrid and rich ceremonial performance, developed in Java and the Indonesian archipelago with at least a millenium of history (Schechner, 1990). Wayang is primarily structured by shadow-puppetry, from which subgenres branched, such as Wayang Gedog (what Artaud calls generically "Balinese Theater", because Gedog developed importantly on the island of Bali), a type of practice within Wayang in which the performers wear masks in order to "puppetize themselves", namely with their masking and physicality imitate the aesthetics of the two-dimensional Wayang Kulit shadow-puppet. In western culture, the puppet imitates the human, whereas in Asian theater it is the opposite. Artaud contrasts this theatrical genre against European bourgeois, realist drama (which he despises), in order to portray an example of his theater of cruelty that enhances the "metaphysical character" of the stage. Artaud comments the Balinese Wayang mask: "The strange thing is that in this systematic depersonalization, in these purely muscular facial expressions, applied to the featured masks, everything produces a significance, everything affords the maximum effect" (1958, 58). Artaud sees the mask as a means of *intensification*: of movement, gesture, emotion, signification; but also an intensification of the rituality and enhanced sensible experience of the theater he dreamed of. Artaud never created the theater of cruelty he argued for, but only found it in non-European forms of theater and ritual in, amongst others, Indonesia.



Fig. 2: Anonymous, *Wayang Gedog*. Balinese masked performer plays a demon from overseas in *The Wedding of Irawana*. Image taken from (June, 2018): <http://shadowtheatre-ika.blogspot.com/2010/08/wayang-topeng-or-wayang-gedog-or-wayang.html>

In addition, Bertolt Brecht studied Peking Opera fascinated by the alienation techniques that he observed in the actors. During the Communist Revolution and rising to power in 1949, the state incorporated the tradition of Peking Opera into a political and ideological machinery as a strategy of cultural domination, all of which Brecht (a professed communist himself) was very excited about. He states that the Chinese performer, comparable to an acrobat, is aware of the gaze of the audience, accuses the attention and acts towards the audience. Thus, *frontality* and *visibility* are rules for Chinese acting. Brecht is of course arguing against the fourth-wall constructed, Aristotelian theater of his time. He describes the choreography of a masked performer within the sequence of a fictional scene where a storm is entering: the actor looks at the dark cloud, comments with the audience, looks at his torso and limbs, and starts to shiver. According to Brecht, to look at himself is for the performer an artful and artistic act of self-estrangement (1961, 131), because the actor does not seek to act as if the audience were not there. On the contrary, the performer acknowledges the artifice of the stage and guides the narration with the directions of his gaze. Here, Brecht exposes how the *directionality of masking* has dramaturgical implications, which in this case is an effect of estrangement, what the German director was searching for.



Fig. 3: *China National Peking Opera Company* (2015), "Farewell to my Concubine". Zhu Hong plays Yu Ji and Liu Kuikui plays Emperor Xiang Yu. Image taken from (June 2018):

<https://bachtrack.com/review-farewell-my-concubine-china-national-peking-opera-sadlers-wells-november-2015>.

In his article 'The Written Face' (1971), Roland Barthes discusses the semiotics of masks in Japanese Noh, Kabuki and Bunraku theater. The author starts from the observation that in Japanese tradition the pictorial is subjugated by the act of writing, so that painting is always "only writing" (80-82). The theatrical face holds resemblance with the white of a blank paper and the black of ink. Therefore, he understands the face in these traditions of theater "only as a place to be written on, an empty expanse of dull material: flour, paint, dough, plaster" (idem). Barthes reminds us that traditionally, women characters in these forms of Japanese theater are played by men, but the transvestite actor does not seek to represent the woman (as in western transvestites), but 'the man is simply absented'. He is interested in how the face *says nothing*, producing two contradictory movements: immobility and fragility/emotionality. Barthes is ultimately interested in how the operation of masking within Japanese theater *does not signify anything else than openness, the potentiality of an empty canvas*. This understanding of masking is quite contrary to that of dramatic western tradition, where masking is precisely a strategy of characterization. The attributions to masking of as a

blank, meaningless surface are also found in theory about the neutral mask in western acting tradition.



Fig. 4: Core of Culture Dance Preservation, *Shura Mono - Noh*. Contemporary Noh Warrior play. Taken from (June 2018): <http://www.coreofculture.org/noh.html>

Masks in 20th Century Physical Acting

The 20th century also held a boom of exploration within the techniques and poetics of acting. Starting from Stanislavski and through the first avant-garde period in Europe, the increasing autonomization of theater from drama made acting investigation a necessity, and several theater practitioners developed specific actor-training methods that regarded the mask as a key element. As already introduced, Hans-Thies Lehmann observed the formation of postdramatic discourse as a series of stages of self-reflection, decomposition and separation of the components of theater (2006, 49). Dramatic tradition may have reached its peak at the end of the XIXth century (Ibsen, Chekhov, Stanislavski, etc), whereas then the two avant-garde periods (first until the thirties, second in the 50`s and 60`s) were tremendously productive in terms of artistic experimentation. Particular masters of physical theater, certainly masters of theatrical art, investigated deep into the possibilities of theatrical masking, also beyond its dramatic function of characterization. I speak of such as Vsevolod

Meyerhold, Etienne Decroux, Jacques Copeau, Marcel Marceau, Jacques Lecoq, Amadeo Sartori, Antonio Fava, Dario Fo, Jerzy Grotowski, Eugenio Barba, Peter Brook and Ariane Mnouchkine, amongst others. I will draft their valuable contributions to the functions of masking, in order to portray an accurate state of the art in our 21st century.

In 1913 Vsevolod Meyerhold wrote 'The Fairground Booth', in which he already addressed the mask in an expanded sense: "a mask is not necessarily made of paper, wood or leather and worn over the face by an actor... Masks can be created by make-up, hairstyle, facial expression, or by any technique that defines a character in terms of its *external characteristics*" (2004, 58). Although Meyerhold is here addressing the character, masking means for him an *external function of image-sending*. Masking as an operation is not reducible to the object of mask itself. He also noticed how a mask demands its actor for precise and enhanced use of gesture and movement, the same physical intensification identified by Artaud in Wayang Gedog. Finally, Meyerhold noticed the mask as a *distance* between the actor and the spectator, distance in which Brecht was likewise interested. These attributes of masking were still married to the paradigm of dramatic representation, but were initial tracings of certain contemporary functions of masking.

Within the historical trend of pantomime, masks have been a matter of great discussion, where certain authors disagree openly on the objectives that masking fulfills. Initially, Etienne Decroux developed his corporeal mime method in which the performer was to cover his or her face with a white cloth, *eradicating the features of human face*, a "denial of characterization, set and plot, the abandonment of human narrative... the actor concealed within a body-mask and operated like a clockwork toy" (2008, 22-23). Decroux strived for a bodily stagework in which the actor-dancer was reduced to an abstract moving system of lines, shapes and colours, and his idea of mask was committed to this purpose. Jacques Copeau, who collaborated with Decroux, designed the traditional neutral mask of western pantomime. Copeau -actor, director, scenographer and pedagog- was also in 1st World War Paris looking for a "naked and neutral stage... where the actor must be stripped as the space" (1978, 20). As Barthes sought in Japanese Noh, the neutral mask favors an emptiness of signification, an abstraction of the human body, an enhancement of its geometrical architecture and choreography.

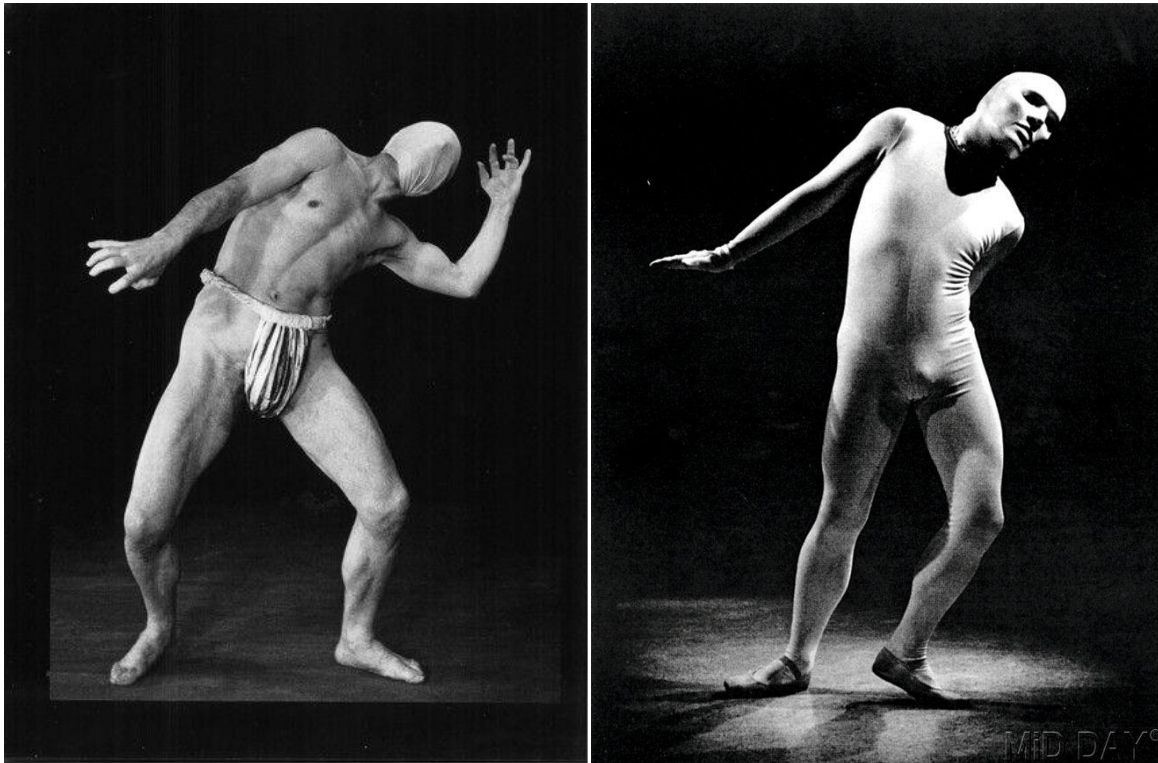


Fig. 5 & 6: Thomas Leabhart (2016) *Corporeal Mime*. Exercises after Etienne Decroux's acting method. Leabhart was a former student of Decroux. Image taken from (June, 2018):

<http://pasdedieux.com/portfolio/thomas-leabhart/>

Quite on the contrary, Decroux's disciple Marcel Marceau disagreed with the neutrality and abstraction of his masters' corporeal mime, and sought for a new pantomime where the expressivity, emotion and illusion were central components of the stage. The miming body works to depict a physical and internal universe of the character, without speech or other objects, generally under a spotlight on a bare stage. If Decroux wanted to erase the human face, Marceau drew its features heavily, underlining it with makeup. In a sense, Marceau stood for the dramatic paradigm of theater, staging pantomime narratives that still drew upon principles such as character, plot and unfolding action. However, Marceau's mime was speechless, characterized by the absence dramatic dialogue, favoring a *corporeal construction of a visual dramaturgy*. He took elements from French tragicomical Pierrot to construct the mask of Bip the Clown, his world-famous character. Overall, the dramaturgical function of masking within Marceau's work is to favor an expressive, three-dimensional character construction, who is the center of the theatrical event. However, his aesthetics of pantomime were tremendously popular and successful, renewing the image of mime and informing it until today. A contribution of Marceau to the function of masking is that of remembering and recontextualizing the *intensity of emotion* and *playfulness* of the mask,

which were very characteristic features of Italian Commedia dell'Arte, functions of masking that are still present in the theater.



Fig. 7: Marcel Marceau, *The Mask-Maker*, where Marceau impersonated his character "Bip the Clown". Image taken from (June 2018) <https://famousclowns.org/famous-clowns/>

The tradition of Commedia dell'Arte, genre born in the 16th century Italy from where it expanded towards Europe, was revived in the 20th century mostly by three figures: Amleto Sartori (mask-maker), Dario Fo (performer, director, writer) and Antonio Fava (performer, director, scholar, mask-maker). One of the principles of Commedia mask acting is, as phrased by Rudlin, "just as in carpentry, let the tool do the work. The same goes for mask acting" (2002, 40). Concerning the mask as a tool, Dario Fo describes what a mask does to an unprepared actor: "the mask can induce anxiety to the actor because it restricts the visual and acoustic-vocal range. Your own voice seems to be singing at you, stunning you and until you master it, you cannot control your breathing". Commedia dell'Arte is a genre that has largely informed the extreme physicality of the masked actor in western theater, where the archetypal character engraved in the tragicomic masks informed the actor on the qualities of movement, gesture and sound. Antonio Fava is a strict formalist in terms of character construction, attaining to the aesthetic forms of medieval Italy, whereas Dario Fo argues for a personal investigation process of the actor, who must find the instinctive features of the archetypal character (i.g. Arlecchino or Pantalone) within him or herself. Anyhow, both put an emphasis on the *rigorous corporeal technique* as the only means to *embody* the mask, which then function on the masked performer intensifying movement and sharpening gesture.



Fig. 8: Dario Fo, (2005) *Arlecchino*. Mask by Amleto Sartori (left). Image from (June 2018)

<http://www.artribune.com/arti-performative/teatro-danza/2015/04/scambi-di-scena-le-maschere-della-famiglia-sartori/>

Fig. 9: Antonio Fava, *Pulcinella*. Mask by himself. Image from (June 2018):

<http://www.antoniofava.com/en/>

There are few physical theater practitioners, directors and pedagogs that could also elaborate their stage-body knowledge into such an eloquent theoretical discourse as Jacques Lecoq. Trained both in Pantomime as in Commedia dell'Arte, he then dedicated his lifes' research to the performing body in theater. His understanding of the interdependence between body and mask was, in my opinion, exceptional. In his "Theater of Movement and Gesture (1987), Lecoq reflects on the *liveness of masks*:

To make a mask come to life you have to know it, become friends with it. It must be made so that it can perform; it has to be a good mask. A good mask is one that changes expression when it moves. If it stays the same when the actor moves or changes attitude and state, then it is a dead mask. (Lecoq, 1987, 103-104)

In Lecoq's actor training method, exercises with masks are crucial. For him, the training in neutral mask drives the understanding of all other masks. He describes the process of neutral mask training: during the first stage, the neutral mask is an *alien, abstract object that suffocates the performer* (1987, 105). Gradually, the performer gets used to moving with the mask on and begins to feel *hidden* and *protected* by it, allowing for a new performative, bodily audacity. In the end, the performer who masters the neutral mask discovers in it a

freedom way greater than the discovered face. Detached from ego, the own face and words, detached from the sense of *self*, the body emerges in the silence, and the performer is fully aware of its importance, which it tends to forget in daily life. Lecoq affirms that the body does not cheat or lie, only words do. The body is always exposed, and with erasing of the personal face, the own sense of movement is enhanced, way more intense and aware than before. The reflections of Lecoq on the *physicality of masking* will be picked up in the following chapter.



Fig. 10: Amleto Sartori, *Neutral Mask*. Mask designed for Jacques Lecoq. Image taken from (June 2018) <http://www.helikos.com/pages/workshops-details.php?post=9&lang=en>

Furthermore, few have researched the techniques of the performing body as deeply and rigorously as did Jerzy Grotowski with his 'Teatr Laboratorium' in Opole since the 50's. Relevant to masking is the Grotowskian notion of the *via negativa*, which supposes the actor as a *medium*: "Ours then is a *via negativa* - not a collection of skills but an eradication of blocks" (2002, 18). Grotowski conceived the actor as a channel, a bridge towards a spiritual

and ancestral source of energy held by everyone, and his actor-training method consisted of freeing the performer from the anxious bonds of ego, from the self-conscious interruptions of the mind in order to unleash the physical flow of this instinctive energy. Thomas Richards, performer at Grotowski's Laboratory Theater, gives account for the Grotowskian *face as a sculpture*: "in essence, the actors followed the same process which occurs in life, where a the face of an aging person starts to take the characteristics of a mask, because repeated reactions have sculpted the wrinkles" (2003). In this sense, Grotowski understood the mask not as a function of character representation, but as a *visual* account of the experiences of the *self*. Here the drift from dramatic tradition is notorious, because the person on stage does not intend to stand for the place of a fictional other, but just to perform, to do, to be. The Polish directors' acting concept is therefore relatable (and contemporary) to the performative turn described by theater studies, which started around the 50's.



Fig. 11: Jerzy Grotowski (1969) *The Constant Prince*. Face of Ryszard Cieslak, leading role performer. Image from (June, 2018): https://culturehub.co/works/The_Madness_of_Benvolio

Finally, several influential directors of the second half of the century such as Eugenio Barba (Odin Teatret director, theater anthropology), Peter Brook (Royal Shakespeare Company, theater and film director) Ariane Mnouchkine (director of Theatre du Soleil) have taken the theatrical knowledge both from Asian and European tradition to create their own poetics of the stage, body and mask. Eugenio Barba has dedicated his life to the understanding of theater anthropology, and has theoretically and practically researched in the performance of a score of theatrical traditions from all over the globe, including Noh, Wayang, Commedia dell'Arte, Pantomime and other forms of masked theater. Barba, who trained in his youth with

Grotowski, developed the relevant concept of *extra-daily energy* to describe the techniques of several theater forms where the intensity of the body on stage is a core issue (1995, 13-18). He signals that, in daily life, our movements are guided by an *economy of energy*, where we put the minimum effort into the performance of the action. This economy of movement is fine for daily life. However, performing on stage asks for the *opposite economy of movement*: maximum amount of energy to perform the subtlest action. to acquire an extra-daily body, opposite directions of energy within the body's architecture are necessary. This is the principle of the *extra-daily energy* is of great use to analyse the bodywork of a masked performer.

Brook and Mnouchkine found in several Asian genres of theater and dance (Kathakali, Wayang, Noh, Kabuki and Bunraku), as well as in Commedia dell'Arte, the ritual aesthetics for restaging classics of Western dramatic literature, and further investigated and spread the techniques of masking of these traditions. Mnouchkine and Brook, both great admirers of Artaud Theater of Cruelty, conceive masking as an operation useful to combat what they call 'psychological' acting, characterised as slow, unnecessarily complicated and narcissistic (1989, 95). This psychological acting is a common enemy of physical theater practitioners and it refers to the realist school, to the Stanislavskian method and its branches, for instance, acting in Hollywood, based on the Actor's Studio education by Lee Strasberg, who adapted Stanislavski's method to screen.



Fig. 12: Eugenio Barba (1988-1991) *Talabot*. Theaterpiece by Odin Teatret inspired in Wayang and Noh. Image taken (June 2018) <http://www.odinteatret.dk/productions/past-productions/talabot.aspx>



Fig. 13: Ariane Mnouchkine (1990-1993) *Les Atrides*. Performed by Theatre du Soleil. Image from (June, 2018) <http://www.dw.com/en/icon-of-theater-ariane-mnouchkine-receives-goethe-prize/a-40224696>



Fig. 14: Peter Brook (1967) *Marat Sade*. film adaptation of Peter Weiss' homonime, which Brook also staged in theater. From (June 2018) <https://www.bam.org/film/2016/marat-sade>

Doubtlessly the twentieth century was very rich in terms of investigation in strategies for the stage and the communion of physicality and masking was thoroughly explored. All these theater makers seem to agree on the function of masking as an intensifier of the presence and movement of the body. Another commonality is that the mask is employed to underline the artistic and formal aspect of theater as an aesthetic, coded construct, quite opposite to its use in theater of illusion. Before film, (realist) theater sought to imitate life "just as it is", this is the effort of naturalism which all these directors stand strongly against. Some authors, such as Marceau, Fava, Fo, Mnouchkine and Brook and Barba stand for the use of masking as a *conservation strategy* of former, wise and rich theatrical traditions of certain cultures and historical periods. Others, such as Decroux and Grotowski, conceive masking as an opposite to characterisation and fiction, where the mask intensifies either the geometrical abstraction (Decroux) or the instinctive energy (Grotowski) of the human performer. Very useful for this research will be Lecoq's discourse on the *liveness and physicality of masks*, as well as Barba's notion of *extra-daily economy of energy*, maximum effort for minimum movement, as a principle for physical theater and a law for masked performance.

Now then, the task at hand is to understand the contemporary context of postdramatic theater, a shift in the theatrical paradigm which has largely informed scholarly debate and artistic practice alike.

Postdramatic Theater: a Mobile, Interactive Hypermedium

As previously mentioned, Hans-Thies Lehmann developed the term of postdramatic theater to describe the autonomization of theater from the artistic and epistemological dominance of the dramatic text, process which started during the first avant-garde period of the 20th century and reached a non-returning point in the boom of media culture in the second half of the decade (2006). Lehmann states that the take off towards a formation of postdramatic discourse in theater can be described as a series of stages of *self-reflection*, *decomposition* and *separation* of the elements of theater (48), process in which the constitutive components of the stage were submitted to radical exploration. The de-hierarchization of theatrical means is a universal principle of postdramatic theater (86). The possibilities of space, light, objects, body, choreography, sound, time, text and spectatorial address, in sum the organization of the theatrical event, were ingredients for constant experiment and rearrangement in attempts to find specificities of the art of theater. The multiple transformation of the stage into landscape, concert hall, art installation, political arena, screen, archive, lecture, dancefloor, feast, city tour, (video)game or lonesome cubicle has positioned the theater as a space for hybrid and interdisciplinary interaction of form and content, of material and concept. For the German scholar, the postdramatic mind-set is in deeply entangled with the shifting from a

text-based culture (until the end of the nineteenth century) towards the highly stimulated, societies of image and sound, where the multiplication and circulation of media content through diverse technological and digital platforms has indeed expanded the space-limits of the physical world. Following this trend of thought, Dr. Chiel Kattenbelt in his article titled "Intermediality in Performance and as a Mode of Performativity" (2010), inquires on the relation of media culture and contemporary theater aesthetics. He claims that the performative turn in the humanities was stimulated by the boom of media culture in the early 20th century, which has been intensified by the proliferation of digital technologies during the last two or three decades (29). The rapid evolution of technological media described through the last century favored a conceptual shift of theater: whereas before it was a space of a dialog-based dramatic representation of human conduct, media culture has validated the stage as what Kattenbelt calls a *hypermedium*. He aims to emphasise the performative quality of intermediality, by arguing that intermediality is all about the process of staging of media, in the sense of a conscious and intentional self-presentation to another, for which theater provides pre-eminently a stage (2010, 29). A stage for staging more stages, a diasporation and proliferation of visual and auditory content, the multiplication of experience. Theater as a hyper-platform of condensed media, organized into an event, an intermedial space where different means perform simultaneously and refer to each other. The notion of theater as a hypermedium is very much related to the postdramatic de-hierarchization of the stage, because each of its components becomes relevant, text has no longer its dominant attention that it used to enjoy of. Today, in daily life it is easy to observe how the dominance of text within culture has been outplaced by the hierarchy of the screen.

This hypermediality of postdramatic theater has had an impact on the reconceptualization of space and narration. Dr. Nanna Verhoeff in "Mobiles Screens: The Visual Regime of Navigation" (2012) points at the narrative potential of mediated spaces product of the of the interactive possibilities of digital media (69). In postdramatic theater, the audience is often an active participant, sometimes comparable to a player of a (video) game. Verhoeff continues saying that the navigation of a player, indeed its interactive autonomous choices, determine the course of the game. The narrative of navigation implies a selection of choices materialises visually on the screen in the creation of mediated spaces. The point here ultimately is that the high intermediality of digital culture has shifted the paradigms of both narration and space within theater.

This navigational narrative as an important branch of postdramatic discourse does not occur only on screens in mediated, digital spaces, but also throughout the city and the urban cartography. In her book "Nomadic Theater" (2015), Dr. Groot Nibbelink rethinks the idea of theatrical space as a product of the appointment of temporary and changing coordinates, the performance is unfolds as negotiated and flexible process of the configuration of a situation

(12). The theater building is no longer a preeminent condition of the theatrical event, where ambulatory performances and performative installations mobilise spectators, performers and stage through a negotiated interaction within the city. Indeed nomadism is a relevant feature of some participatory performances that have proliferated in this postdramatic context.

Masks are Media

Since antiquity masks have *operated as a medium*. According to the Online Oxford Living Dictionaries, a medium (plural: media) is both a means of *doing* something, as well as a means by which something is *communicated or expressed*. Likewise, the term *operation* refers to “an active process, a discharge of function; the action of functioning” (2018). The mask is one other mediating component of Kattenbelt’s theater as a hypermedium, where signification and experience are inseparable. If the mask is a medium, there must certainly be space for a recontextualization of masking within such a hyper-mediatized event such as theater. As much as a virtual reality goggles, a smartphone or headphones are ingredients of contemporary intermedial theater, so is the mask. They are both a means of experience, a channel of communication, an interface in which an exchange is produced. If masks are not necessarily faces of characters performers attach to their face, the boundary between mask and other technological devices is not so clear. A set of headphones can be both headphones and a mask at the same time. I argue that it has to do mostly with the *function* that the object may perform. Even further, I conceive mask not as a noun but as a verb, *to mask* and *to unmask*. What does this verb do within postdramatic theater pieces? I suggest that there is no single effect that the action of (un)masking can perform. I will further elaborate on this trend of thought in the coming chapter, where the viewpoint of dramaturgy and a recontextualised, interdisciplinary academic discourse around masks will hopefully allow to reposition the functional performance of masking within postdramatic theater.

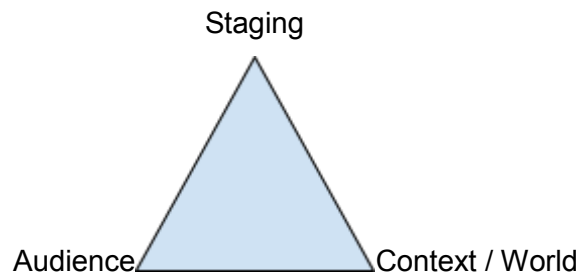
Chapter II: Analytical Approach and a Conceptual Framework for Masking in Postdramatic Theater.

The Lens of Dramaturgy: an Analytical Approach

Furthermore, the use of *dramaturgy* as an analytical approach will now be exposed, because it is the working ground upon which this analysis of contemporary theatrical masking shall build upon. In her text 'Questions to Ask a Small Planet' (2004), Elinor Fuchs invites the dramaturg to "mold the play into a medium-sized ball... Make the ball small enough that you can see the entire planet, not so small that you lose detail, and not so large that detail overwhelms the whole" (6). The small planet has its own rules of existence: space, time, climate, sound, light, temperature, mood, objects, power relations, beings. What changes in the planet? What stays the same? This is the initial dramaturgical approach for the cases of study (introduced later on). The issue at stake in this research is how the operation of masking behaves within the small planet, how the mask as a function draws rules for the configuration of the performance, shaping its internal laws.

To continue, I will borrow the concept of dramaturgy from Maaïke Bleeker (2003), understanding this practice as a mode of observation with a special eye for the material and conceptual configuration of the theatrical event (165-166). Dr. Bleeker coined the notion of dramaturgy as a process of *reverse engineering*, establishing a parallel between the theatrical scene and a mechanical apparatus, where the different pieces that compose the whole are parts of a montage that can be analysed, dismantled, rearranged and reassembled; it is a task of the dramaturg to be sensitive to the various implications and effects of this theatrical machinery, to observe in an acute manner how ingredients behave with another. Again, the present analysis seeks to question, dismantle and experimentally reflect on the function which masking performs within the theatrical apparatus.

Finally, from the lectures in "Doing Dramaturgy" with Dr. Sigrid Merx (November 2017), I extract the idea that the dramaturgical mindset is aware of the interaction within the triadic constellation composed by the 1) Staging, 2) Audience and 3) Context (World). Bluntly, dramaturgy is busy with how the articulation of the elements of the staging inform the experience of the audience and thus, how artists and spectators relate the theatrical experience to a broader societal context outside the theatrical event itself. Therefore, this text will not only pay attention to the mask within the limits of the stageworld, but will also take into account how the operation of masking implies a certain mode of spectatorial address, and how the mask relates to a cultural context at large.



Elemental dramaturgical considerations on Masking

In the light of this dramaturgical lens, masking shall be understood as a staging strategy that has a certain gravitational influence on the configuration of the small planet it belongs to. Hereby three elemental features of how masking will function within this analytical text. Firstly, I will remind how masking is an *operation*, to mask and unmask as active verbs, a discharge of function, an action that produces a mask-moving process, but not reducible to the object of the mask itself. Masking does not necessarily require the attachment of an external object to the face of the performer, it may occur in a broad variety of material conditions. As stated in the introduction, masking may hide, protect, frame, expose, contain, select, mold, transform. Aside from all these flexible functions, masking nevertheless always entails an externalizing operation of output, a discharge of *self-presentation*, for masking as a process is inseparable from *spectatorship*, from the sensible reception of the other. The mask is in this sense more than only expression, a channel of communication. It is literally the *interface* between the performer and its stage (small world) and the surrounding larger world around her or him. This is the second quality of the mask as a *medium*. Remembering the dramaturgical triangle, the mask as a medium will be understood as a point of interaction composed by the mobile constellation of mask, performer and audience. Consequently, masking is also a *spatial* phenomenon that necessarily implies *directionality*. Theater as an appointment of a situation (Groot Nibbelink) is organised by a certain spatial arrangement which shapes the relationship between stage and spectator, and consequently informs to a great extent the conditions of the theatrical experience of the audience. Masking and space are intertwined: many traditional masked theater genres occurred in architectural settings, either in an actual theater building or on the street, where stage and audience face each other in a *frontal* relationship. Masking has mostly implied *frontality* as a bidirectional vector connecting spectator and performer. However, postdramatic forms of theater questioned this frontality and have experimented with the spatial coordinates of the theatrical event, operation which has altered the tradition of frontal masking. Hence, the contemporary directionality of masking asks for an update, a new geometrical awareness that can expand from the face-to-face vectorial relationship.

An Interdisciplinary Conceptual Framework for Masking

In order to further inform the dramaturgical analysis of the operation of masking, I suggest a hybrid conceptual framework that will hopefully recontextualise masks in the postdramatic and contemporary terrain of theater studies. This theoretical apparatus intends to be a flexible network, a spiderweb which connects Don Ihde's postphenomenology of human-technology relationships (relatable to the context-world in our dramaturgical triangle); Lecoq and Barba's research on physical acting technique (stage); and Erving Goffman's performative approach to self-presentation and social interaction (audience). The fields from which I draw these theoretical tools are intentionally somewhat dissimilar and heterogeneous, just as are the poetics of the postdramatic. Ihde stands for an updating of masks within the present discussion of human and technological entanglements and the repositioning of intentionality as also a non-human quality. Lecoq and Barba are situated in the twentieth century developments on physical acting that have masks as a central component of their actor-training methods and theoretical discourse; they do not represent the postdramatic *persé*, but they stand for the heritage of masking technique as practice based and embodied knowledge. Finally, Goffman covers the more sociological aspects of masking, informing postdramatic dramaturgies on how the mask is a self-presentational function of social interaction. The sociologist can be mapped within the performative turn of the humanities and social sciences that took place initially in the late fifties.

i) Don Ihde: Intentional Tools, Mask as a Prosthesis.

To develop a consistent dramaturgy of the operation of masking in postdramatic theater practices, I will take into serious account some concepts coined by Don Ihde in his postphenomenology of technoscience. Why is this ontological reflection on human and technological relationships relevant to the operation of masking? Well, masks were one of the first technological devices ever used by our species, and thus lurk in the protohistory of this present debate. Specifically, I am interested in his reflections around the human-object relationships. In the second chapter of *Postphenomenology and Technoscience, The Peking University Lectures* (2009), Ihde quotes Francis Bacon, in order to introduce the relevance of studying the imbrication of human and technics:

We should notice the force, effects and consequences of inventions, which are nowhere more conspicuous than in those three which were known to the ancients... printing, gunpowder, and the compass. For these three have changed the state and

appearance of the whole world... innumerable changes have been thence derived, so that no empire... appears to have exercised a greater power and influence on human affairs than these mechanical discoveries. (Francis Bacon. Quoted in Ihde. 2009. 26).

This is a reminder of how technologies have shaped the world in active performance, they are not mere passive and disposable 'things'. Continuing his argument, Ihde states that tools are active agents relative to specific contexts-of-use, they are *means for doing something* (2009, 33). Under this perspective, the author speaks of the intentionality of the object, relatable to its context of use in which it performs. Print, gunpowder and the compass (worth remembering that the three are Chinese inventions) were means of accomplishment of certain actions: to register knowledge, to fire a weapon, to navigate the ocean; these are the intentionalities of the artifacts. Within the post phenomenological ontology of human and technology relationship proposed by Ihde, the performativity and intentionality of mankind and objects are balanced at a horizontal level, opposed to the mindset of anthropocentric hierarchy over the material world. Consequently, the pens' performative intention aims at the action of writing as much as that of the writer, there is an interdependent relation between the two. Put simply: without the pen and paper, how is the writer to write? Ihde argues that the bodily engagement with artifacts has ever since been a means of experiencing Nature, or as he calls it, the *Lifeworld*. The author states that knowledge which arises from the use of artifacts is not Cartesian (exclusively cognitive, proper of the mind), but rather a practical, know-how-to-use knowledge which deals with *doing with the body*, not with a passive *knowing with the mind*. Thus, the human experience of 'sea' is undeniably attached to the active existence and embodied human-object performances related to tools such as 'compass' or 'boat'. Ihde argues for the phenomenological 'withdrawal' of the used tool: while hammering a nail into the wall, the hammer becomes incorporated to the human body in favor of the realization of the task at hand. Thus, the hammer withdraws (classic Heideggerian example), it is here *quasi-transparent*. Yet, the withdrawal of the tool-as-object *reveals or lights-up* something else; it is implicitly an account of Nature or the Lifeworld. The hammer is tremendously visible when it is absent, and one needs to nail a nail with something else. The boat gives account of the ocean, its sail gives account of the wind. Similarly, the mask becomes quasi-transparent while performing, revealing the intensified body of the performer who is embodying it. Hence, the mask in this research is understood as an embodied, quasi-transparent theater-tool with intentionality, the effects of its operation the point of interest.

To further unpack his ideas on human-technology interaction, Ihde defines several types of relationships between human and object, two of which shall be incorporated into this research. First, the author suggests that many human-object engagements are *embodied*

relationships. This notion addresses the already mentioned idea of objects as means of experience, which are incorporated to the human body as a part of the whole. Ihde offers the example of eyeglasses or contact-lenses: they are attached to the face and are a quasi-transparent tool that nonetheless enables the user to see, to perceive the world around her. Likewise, the mask is a means of experience for the masked performer. *Embodiment* is a term already very visited by theater practitioners in the field of physical acting and masks. However, what Ihde's conception offers is the ontological understanding of the mask-tool as an *intentional device* that merges with the human, whereas the mask in theatrical practice has been somewhat sacralized and animated as a potentially alive sculpture that withholds something like the "spirit of a character", which the actor must be trained enough to channel and embody. Ihde's conception of an embodied relation of human and technology has nothing to do with the human user being able to animate a tool. He renders the eyeglasses as a means of experience, a quasi-transparent device more relatable to a *prosthesis* than to a character.

Continuing, Ihde explains the human-object relation of *alterity*, where humans regard technologies themselves as quasi-other living beings, hence the term of alterity. (2009, 43). Here, the author exemplifies with toys, who are treated as other beings by the playing child. Same goes for robots, who also receive a near human treatment, they are more creatures than they are things. In this sense, the operation of masking is greatly informed by this concept of alterity, as for masks are commonly addressed by theater practitioners as if breathing entities with a life of their own. It is not that they are animated and breathe as an animal breathes, but our relation with them invests them of *otherness*, for we recognise their potential intentionality. Peter-Paul Verbeek (other post-phenomenologist) comments on Don Ihde's work, suggesting that hybrid intentionality occurs when the technological actually merges with the human, producing *cyborg intentionality* (2008). I agree with this line of thinking, suggesting that mask and performer merge producing someone not entirely human, a certain hybrid of object and flesh, mask as prosthesis, in one word, a cyborg.

For this research, I will consider the mask as an Ihdean tool, albeit a detachable object, make-up or a muscular arrangement of the face. Masking is a means of doing theater, a medium with a specific context of use. The masks' performative intentionality drives towards the action of staging, as much as the actors' does. The previous concepts around Ihde will be used in the analysis of performances by means of an awareness of the relation between mask and human and the effects of this relation. The idea of the mask as an embodied, intentional, performative, cyborg-creating alterity allows masking to claim a position within contemporary theater studies debate, as well as to locate masking within postdramatic dramaturgies.

ii) Lecoq and Barba: Liveness of Masks, Economy of Energy

The following set of concepts are all related to the *physicality inherent to the operation of masking*, for which the already mentioned work of Jacques Lecoq and Eugenio Barba are main theoretical guidelines.

Lecoq's understanding of the liveness of masks, expressed formerly in the section on masking technique in the XXth century, points at its dualistic function: the mask simultaneously *conceals* and *reveals*. On the one hand, the social mask of the person is hidden underneath a new *surface*, namely the neutral mask in Lecoq's acting pedagogy. In the initial phase, the neutral mask is a bothering and suffocating object, alien to the body, where the embodiment of mask and skin has not yet occurred but is on its way towards an understanding. The neutral mask is firstly rejected by the body, as an external agent is rejected by the immune system. But then, human and mask start coming to terms, and the performer feels concealed, contained, abstracted from itself and its social use of movement and speech. As the relationship progresses, the concealing of the daily face of the performer enhances its corporeal dimension, highlighting the intensity of its presence, *revealing* its performative and kinesthetic potential. The neutral mask is used for the physical training of performers because it imposes its silence: verbal communication is banned, the only language possible is that of gesture, of the stillness and movement of the body. Any masking operation will free its masker from the social self, from the quotidian and economic bodily action proper to daily life.

This is a point where Lecoq's research on acting and postphenomenology converge: in Ihde's words, the mask has an embodied relation with the performer, producing at the same time the effect of alterity for the spectator, who sees the masked performer as a cyborg, a hybrid corpus of object and flesh. The mask is treated by Lecoq as a living being, but not in terms of its inner character, rather in its *fusion with flesh which reveals its transformative potential in movement*. The life of the mask depends both on its sculptor and on its actor. If the mask is made so with a fixed expression that cannot morph by changing position, it is dead. If the performer cannot make it change its expression while moving, it is also dead. This is how deeply sunken in the body the relation between masking and movement is. This is Lecoq's concept of *live mask*, which is expandable to masking operations that do not necessarily include a detachable object. This will be a dramaturgical question for analysis of masking: how does the masked body move? In what manner does the intentionality of the mask function over the performing organism?

Masking, independent of its corresponding genre of performance and its cultural coordinates, always demands for an intensified aesthetics of movement. It is the intentionality of the mask, indeed its *urge to live*, that does not permit its performer to ignore it, to move as if it were not

there, as if in daily life. Of course the traditions of masked theater withhold the most varied poetics of presence, body architectures and choreographies. Greek Tragedy, Chinese Opera, Balinese Theater, Noh, Kathakali, Commedia Dell'arte, Bunraku, Pantomime, Kabuki (etc) have all developed in their history different aesthetics of both masking and movement. Nevertheless, the common denominator shared by all these traditions is the extra-daily quality of movement which masking demands for. This concept of live mask will permit a nuanced observation of the masked body's movement in the following cases of postdramatic theater. How does masking operate with/on staged bodies today, in forms of performance that do not respond to traditional genres of mask-theater? What aesthetics of movement are the contemporary masks asking for?

To complete, the research of Eugenio Barba on Physical Theater Anthropology can further enlighten what it concretely means to intensify movement and the body's presence. Barba developed the relevant concept of *extra-daily energy* to describe the techniques of several theater forms where the intensity of the body on stage is a core issue (1995, 13-18). The author studied as a scholar and a practitioner -with his Odin Theater, company based in Denmark- a broad amount of theater forms corresponding to the most differing cultures, searching for a common point concerning techniques of the performing body. He signals that, in daily life, our movements are guided by an economy of energy, where we put the minimum effort into the performance of the action. This economy of movement is suitable for daily life, as it is a strategy of dosification which obeys to survival. However, performing on stage asks for the contrary economy of movement: maximum amount of energy to perform the subtlest action. This is the principle of the extra-daily body, which relates to the operation of masking, namely the exposure of the body through its intensified movement. To acquire an extra-daily body, opposite directions of energy within the body's architecture are necessary. For instance, gravity is pulling the lower spine of the performer groundwards, yet the body must also push the structure of the higher vertebrae skywards. It is the classic string image which pulls the actor from the crown and from the pelvis, keeping him alert, ready for action. An analysis of the oppositions within the performing organism is a useful tool regarding the dramaturgy of the masked body.

iii) Goffman and Social Masking: Performing the Self.

In this third and final section of the theoretical framework, I will concentrate on Erving Goffman's performative conception of the self as a means of highlighting the social aspect inherent to the operation of masking. In his groundbreaking title *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, the author claims that the self:

is a product of the scene that comes off, and it is not a *cause* of it. The self, then, as a performed character, is not an organic thing that has a specific location, whose fundamental fate is to be born, to mature, and to die; it is a dramatic effect arising diffusely from a scene that is presented, and the characteristic issue, the crucial concern, is whether it is credited or discredited. (1959, 245)

Goffman is here stressing the performative character of self as a staged construction in social life. He builds the argument by observing that, in a social encounter, information about the individual helps to define the situation, enabling others to know in advance what it might expect from others and vice versa (Ídem, 13). Participants of a certain situation are in an ongoing negotiation of presenting self-information (consciously and unawaresly) and of observing the self-information that comes off the others. Self in Goffman has nothing to do with essence: it is a performative machinery that changes social masks several times a day, adapting its character to the different situations it engages with. The mask within Goffman is a conceptual tool that allows for a performative interpretation of self-presentation in social interaction, underlining the necessity of masking as a instinctive strategy of social adaptation, a means for successful survival within society. The individual performs several masks through the journey of everyday life: wife, mother, daughter, friend, employee, boss, colleague, patient, customer and so on. On the contrary, she who cannot 'change masks' is rendered socially unadapted. Curiously enough, theatrical traditions such as Commedia dell'Arte are all about how individuals pushed to the limits of survival in everyday situations, as if masks reminded the theater of the urgency of life. The operation of masking is a self-staging practice that permanently renegotiates the state of the situation with its surrounding context. Masking as an operation that favours a working consensus, an implicit political negotiation that strives to agree on defining the situation, where masks discharge a powerful function of disruption and disagreement on the state of a given social encounter. As Goffman warns: "Choose your self-presentations carefully, for what starts out as a mask may become your face" (Ídem, 16).

An awareness of social masking will come very much in handy for this research, especially when approaching cases of contemporary performance that use masking without any external and detachable object, subscribed within the context of a highly performative, mediatic and digital culture. Returning to Kattenbelt:

In a mediatised culture and society, the mass media have become a substantial part of reality itself, more than just representing reality through a mediating function. In other words, our mediatised culture and society have turned into a hyperreality of simulations and simulacra, which means that the

signs have become more real than the objects to which they refer (Eco 1985) or, to put it differently, that reality has been replaced by its representations (Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari 1972 and Jean Baudrillard 1985 and 1986)... This all means that the expression "all the world's a stage" is no longer just a metaphor, but a characteristic feature of our mediated culture and society. (2010, 34-35).

Thus, I argue that the operation of masking is crucial to further comprehend the self-staging practices, not only inside the contemporary theatrical event, but in our cybernetic mediated society at large. To administer a personal account in a social media platform is also an action which entails the operation of masking inseparable from all social encounter. The self-staging function of the mask is active within the "dramaturgy of everyday life performance of the person": in the performative identity of the individual, in "real life" interpersonal encounters, in all digital platforms that suppose human interaction, in the administration of information and knowledge; masking as a political function within power relations.

To synthesise, the theoretical framework that nourishes the dramaturgical functions of masking within postdramatic theater mingle with the academic debates on: the ontology of human-technological relationships and the postphenomenological understanding of intentionality as a property of all things; physicality and the embodiment of masks according to theater practitioners as an intensifier of the economy of energy/movement; and the social dimension of masking as a daily-life operation of self-presentation to others. Now, the following section will briefly introduce the four performances that shall be the testing ground for this interdisciplinary theoretical apparatus to revisit masking in contemporary theater.

Cases of Study: Heterogeneous Samples of Postdramatic Performances

The dramaturgical functions of the operation of masking shall be analyzed -considering all the previous concepts as analytical tools- within the following performances:

a) **Boogaerdt & van der Schoot (2012) *Bimbo***. (video footage seen February, 2018): Intermedial peep-show performance on the capitalist conception of the female body as an object of desire. Ongoing explicit sexual content. Shortly, this peep show engages rawly with the problematics of the female body, mass media culture and the agenda of capitalism.

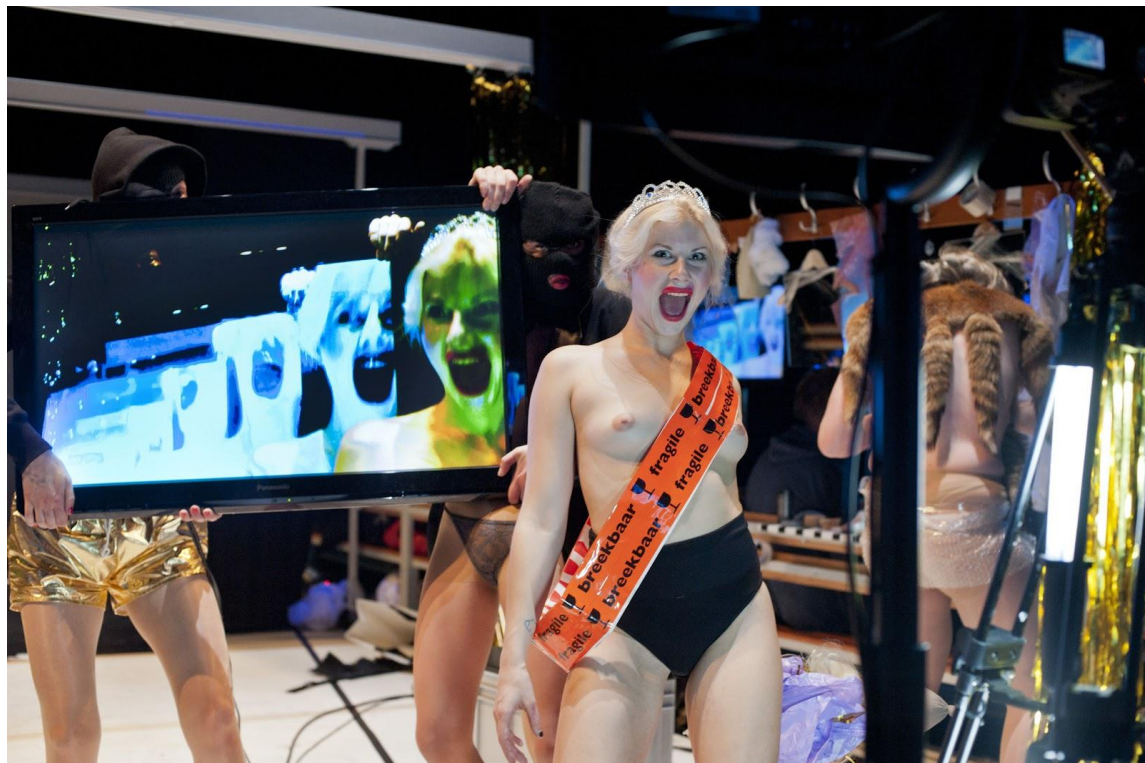


Fig. 15 & 16: Boogaerdt & van der Schoot (2012) *Bimbo*. Images from (June 2018):

<https://www.toneelgroepoostpool.nl/2012-2013/bimbo>

b) **Phia Menard (2011) *Vortex***. (Seen January, 2016): Solo choreography of the performer who strips of layers of plastic bags, within a circle of fans, creating a whirlwind. First bags are small and roughly anthropomorphic. Gradually, the bags increase in size and no longer resemble humans. Mingles with topics of ecology, sustainability and the reflections on the material ideology that plastic stands for.



Fig. 17 & 18: Phia Menard (2011) *Vortex*. Images taken from (June 2018) <http://www.cienonnova.com>

c) **Katja Heitmann (2017) *Pandora's Dropbox***. (video footage seen February, 2018): Choreography over a hexagonal, synthetic grass platform in which the movements of the six performers are mechanized, stretching the automatic codification to an extreme. The dancers are automatas, programmed androids in a strive for perfection, to erase difference and error from the moving body.

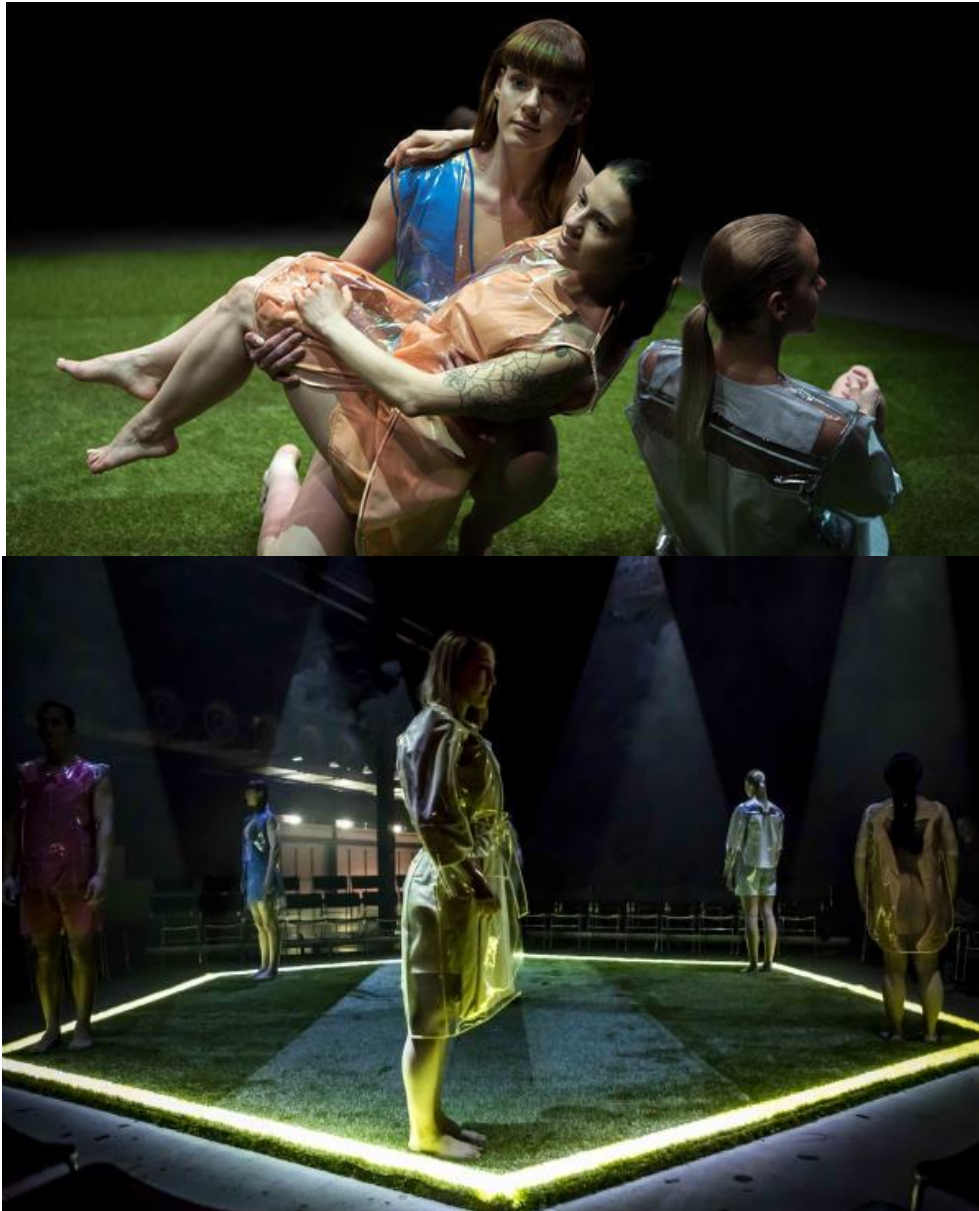


Fig 19 & 20: Katja Heitmann, (2017) *Pandora's Dropbox*. Images from (June 2018)
<http://www.katjaheitmann.com/work/pandoras-dropbox/>

d) **Rimini Protokoll (2015) *Remote Santiago***. (seen January, 2015) : Participatory theater, audio-tour navigating through the city center of Santiago, Chile. Group of spectators is herded by means of an audio-narration through headphones from the general cemetery, through a public hospital, on the street, in the metro, into a church, a shopping mall, a market, etc. Engages with public space, collectivity, and a theatrical perception of urban space.



Fig. 21 & 22: Rimini Protokoll, (2015) *Remote Santiago*. Images from (taken June 2018)

<https://vimeo.com/118690380>

These performances constitute certainly quite a heterogenous panorama: an intermedial, rawly sexual peep-show; a solo choreography of plastic stripping; a dance piece striving for embodying the perfect automata; an audio-tour through an urban landscape. They stage radically different small planets, use various dramaturgical strategies to do so and engage with wide scope of academic debates and societal problems. Due to their differences, each performance will also have an extra input concerning a topic and academic debate they relate to: *Bimbo* deals with the *aesthetics of pornography*; *Vortex* with *ecology* and the *neo-materialist* idea of *matter as agential*; *Pandora's Dropbox* mingles with the *fatigue of an achievement-oriented society*; and *Remote Santiago* is a *swarming* and *nomadic* exercise on collectivity and public space. In none of them does masking shine evidently as a central topic nor an orchestrating operation of the theatrical event. Nevertheless, they offer a dissimilar selection of non-dramatic, contemporary theater practices that all fit in the academic frame of postdramatic theater and performance. The next chapter commits to establish pertinent crossings, comparisons, contrasts and similarities between the functions of masking within them. In the following chapter comes the mapping of a web of relations in a dramaturgy-based, contextual analysis of the material and conceptual functions of masking in these four performances.

Chapter III: Dramaturgical analysis of Masking.

1. Pornographic Mask: Boogaerdt & van der Schoot, (2012) *Bimbo*.

It is nevertheless precisely in pornographic cinema that the "substance of enjoyment" perceived by the view from aside is radically lost.

(Slavoj Zizek, 1992, 35)



Fig. 23 Boogaerdt & van der Schoot (2012) *Bimbo*. Images from (June 2018):

<https://www.toneelgroepoostpool.nl/2012-2013/bimbo>

The stage in *Bimbo* is a rectangular, white space surrounded by hangers full of clothing and props on the inside, towards the outside it is surrounded by outfacing chairs. The audience is seated in front of screens, their backs facing the stage, and consequently have a somewhat interrupted vision of it. A single camera streams the actions of the five women, establishing a frame for the performance and a frontality for the choreography. The rap song *My Neck, My Back* (Khia, 2002) loops during the vast majority of the performance.

Bimbo engages raw and rough with the capitalist conception of the female body as a mediatized sexual object of desire. Experiencing this performance is neither pleasant, comfortable nor sublime. It is very clear that the objective of the stage is not to please its audience, quite on the contrary. Adjectives suitable for *Bimbo* could be hard-core, obscene, grotesque, disgusting, depressive, exhausting, perverted, humiliating. The overall

dramaturgical operation during the apparently endless hour of performance is the *same*: stage explicit sexual actions towards the camera. In a way, *Bimbo* works as a physical and mental test of *enduring the pornographical*, an uncomfortable experience that performers and spectators must put up with. There is a certain dramaturgical refreshing of the stage images that aim to keep the different scenes effective, but all sequences aim at the same objective. Scene composition varies by means of, firstly, the amount of performers within the frame of recorded by the camera. At times we have a single woman, at others a pair, three, or the whole cast. When someone is not in the frame, she is undressing, putting on makeup, a mask or whatever necessary preparation for the following scene, all of which the spectators can also see. Secondly, the women use different: (female and male) masks, sex toys and dolls, sex costumes, makeup, wigs, silicone prosthesis, etc. Thirdly, the color, source and directionality of light which illuminates the white, 'neutral' stage. The final aspect of variation deals with the distance of the performers to the fixed camera, varying from pornographic close-ups and headshots to panoramic compositions. These traveling elements function all in favor of the choreography, which does not rest from a permanent recycling of all imaginable sexual acts: snogging, masturbation, vaginal, anal and oral sex, orgies, etc.

The question now at hand relates to the function of masking within this theatrical event and the thesis here is that, without the diverse strategies of masking employed within the performance, *Bimbo* would be an unbearable, tortuous experience for actresses and audience. I relate the function of masking in *Bimbo* to *survival*, a dramaturgical operation of *self-preservation*. Before diving into the meticulous dramaturgical analysis of the operation of masking within *Bimbo*, it seems relevant to address some aspects of the genre of *pornography*.

In her book titled *Excitable Speech: a Politics of the Performative* (2013), Judith Butler stresses the fact that pornography is a kind of *hate speech*: "The one who speaks hate speech is imagined to wield sovereign power, to do what he or she says when it is said." (2013, 16) Hate speech in Butler has a direct relation with *politics*, the power relations in an event where a performative utterance takes place. Butler follows the speech act theory of Austin, where, *speech* is conceived as a *performative utterance*, an *action*. Why does Butler conceive pornography as a hate speech, and what does this idea entail considering the staging in *Bimbo*? What negotiations of power occur within pornography? In other words, how does the 'power- dramaturgy of porn' function?

Slavoj Žižek offers a possible answer. In his article on perception *Looking Awry* (1992), the author claims that pornography is inherently perverse, and its perversity is not defined by showing "all the dirty details". He follows the concept of Lacan, where perversion "is defined by the fact that, as a stratagem to evade his constitutive splitting, the subject itself assumes the position of an object instrumental to the enjoyment of the Other (1992, 36)".

Certain genres of video such as porn and gore *dramaturgically assume* that their audience is perverted, because they only offer them that position of spectatorship, namely to observe the Other as a object, to take pleasure in the instrumental penetration (porn) or mutilation (gore) of performers. How is then power distributed within the pornographic gaze? At first sight, the observer seems to wield the power. But is the spectator instrumentalizing the porn actress as a means of his or her sexual arousing? Or is also the spectator at service of the *monopolistic agenda of the pornographic screen*, lured by the promise of fulfilling the desire for voyeuristic power? Thus, Judith Butler's concept of *hate speech* is relatable to the power that the pornographic industry wields both over performers (sexual products) and the spectators (passive consumerists). Zizek makes use again of Lacan, this time to reflect on how *desire* functions, something that capitalism is very knowledgeable about:

Pornography is thus just another variation on the paradox of Achilles and the tortoise, which, according to Lacan, defines the relation of the subject to the object of its desire. Naturally, Achilles can easily outdistance the tortoise and leave it behind, but the point is that he cannot come up alongside it, rejoin it. The subject is always too slow or too quick, can never keep pace with the object of its desire. (1992, 38)

The sexually eager spectator of pornography cannot meet his or her desire, for he or she has already outpaced it. The Lacanian paradox of 'Achilles and the Tortoise' is an accurate description of the logic that drives consumerist culture: objects of desire are exposed everywhere, whereas the customers will never meet satisfaction, for they live in the paradoxical outrunning and never-reaching of the desired object.

In porn, the gaze of the spectator cannot but fall back into him or herself, who has willingly (but unconsciously) placed him or herself in the position of a perverse observer, staring stupidly at the screen that "shows it all". The pornographic gaze exposes its very function, a certain insightful moment where the spectator realizes "I have got what I wanted straight away, now what? Do I like it?" Zizek calls the porn-viewer an objectified spectator, reduced to gaze passively at the subjects in the video with the objective of being sexually aroused. Phrased differently, the pornographic screen functions as a mirror of the unmet desire of the viewer. The effect after watching pornography as extremely vulgar and depressing, a quite similar effect triggered *Bimbo*.

Boogaerdt and van der Schoot situate the spectator of *theater* in the position of a spectator of *porn*. Since the audience of *Bimbo* did not attend the performance with the intention of being sexually stimulated, the perversity of the objectified gaze in pornography is underlined, which explains why the performance is so effectively uncomfortable, or in Zizek's words, *vulgar and depressing*. This intermedial peep-show is such a raw critique to the capitalist

and mediatized image of the female body as a sexual object, because it ruthlessly dismantles the function of desire as a capitalist strategy operating on the body of women. In neoliberalism, the sexually aroused female body is an object of lust, a manipulated image, a fail-less consumption drive. As a spectator of *Bimbo*, fifteen minutes suffice to *want to not see* anything else, and nevertheless one must endure the harshly staged sexual acts for another forty five minutes. Needless to say, it is indeed an exhausting performance, for viewers and more so for the performers.



Fig. 24: Boogaerdt & van der Schoot (2012) *Bimbo*. Images from (June 2018):

<https://www.toneelgroepoostpool.nl/2012-2013/bimbo>

To further unpack this idea, I will start by revisiting the ideas of Don Ihde, which allow for a conception of the mask as an intentional and embodied tool. *Bimbo* offers a broad spectrum of masking operations, which range from heavy makeup, wigs, plastic foil, medical masks to cover mouth and nose, plastic female masks, a silicone male mask. These objects perform a double intentionality. On one side, they have an aesthetic and discursive function of staging *artificiality*, where the collection of these cheap and disposable accessories (the masks) refer to the capitalist drive of massively producing low cost souvenirs, which obeys to the idea that consumerist societies have a market for *everything*, even though it is plastic junk. And yet, these cheap masks also perform their function as a *veil*, a protective surface that says nothing about the identity of the masker. The masks in the previous photography are standardized, endlessly produced plastic models that give away no information concerning the corporeality and face of the performer. Within a performance which is all about *showing*,

masking here functions as a tool to *conceal* and thus *protect* the actresses, in the sense that the masks acknowledge their performers as humans that have other roles than that of performing on stage. *Bimbo* is dramaturgically organised *as if* it were a pornographic peep-show, but it is not, and the overall intentionality of masking is to *establish the difference between pornography and theatrical event*. In pornographic film masks are rarely used, and if so they function only as fetishes to further stimulate desire in the spectator. Pornography is all about showing: the industry profits from exhibiting their star-actresses bare skinned, who make their fame and money out of close-up shots of their faces during a staged sexual action. The performers in *Bimbo* are no porn stars (nor do they earn like them) and thus need of this protective function of masking not only in order to preserve themselves from the perverted gaze (Zizek) and the hate speech (Butler), but also to establish a difference between the theater stage and the porn set-up.

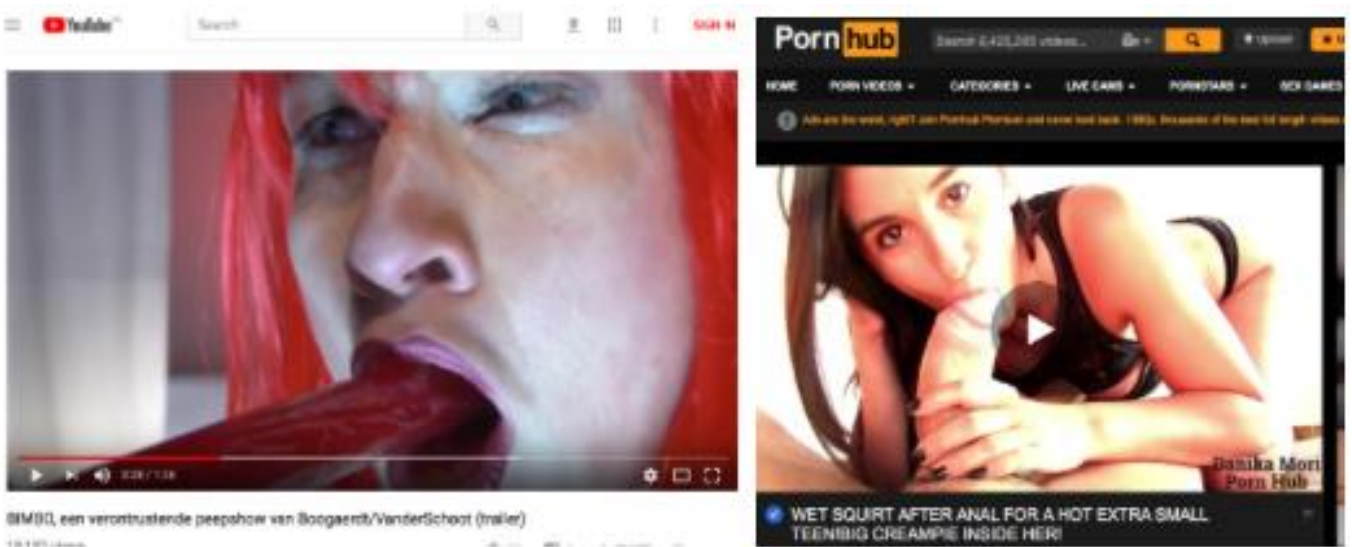


Fig. 25: Boogaerdt & van der Schoot (2012) *Bimbo*. Images from (June 2018):

<https://www.toneelgroepoostpool.nl/2012-2013/bimbo>

Fig. 26: PornHub screenshot (June 2018). Image from www.pornhube.com.

Furthermore, the operation of masking functions as a relevant *medium* within this *hypermediatic system* (following Kattenbelt) which is *Bimbo*. The media present in the piece have different intentions and complement each other in their functioning. As previously mentioned, the fixed camera frames the stage, working as a *mask* in the sense of *photography*, because it selects the field of vision, delimits the inside and the outside. The screens operate as a multiplication factor, reproducing the image as mass-media content. Finally, the masks protect the performers from the very actions they do on stage, allowing them to endure the exposition to the camera. At this point the concept of *live mask* by Lecoq is relevant. Masking in *Bimbo* also activates an *extra-daily economy of energy* necessary to perform the physical harshness of the movements. The plastic cheap masks or the thick

makeup are very far from what Lecoq would render as a *good mask*, they are not made as sensible acting tools and do not change expression at all with the movement of the performers. They are alien and suffocating, as the neutral mask in the beginning of Lecoq's training. Nevertheless, it is precisely the lifelessness of the masks what protects the performers, for they stay covered by a artificial, plastic and neutral barrier. As the performance develops and exhaustion starts taking a toll on the performing bodies, the biologies of the women start *leaking through* their containers. Sweat, saliva and tears trespass the barrier of the lifeless masks, a physical happening that materializes the struggle of the women while enduring their own performance, the bodily struggle that likewise occurs in the performance of objectified porn actresses and actors. Their outer layer is an object, but the human biology cannot but leak through this objectification. In porn, the leaking of biology plays a crucial role in the dramaturgy of the scene, there is a timeline that administers liquid such as ejaculation, the excretion of genital fluids and saliva. Whereas in porn this dramaturgy of fluids is manipulated (with drugs and hormones), in *Bimbo* the sweating, drooling and crying is intentionally staged and yet also an organic consequence of physical wear and tear which has a direct correlation with the corporeal intensification activated by masking, the explosion of inner fluids as physical response to the extra-daily economy of energy. If the stage of *Bimbo* were a small planet (Fuchs), the performers would be cyborgs and the masks would be organs of this hybrid body.



Fig. 27 & 28: Boogaerd & van der Schoot (2012) *Bimbo*. Images from (June 2018):

<https://www.toneelgroepoostpool.nl/2012-2013/bimbo>

Bimbo addresses its societal context by explicitly showing the *social masking* as an action of *self presentation* (via Goffman). It is to my understanding that the social masking operation activated in this performance has a double effect, or phrased differently, appeals to two different spheres: the first is within the theatrical architecture itself, conceiving the performative event as an isolated universe (dramaturgically stage - spectator interaction); whereas the second dimension has to do with the exchange process between stage and stage and the world at large.

Within the performance itself, the actresses present themselves to the audience with this *pornographic mask*. As discussed, they stage themselves as objects of desire, sexual toys that *do not cease to perform* their pornographic actions. In terms of Goffman, the (nonexistent) self is constructed by one single and same self-staging function, namely the woman as a lustful object. The situation is flat and presents no change, no space for negotiation possible, for the information that the performers give off is not flexible nor dynamic, it insists on its only motive. This sameness is a symptom which reminds us of the postdramatic frame for dramatic theater is all about *change*: twist of plot, ascension of action and tension, the portrayal of three dimensional characters. In *Bimbo* we see no change of plot, no ascending action, no three dimensional characters with psychological processes and contradictory intentions. Within the closed universe of stage and spectator, the women will always perform as sex dolls, as pornographic avatars. That is why the spectator must *endure* the unchanging situation, for negotiating a different outcome is not possible.

However, the pornographic mask that functions within the performance is also the weapon of critique that *Bimbo* uses in a societal context to point at the capitalist agenda which drives the perverse conception of the female body as pleasure object. Boogaerdt and van der Schoot can (rightly so) be read as politically engaged artists who bluntly and rawly confront the economic plan that capitalism has traced for women. The spectator who saw a trailer of *Bimbo* and decided to attend the performance is prepared to receive a critical discourse, probably searching for it. This is also a function of social masking, where the social identity performed by the makers is information for a wider audience, who can socially read them as feminists, punks, hard-core artists, counter-capitalists. Thus, the pornographic mask in *Bimbo* is both protection and confrontation, a shield and a weapon.

2. Ecology of Unmasking: Phia Ménard (2011), *Vortex*.



Fig. 29: Phia Menard (2011) *Vortex*. Image taken from (June 2018) <http://www.cienonnova.com>

At base, the new materialism takes seriously the idea that all matter is agential and that agency is distributed across and among materials in relation. As such, matter engages with matter as well as with (or without) humans, who are also matter.

Rebecca Schneider (2015, 7).

Vortex occurs in a small, round circus tent. The stage is also circular, surrounded by tilted fans that all point inwards. A lone human figure appears but we see no skin, for it is heavily wrapped in plastic, a mummy of sorts. The figure pulls some vaguely anthropomorphic plastic bags from its sleeve. The fans go on, and plastic bags, moved by the whirlwind of circulating air, dance freely in this aeolic cylinder. The body keeps stripping layers of plastic

bags and other wrappings, pushing this operation to the limit, and the layers of materials perform movements in the vortex of air.

In order to comprehend the functions of masking within *Vortex*, I suggest a *neo-materialist* interpretative frame, where the dramaturgy of the stage is conceived as a *self-organised ecosystem*. In this case, the theatrical event is composed by wind, plastic and human flesh, these are the interacting materials of the stage. Later on shall the conceptual tools of mask intentionality (Ihde), physicality of masking (Lecoq) and social masking (Goffman) be applied for further analysis.

New materialism starts from the base of considering all matter as agential, so matter actively engages in relational processes with other materials, with or independent of humans (Schneider, 2015, 7). Matter is not conceived as "dead" or passive, but rather an active participant of *matter/energy complexes* (2013, 400). Energy is not matter, but travels through it and thus they are inextricably linked: light bounces on objects, sound as the vibration of particles, heat is absorbed by water, living organisms withdraw chemical energy from food or photosynthesis. Organic and inorganic matter have the capacity to influence and change material-energetic situations, which many times imply an entanglement of nonhuman and human force-fields. William Connolly well points out that that these processes occur "both within the human body and outside of humanity", for each human being ports inside her or his organism more than half a kilogram of bacteria (2013, 401). The neo-materialist perspective acknowledges the unstable dependency and ever-changing relation of natural and cultural systems. Therefore, it distrusts the anthropocentric positioning of humans as the main administrator of agency on the planet, which has led to our current state of "worldwide economic meltdown," (2013, 404) the intersection of capitalism and global warming. Events are going bad, and they are exponentially getting worse. Thus, Connolly reminds us of the *fragility* of the world we live in:

From the perspective of the endurance and quality of life now available to the human estate in its cross-cultural entanglements, in its exchanges with nonhuman force fields, and in the reverberations back and forth between several human and nonhuman processes, we once again inhabit a fragile world. (2013, 410)

Consequently, new materialism stands for an *ecological agenda*. It calls for a humbling of the human among the other organisms and energy/matter complexes of the Earth. According to Manuel DeLanda, ecology has much to inform economy regarding the multiple sources of value an object contains (2012, 42). He explains that ecologist scientists study food webs, knowledge that considers the ample network of value that is inherent to material processes of transformation of energy, such as photosynthesis, decomposition of organic material,

animal feeding, fossilization, et cetera. A barrel of oil is valued far beyond its market price as a non-renewable fossil source of energy. Nonetheless, countless barrels of oil are pumped out every minute, wars rage around its extraction, oil-industry spills waste into oceans and carbon monoxide into the troposphere; all due to the urgency of the capitalist agenda.

Vortex stages certainly a vibrant performativity of objects portraying an ecosystem where plastic functions as an *accumulation of layers*, quite like the operation of social masking within Goffman's self-presentation discourse. Here, masking is an operation on the entire body, not reducible to the face itself. Phia is mummified with seemingly endless sheets of wrapping which she will strip off during the entire course of the performance. In Goffman, masking is likewise an endless operation, where the self is no essence, but is constituted by this accumulation of layers that are directed outwards, sending information to the specific social situation in which the subject is interacting with Others. Within the circular stageworld of *Vortex*, the Others are non-human. The shapes, sizes and colors of the stripped plastic layers vary, to the point in which this very materiality defines the body-plastic relationship and constitutes the *emotional journey* as a dramaturgical progression of the theatrical event. Goffman's social masking will function as conceptual lens in which the plastic of *Vortex* shall also be understood as a *socially interacting agent* which performs the operation of masking. The speculation that is here being nursed is the hypothesis that *masking is not reducible to humans*, but is a self-staging, socially orientated performativity which non-human objects, organic and inorganic, also have and do.

So, returning to the dramaturgical journey of *Vortex*, the opening scene presents this plastified mummy, dressed with a suit, a hat and sunglasses, which from stillness 'comes to life'. Soon, it takes from its wrist a plastic bag, quite an anthropomorphic figure, a doll or puppet with four limbs and a head, which dances playfully within the whirling wind. The big mummy interacts with it, and strips of more bag-puppets of different colors who join this twirling choreography. The emotional effect on the spectator is that of tenderness, an emotional empathy with the cute little bags that unpredictably dance within the vortex of air, now evidently a well designed aeolic cylinder which keeps the floating puppets within a defined ratio. The social dimension of these plastic puppets is visible, for they do not only interact with the human body on stage, but also between themselves, leaving Phia as another spectator of the little party. So far, plastic performs here a playful and friendly social role, it is its first layer of the social masking, the introduction scene to create an empathic social allegiance with the spectator. Curiously enough, this friendliness of the plastic is much relatable to the politeness and easy-going tone of many first time meetings between people, the social mask most of us use daily to interact with others we are just getting to know. I do

not render this mask as superficial but rather an adaptive function of the social mask as a means of survival. Until now, plastic promises friendship and playfulness.



Fig. 30: Phia Menard (2011) *Vortex*. Image taken from (June 2018) <http://www.cienonnova.com>

After some minutes, the anthropomorphic puppets leave the stage to give way to a one to one human scale plastic doll, with which the performer dances a tango-like sequence, indeed a courtship between woman and plastic doll. Again the shape of the material, the mask it assumes defines the social situation, spatially displaying the negotiation of power with variations of proximity of the two actors, an embodiment of the archetypal give and take dynamics proper of seduction. The transition from playfulness to courtship somehow points at the biological dramaturgy of life stages, from the birth and discovering of small childhood to the full-size, sexually performative adult. Just as a reflection, the upbringing and educational process of a child towards adulthood has a lot to do with the slow grasping of the adaptive embodied knowledge to *socially mask and unmask*.

Gradually the stripped plastic ceases to be anthropomorphic and is only an extended sheet twirling in the vortex. The performer is now in a struggle, clawing at herself to free her organism of its tight layers and the emotional dramaturgy takes a nightmarish twist. Phia is pulling from her guts a seemingly infinite plastic sheet, a procedure which lasts several minutes, the plastic hurricanes violently above her, forming a swirling cloud of plastic intestines. The scene is indeed oniric and obscure, producing an effect of dark surrealism, a tortured body who cannot free itself from its layers. Again the material has morphed its mask, before friendly and seductive, now a gigantic parasite, a visceral invader that is extracted

from inside only to haunt from above. The plastic has intruded in the human organism at the point of suffocation, the performer is exhausted yet fighting to free herself from the plastic layers which do not allow her cells to breathe. In my opinion, this scene is a beautiful and hopeless staging of an unsustainable ecosystem, where the human organism has been invaded and overpowered by its own creation, polymers, made from petrochemicals, used to quantify objects in favor of a capitalist agenda of endless economic growth.

Jumping to Ihde, the *intentionality of plastic* is given by the quality its name, namely the property of *plasticity*, the capacity of materials which can deform irreversibly without breaking out. That is why plastic is such a successful *wrapping, plastic wrappers*, the fundamental and material means of separating, isolating and counting objects, converting them into products. The intention of polymers, indeed its material will, is to *adapt around*. More successful than organic materials such as wood, ceramics or stone, plastic is lightweight, moldable, water and lipid resistant, and extremely cheap to produce. The excitement of the capitalist mindset with polymers has led to a massive, unsayable overproduction, its presence invading all ecosystems (oceans, skies and land) on the planet, to a point of no return and unpredictable consequences. This is how *Vortex*, with frightening accuracy, stages the unsustainable ecosystem, where plastic colonized the air, human skin and its organs, its extraction and administration no longer possible. The drive for unsustainable economic growth aims finally at extinction, the death toll on flora and fauna is already endless, where the ravenous extraction of petrochemicals and production of polymers will quite literally overpower and annihilate the objects and molecules of Nature such as water, oxygen, stone, dirt, and vegetal, animal, fungi and bacterial life.



Fig. 31: Phia Menard (2011) *Vortex*. Image taken from (June 2018) <http://www.cienonnova.com>

The final scene of *Vortex* is the following: exhausted by the effort of battling over an hour against its plastic layers of wrapping, the human organism seems to finally have reached its own skin. The performer lays covered in sweat and panting breathless. It seems that she has freed herself. But suddenly, she starts clawing in rage at herself, and for one split second, I thought she was really gnashing at her own skin. The whole audience gasped in awe, in actual panic. But no: Phia is actually ripping off her final layer, a synthetic "legging-like" cloth, the final, skin colored plastic wrapper that is keeping her skin from the exposition to fresh air. When we thought there was no mask left, there still was yet one disguising surface.



Fig. 32: Phia Menard (2011) *Vortex*. Image taken from (June 2018) <http://www.cienonnova.com>

Furthermore, *Vortex* is dramaturgically driven by the ongoing, endless operation of *unmasking*, the paired, complimentary opposite action of masking, without which masking as addition, as layering, as accumulation is not conceivable, for it is unmasking as *subtraction*, as *digging and removal* that allows for *change*. Unlike *Bimbo*, where the function of masking was to conceal and protect the pornographically staged woman, the masking of the body is the very *problem*, the *suffocating agent*. Unmasking allows the intimate to show, expose the inside, a renewal of surface, to later *remask*. This is true both in the theater as everyday life: in our social masking practices of self-presentation, an overload of masks leads to collapsed information. One does not speak to a colleague with the mask of son/daughter, lover, parent and friend at the same time, social adaptation instinct renders that useless for survival in groups. Likewise, both in traditional and contemporary theater, never has the masker wear five masks at the same time: the operation of unmasking is the transition from one output to the other. Within *Vortex*, it is the unmasking that demands for the huge amount of extra-daily economy of energy (Barba/Lecoq) of the performing body. The layers of plastic masks determine also the dramaturgical flow of the quality of movement, relatable to the emotional journey and the social aspect of the staging previously described. At first, the plastic mummy moves slow and clumsy, very calm (which does not mean effortless), portraying a rather innocent and curious creature who is discovering the dancing little plastic puppets. As the unmasking of the body continues, the intensity of movement becomes more visible: the choreography is sharper, quicker, more precise, for there is less material restricting its possibilities, allowing progressively for more air. This is mostly the tango scene. Then, during

the gut-cloud nightmare, exhaustion becomes very evident, the leaking of biology a necessity repressed by the remaining layers of plastic. The energy that has been used is so much that the performer slips, trembles, falls, burning its last fuel to continue the operation of unmasking, the freeing of the skin. The final impulse seen in the ripping of the synthetic panty-material is pushed by a new, self-destructive and aggressive energy which will finally leave Phia naked, unmasked and completely ruined in exhaustion, trembling like a whimpering newborn who is exhausted by the odyssey of birth. This is the dramaturgy of the outer layers, the surfaces, the changing live-masks that Lecoq argues for in the intense, embodied understanding of the performer with its mask, its material. Thus, *Vortex* stages an unsustainable ecosystem, where the body must reach its limit and more to fulfil the exhausting task of unmasking the endless layers of plastic that wrap the human body and fill the air.

3. Cyborg Mask: Katja Heitmann (2017) *Pandora's Dropbox*.



Fig 33: Katja Heitmann, (2017) *Pandora's Dropbox*. Image from (June 2018)

<http://www.katjaheitmann.com/work/pandoras-dropbox/>

"As its flipside, the society of achievement and activeness is generating excessive tiredness and exhaustion. These psychic conditions characterize a world poor in negativity and in turn dominated by excess positivity. They are not immunological reactions presupposing the negativity of the immunologically Other. Rather, they are caused by too much positivity. The excessiveness of performance enhancement leads to psychic infarctions."

Byung Chul Han (2015, 31).

The stage in the dance performance *Pandora's Dropbox* is, as visible in the image above, a hexagonal tapette of green synthetic grass with six performers on it. They dress in pastel colored synthetic outfits, makeupegd in the same neutral "skin tone". Light is white and evenly illuminating the stage while leaving the audience in the darkness, which is sitting on a single row of chairs, quite near the dancers. Similar to the other two already described performances, *sameness* is a dramaturgical law. The bodies blink, breathe, walk, turn, squat, lift each other in an absolutely mechanical, programmed, metronomed tempo. This performance lasts one hour, but if it lasted five or two days, the choreography would not

change. The dancers are ghastly perfect, their flawless perfectness erases their anatomical differences. They are maniquis, dolls who exchanged skin for exoskeleton, they are *cyborgs*. Peter Paul Verbeek wrote the article *Cyborg Intentionality* (2008) in order to further reflect and augment the ideas of Don Ihde concerning the ontology of human-technological relationships. Verbeek agrees with the notion that intentionality is not at all an exclusively human property, questioning the (until recently) hegemonic humanist postulate that the world of objects is passive and mute, lifeless and unintentional. The author quotes Stiegler (1998) who states that it is not humanity that invented technology, but rather the other way around, where the *Homo Sapiens* came into existence by means of technological realization (2008, 388). This originary technicity leads to a cyborg conception of the human, which has always been a "border-blurring entity, uniting both human and non-human elements." (2008, 387) Thus, the human-technology embodied relationship (Ihde) which the operation of masking entails illustrates quite clearly the cyborgian character of humanity. Verbeek stretches Ihde's typification of human-technological relationships, defining that of *hybrid intentionality* (392), where human and technology do not interact but *merge*, where the *transhuman cyborg* is an amalgam constituted of biology and technology.

Katja Heitmann stages the cyborgality of the human body in *Pandora*, where the dancer is a programmed, perfectly controlled avatar that does not know error, to the point that the performers execute the action of blinking all at the same time and tempo. They perform a partiture that is rigorously squared in time, no room for difference. Interestingly enough, mask is also a term in *computer science*, where the mask is data in binary bitwise operations (0 1), within a bit field:

```

      10010101    10100101
AND 00001111    00001111
= 00000101    00000101

```

The cyborgian intentionality of masking within *Pandora* is directed at the operation of programming the human as an android. The self-staging function of masking here is to erase its social aspect, for perfection in this staged programming is reached by *not adapting* and the lack of change. Masking in Katja Heitmann's performance is not only the outer surface of the face and body of her dancers, but is ultimately a procedure which stands for the equivalence between choreography and computing. The performers are strictly forbidden to react, adapt and improvise, they are technological tools that which carry out a series actions, the counting in their heads the only input, the execution of movement their output.

Furthermore, the process of intensification of the body as a consequence of this cyborg masking plays a fundamental role in the dramaturgy and discourse of *Pandora's Dropbox*. The Lecoqian live mask functions as an activation of the extra-quotidian economy of energy of all muscles and even of the mind, for absolute control and synchronization is the law of the small planet. The economy of energy that the performers must use is the economy of energy that a high precision machine has, clearly an unhuman one. This android, programmed perfectness of movement demands for such a huge amount of energy from the performers to maintain concentration and control in all actions, to the turning point that it is unsustainable anymore and *failure starts to leak through* of the cyborg exoskeleton. Roughly in the middle of the performance, the dancers cannot but start to tremble and quiver out of pure fatigue, bathed in sweat, their limbs shaky and increasingly imprecise, and yet still in the physical struggle to follow the dramaturgy of computerized programming. Suddenly the eyes of everyone are shedding a flux of tears, the noses as runny. The biology again commences to leak out of the cyborg, it cannot no longer be retained by the performers. Although there is no change in terms of *action* nor of *choreography*, the flowing fluids are the dramaturgical cracking point of the performance, where the cyborgian programming of movement and energy is no longer sustainable. The machinery collapses and the animal is revealed, where the operation of *unmasking* in *Pandora's Dropbox* occurs by means of *exhaustion*. The before perfect, impenetrable cyborgs are now porous, full of leaking holes, the mask cannot any longer contain the pulsing water that urges to surface.

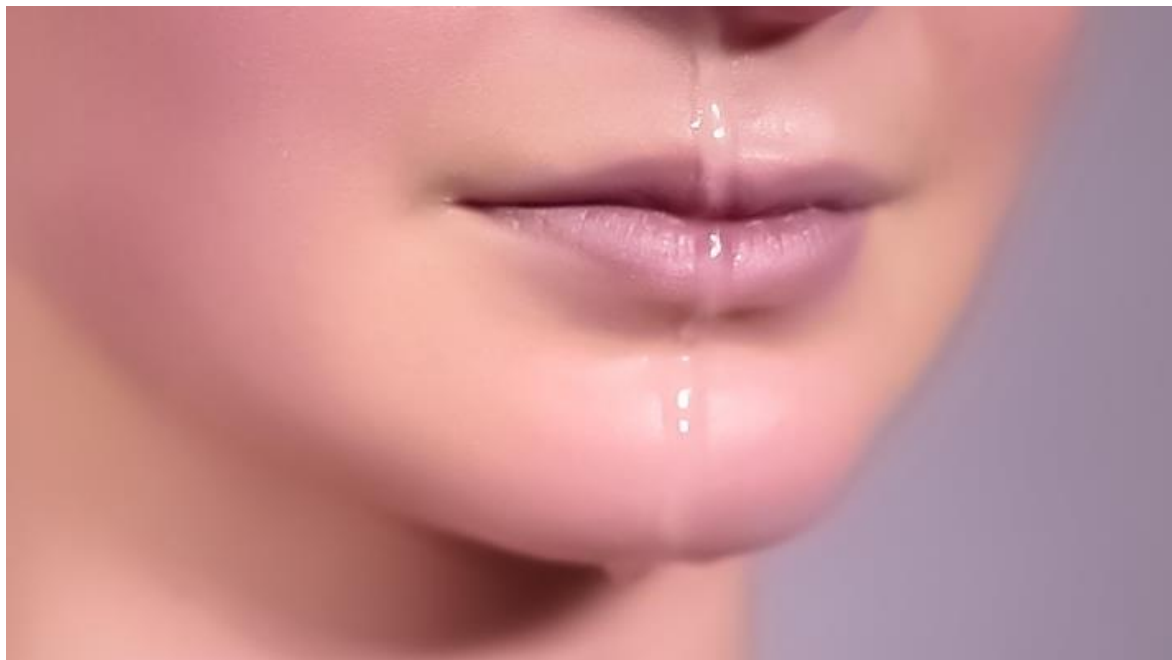


Fig 34: Katja Heitmann, (2017) *Pandora's Dropbox*. Image from (June 2018)

<http://www.katjaheitmann.com/work/pandoras-dropbox/>

Exhaustion seems to play a relevant role in the already three analysed performances as the price to pay, the backfire on the organism for certain unsustainable human practices and mindsets. *Bimbo* exhausted both audience and performers with the endless exhibition of pornographical content, the capitalist agenda for the female body as an activating tool for desire and consumption. *Vortex* exhausted Phia Menard with the endless unmasking of plastic layers that wrap the body and invade the world, to the point that polymers are monopolizing and extinguishing living ecosystems. Likewise, exhaustion is the physical consequence of the perfectionist performance enhancing drive of an economic model that seeks to be ever more effective in its own expansive intentions. In *The Burnout Society* (2015), Byung Chul Han reflects on the unsustainability of a the society of achievement and activeness is unbalanced by the excess of positivity and the poverty of negativity (2015, 31). The contemporary life system is intoxicated by a positive overload of action, speed, performance, efficiency, growth, accumulation, work, success and is extremely poor in rest, silence, immobility, slowness, shrinking, laziness, failure and sleep. The consequences are evident symptoms of excessive tiredness, exhaustion, fatigue, pain and psychic infarctions. Han distinguishes between a we-tiredness "where things grow less determinate, more porous and lose some of their resolution." (2015, 33) We-tiredness (*Wirmüdigkeit*) lowers the strictures of identity and loosens ego, producing friendliness, it trusts the World, generates empathy and community (*Mehr des weniger Ich*). Han's diagnose is that the society of fatigue has a serious lack of this healthy tiredness, and instead is rich in the tiredness product of self-exploitation in a society of achievement, namely the I-tiredness (*Ichmüdigkeit*). This exhaustion is not community bonding, ego lowering nor friendly, but is a lonely experience of weary self-destruction and slavery. "I-tiredness, as solitary tiredness, is worldless and world-destroying; it annihilates all reference to the Other in favor of narcissistic self-reference" (2015, 36). In a way, all three so far analysed performances can relate to Han's reflections on tiredness, for exhaustion is a common point as a relevant dramaturgical strategy to stage the consequences of unsustainable mindsets of our contemporary world. Exhaustion is both where the economy breaks and life is exposed. In the case of *Pandora's Dropbox*, it is exhaustion that cracks open the masked cyborgs, makes them leak and causes the empathy but also the critical awareness of the spectator, who can mirror her or himself in the walking androids as a subject who strives for perfect execution but is aimed to break. Maybe this exhausted collapse is our only future and only salvation.



Fig 35: Katja Heitmann, (2017) *Pandora's Dropbox*. Image from (June 2018)

<http://www.katjaheitmann.com/work/pandoras-dropbox/>

4. Masks in a Swarm: Rimini Protokoll, (2015) *Remote Santiago*.



Fig.36: Rimini Protokoll, (2015) *Remote Santiago*. Image from (taken June 2018)

<https://vimeo.com/118690380>

Over the last decade, there seems to be an increase of performances that literally attempt to mobilise the spectator and rethink the conditions of the stage. Spectators are engaged in promenade performances or walking theater, or they traverse the city by bike; they are driven around in wheelchairs, cars, by motorbikes or minivans, or drift across labyrinthine performance installations. Performers forsake the usual center-stage position and turn into guides, tour operators or voices on an audiotape. Theater spaces - the term I will use to designate the space in which theater takes place- are produced in the appointment of temporary and changing coordinates; contrary to the usual conflation with a theater building, they emerge in and as the process of performance as temporary situations.

Liesbeth Groot Nibbelink (2015, 12).

I worked as a performance operator or tour guide in *Remote Santiago*, the production of Rimini Protokoll. The audience is invited to the Italian mausoleum inside the General Cemetery, in the neighborhood of Independencia, just north of the city center. The participants receive headphones at the entrance of the building, are invited to wear them and are free to explore the spiraling staircases with tombs (see image above). A female voice is synchronized with all headphones, a Siri of sorts, which greets her audience and sets the

rules: the group is to move as a herd, to be guided by her voice. Thus, commences the performance, an audio city tour through and out the cemetery, into the J.J. Aguirre public hospital, to the street, racing through a park, into the metro station Cerro Blanco and out to the Plaza de Armas, into a church, dancing in a shopping mall, protesting through a market and onto a rooftop terrace at Estación Mapocho. The performance occurred twice a day for two weeks, during the summer (January) of 2015, with a group of around thirty participants each time.

First, it seems relevant to address the spatial and temporal coordinates that constitute this theatrical event. Rimini Protokoll often works outside the theater building, in performances where the stage is not a fixed and single place, nor is the event lead by performers who narrate a story. That is well the case of *Remote Santiago*. If there are no traditional performers, how are we to proceed with a dramaturgical analysis of the operation of masking within this city tour? As Liesbeth Groot Nibbelink points out, "Rimini Protokoll removes the focus on (the presence of) the actor... and redirects the attention to how the spectator is perceptively engaged with this performance" (2015, 12). Groot Nibbelink coined the concept of *nomadic theater*, a tool to describe a field of ambulatory performances which are produced by the flexible appointment of temporary and changing situations, where the mobility of spectators, performers and stage are in constant negotiation (2015, 12-13). The author continues elaborating on the political implications of *detritorialisation*, the occupation, destabilisation, displacement and undoing of territories (2015, 17). The stage in *Remote Santiago* is in constant variation, a walking process of reterritorialising the theatrical space.

In addition, the herd of spectators and guides which conform *Remote Santiago* navigate through the city as a *swarm*, defined by Van Eikels as a *collective experienced as an emergent effect* (2008, 86). In a swarm there is no center nor hierarchical group structure, where "the collective is fleeting, its cohesion is limited to the duration of a few movements executed roughly together by all participants, but never in exactly the same rhythm. (Idem). The swarm as a format of organization is a spontaneous event, driven by a certain cooperative initiatives that does not seek total consensus nor unidirectionality, and is also defined by its finiteness, by the fact that it will end. Van Eikels reflect on the political potential of swarming, describing a political shift in times where the centralized hierarchy and immobility of the agora (i.e parliaments, assemblies, congresses, etc) as the space of representative politics is no longer effective compared to a multitude of decentralized forums and initiatives, where the rapid and playfully efficient perception of options for action. (2008, 87). Thus, the terms nomadic and swarm, both with there spatial and political implications, seem very accurate to describe the collective, mobile event of theater that roams through the Chilean city.



Fig. 37: Rimini Protokoll, (2015) *Remote Santiago*. Image from (taken June 2018)

<https://vimeo.com/118690380>

A dramaturgical analysis of *Remote Santiago* by means of social masking (Goffman) may result productive as long as it is aware of masking as a self-staging practice that happens *within* and *from* this nomadic swarm. Self-staging practices performed by the walking spectators take place in at least two levels of interaction: between the spectators as a group of participants of *Remote Santiago* (within the swarm); and also in the interaction of the participants of the piece with citizen-spectators that are likewise swarming the city, but not with Rimini Protokoll headphones on (from the swarm towards the city). Within the swarm, social masking occurs most importantly from the *awareness of being observed*, and thus each participant stages her or his presentational information of 'self'. In *Remote Santiago*, masking is a function of *spectatorship*, not of the performer, as occurs in traditional theatrical masking practices and in the previous three cases of study (*Bimbo*, *Vortex*, *Pandora's Dropbox*). As I was a tour operator of the performance and experienced it over twenty times, I could always observe how people would negotiate roles and share information by means of social masking, mostly by establishing *eye-contact*. Within this swarming audience, the *directionality of social masking* was made evident (for anyone willing to observe) because there were some participants that were *seeking* eye-contact and others that openly *avoided* it. This is a very practical issue: some people would search eagerly within eye-level for connection with pairs, wanting to bond; whereas others would stare far above at the buildings, trees or skyscape, or groundwards, looking at their own feet, and when approached by an eager participant, they would just deflect the gaze of the Other by shifting head or eyeballs slightly. Within the swarm swarms a dynamic, non hierarchical web of gaze directionalities. Some masks were eager to share amazement, giggles or any other comment

on the robotic instructions of the Siri-like voice that guided the event. Of course the dancing in the subway, racing through the park and walking backwards rose the amount of intermask eye-contact communication. Conversation was not possible due to the presence of the headphones, so people would communicate with their facial expressions and body language. Within the gazes one could observe if the people knew each other previous to the performance or not, and could also sketch a guess of the type of relationship they had. Some masks would connect and flirt, some would joke, some would share a skeptical comment on the weird theater play they ended up in. Curiously enough, I found that the participants had a strong drive of staging their opinion of the performance and sharing it with others, and all of these subcutaneous interactions occurred at a level of social masking.



Fig. 38: Rimini Protokoll, (2015) *Remote Santiago*. Image from (taken June 2018)

<https://vimeo.com/118690380>

After an hour of performance or so, some micro-alliances were already established within the swarm and the dramaturgy of the audio-guidance grew increasingly more active, in terms of asking the participants to act in "weird" ways (protest, dance, walk backwards, run) in public space and to create awareness of their own performance for other, non-participating citizens that also walked the city. This is the phenomenon of masking that the spectators-performers staged for their mobile urban environment. Now, the self-staging practices occur at a collective, group identity level. When the nomadic swarm enters the hospital waiting room or sits at the church, the already present patients or devotees looked in surprise, amusement or offense, causing the group to behave quietly, to adapt to the present situation, sit in the back and try to "disappear". The deterritorialisation here only functioned partly, as for the place did not alter its situation, but only incorporated this swarm as a witness. On the other hand, when

asked by the Siri-voice to dance or protest, the swarm became tremendously outgoing, expressive and attention attracting, taking the territory for themselves, enjoying the spectatorship of confused citizens that watched them dance and also enjoying the collective unity and protection of the swarm as the group that contains their individual actions. This outward performativity sometimes attracted non-participants into joining in, invited by the dancing or protesting group.



Fig. 39 & 40: Rimini Protokoll, (2015) *Remote Santiago*. Images from (taken June 2018)

<https://vimeo.com/118690380>

Leaving the social character of masking at rest, the cyborgian embodied relationship of technology and human imbrication is also a relevant aspect of masking within *Remote Santiago*, where the headphones operate as an expanded masking element which perform certain intentionalities to meet a desired effect. Firstly, the headphones conform the visual identity of the swarm, for they are the uniting object worned by all participants of the event. The easiest way to distinguish an audience member (which was under observation and care of us tour-operators) was by the headphones. The headphones *masked* all spectators under the same identity in terms of belonging to the swarm.

Finally, in *Remote Santiago* neither do the social nor the technological intentionality of the masking operation enhance the *physicality* of the performers and spectators, at least in the terms of the previous three cases. Neither do exhaustion nor the leaking of biology come as a consequence of an extradaily economy of energy of the performing/spectating body. However, both the social masks and the headphones as expanded technological masks do demand for an enhanced intensity of *awareness*, by all means a bodily and biological process of the human organism. The masking operation within *Remote Santiago* asks mostly of an intensity of attention to the spectator, who must adapt quickly to a an unfamiliar theater format, carry out instructions and perform certain actions, maybe in a city or neighborhood unknown to her or him, and remain aware of the location and within the radius of the nomadic group. The participants were in a way responsible for the very cohesion of the swarm as such, and it happened in every performance that we tour guides had to search for someone who I had lost their attention and went astray.





Fig. 41 & 42: Rimini Protokoll, (2015) *Remote Santiago*. Images from (taken June 2018)
<https://vimeo.com/118690380>

Conclusions

As a first conclusion, I believe that the hybrid conceptual framework for masking in postdramatic functioned best within the first three cases of study, namely *Bimbo*, *Vortex* and *Pandora's Dropbox*. Although the performances are very different, they situate physical endurance and exhaustion as common processes for the staged bodies, and in the three cases masking performs a relevant function: in *Bimbo*, it shields the performers, allowing them to withstand the intense pornographical exhibition, as well as to critically strike at the agenda that capitalism has for the female body as an object of desire; in *Vortex* unmasking functions as the exhausting process of ripping off the endless layers of plastic that the unsustainable mindset of ever-growing economies has produced and wrapped even around the human body; whereas in *Pandora's Dropbox* the mask of the perfectly programmed cyborg is also impossible to sustain in time, and the flawless mask ends up cracking under the exhaustion, releasing the animal fluids. This relationship between exhaustion and masking seems to be a characteristic of certain postdramatic performances that wish to critically stage the human and environmental disasters our present political and economic apparatus are leading us to. In these three cases the interaction between the interdisciplinary theoretical framework and the dramaturgical analysis of the piece went rather smoothly, allowing for crossing between intentionality of materials, enhanced physicality and their social dimensions.

However, *Remote Santiago* was not as fruitfully informed as the previous three cases, and the most productive aspect of the conceptual framework for this artwork seems to be Goffman's social masking as a function of self-presentation in human interaction. The physicality of masking rendered itself pretty much useless for this case, and Ihde's object intentionality did not really match up with the social masking aspect of the Rimini Protokoll piece, also because the headphones were more a medium for perception than rather for social expression. Although the relationship of masking and *Remote Santiago* was somehow stretched, it did permit to understand how social masking as self-staging behavior is a function of spectatorship, at least within the trend of navigational, nomadic and participatory theater. To further inquire in masking and nomadic theater, probably an intermedial awareness from the field of performance studies, cultural practices and also communication studies could be beneficial. The social function of masking explored in this research could definitely be useful for those scholars interested in the performative and self-staging processes of social media and digital platforms. I see plenty potential within social masking, self-staging practices and our highly intermedial culture mostly outside the frame of theater, more so in daily life and digital platforms that somehow mingle with the portrayal of avatars, with the digital construction of identity. In addition, masking, self-staging, gender and queer

studies could also profit from each other. Also through masking, It is not so difficult to envision an allegiance between theater studies and psychology. The directionality of masking also proved useful to analyse the mobile organisation and interaction within the swarm, which is indeed a very postdramatic and contemporary spatial arrangement of theater as well as a political shape of contemporary collectivity. In this sense, masking could also be an interesting tool for those who are passionate about social architecture, expanded scenography and how the configuration of space informs social interaction processes. Even though "Remote Santiago" was the most forced analysis, its porosity presents a fertile soil for future investigation opportunities in which a masking awareness can be a valuable input. This all proves that masking was effectively recontextualised into a postdramatic context of debate and contemporary theatrical practice, and permits for rich dramaturgical analysis and plenty further speculation. Masks did not stay in the past, in museums, in indigenous rituals nor in dramatic theater: they are multifunctional, chameleonic, a means of embodying an identity, an aesthetic, a material, visual and ideological discourse. They are also a means of enduring, hiding, protecting, resisting. Masking, adaptation and survival are tightly entangled. The questions that *Bimbo*, *Vortex* and *Pandora's Dropbox* ask are: at the cost of what or whom are we surviving? Who is surviving and who is driven towards extinction?

As a final, more methodological reflection, this research has interdisciplinarity at its core: masks are, if anything, polyfunctional; the conceptual framework was certainly a very interdisciplinary crossing of fields; the selection of performances also proved too hybrid and heterogeneous to extract one single, overall conclusion. I think it was a strength: I see no reason to not make use of hybrid tools, of the overlapping of maps, of the collage and accumulation of unsimilar knowledge fields. Dramatic discourse exhausted itself, because the world cannot be portrayed as a single, causal-effect chain of action, a surveyable and human-centered small planet. Our small planet is plurality of messes. Theater and the world are too complicated to grasp anyway, so why not have a look through different sets of eyes? The dramaturgical functions of masking have manifested their worth in their plasticity.

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