Social Media and Online Performances: Online liveness through social
media dramaturgy in the time of pandemic

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Abstract

This thesis wants to claim the term "social media performance," part of the wider genre of digital theatre, by discovering social media's dramaturgical strategies. This exploration derived from the Covid-19 pandemic and the lockdown, and its huge impact on the sector of arts. Since theatres, cinemas, and cultural institutions remained closed, canceling and postponing scheduled events, some artists turned their focus on online platforms. Therefore, the starting point of this phenomenon of online theatre, during the time of the pandemic, is trying to discover how the social media platforms have the potential to produce online theatre, and how they can enable a sense of liveness in online performances. Thus, this thesis explores how theatre functions in moments of crisis, the role of social media in theatre-making in this context, and how this influences the experience of the spectator. The analysis is based on existing literature on concepts about liveness as *Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture (2008)* by Philip Auslander, intermediality in theatre by Sarah Bay Chang, Chiel Kattenbelt, Andy Lavender, and Robin Nelson in their book *Mapping Intermediality in Performance* (2010), interwoven with more recent publications about theatre and social media, like *Theatre, Social Media, and Meaning Making* (2017) by Hadley Bree and *Theatre and Social Media* (2016) by Lonergan Patrick. I examine the social media use and the video-sharing platforms in the current Social Media Culture, in order to elaborate on their use in the creation of online performances. In this thesis, I offer a dramaturgical analysis of two case studies, that use the same broadcasting platform Zoom, *Digital Silence* by Building Conversation, and *Enter Full Screen* by Nowy Theatr directed by Wojtek Ziemilski. Through this analysis, I explore the dramaturgical strategies of this video-sharing platform in the creation of at-home performances and examine under which pattern can this kind of social media theatre operate.

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Introduction

Digital Silence (2020) by Building Conversation, is a performance in which all participants sit behind their laptop cameras, in silence, for one hour, leaving the camera and microphone on in order to create a non-verbal dialogue enriched with digital sounds. Being in a Zoom call full of strangers, sharing all the same silence, the same sounds coming from a digital space created completely out of our room noises, where one can experience the feeling of togetherness, was my first experience of an online performance. The performative conversation provoked me to explore and dive into the genre of online theatre, especially the one created through video-sharing platforms, such as Zoom.

What made the online world as powerful as it is today was the spread of Covid-19 in early January 2020 and its ongoing spread through several countries, leading to a worldwide complete lockdown. That practically meant the shutdown of every sector of a country, meaning cultural activities too. People started working from home through their laptops, students attending courses through virtual classrooms, and theatre companies uploaded previous performances online, or they deliberately started creating performances for online platforms. The networking system gained more power and social media seemed the only way to communicate at the time.

During that period, I grew a fascination with practices that intersect social media and performance. I decided to explore the genre of "online theatre," mapping down performances that were deliberately created for the video-sharing platforms during Covid-19 or uploaded during that period. This type of online theatre is characterized by its accessibility since it is not limited to a theatre venue and, instead, utilizes an "online stage" that everyone can attend from all around the world; "online theatre" without borders. That explains why this endeavor is internationally aimed, due to the international accessibility of social media platforms. Social media platforms have embedded performativity and agency to create online performances, using their given tools.

My attendance at online performances via communication platforms, such as Zoom, triggered me to explore this type of theatre even more and left me wondering about the many possibilities of theatre. I kept asking myself how do we manage to

preserve theatre, performance, and art in general in a moment of crisis, as being in lockdown in a fourth wall room. Concomitantly, these reflections sparked a dialogue on what made those artists create a performance on a video-sharing platform, what was the reason behind that, what does it mean to create an artwork in precarious moments, and how do you reach the audience in that context.

Having this timely phenomenon in mind, my research topic is discovering how social media platforms have the potential to produce online theatre and how they can enable a sense of liveness in online performances. My thesis explores how theatre functions in moments of crisis, as in a pandemic, the role of social media in theatre-making in this context, and how this influences the experience of the spectator. This thesis, then, probes the genre of "social media performances" that emerged in the Covid-19 era.

The research that this thesis proposes is crucial at this moment in time because we need to investigate this type of theatre that emerged from a sociopolitical problem and, at the same time, determine the strategies in which it can operate. It is essential to explore if this kind of theatre can only function in these crisis circumstances, or if it can be further developed more exclusively by the artists, in the future. Thus, this thesis profiles the theatrical existence of its time.

Social media and technology in performance is already an organized framework. Many theatre companies are using technology in the core of their artistic work, such as Rimini Protokoll, Blast Theory, The Builders Association, and La Fura del Baus, Two Dogs Company, etc. Theatre academics, researchers, and scholars, over the years, have probed the concepts of intermediality (Freda & Kattenbelt, 2006), networking (Bay-Cheng et. al., 2010), digital and media use in theatre (Hadley, 2017; Leeker et. al., 2017; Artwick, 2019), and explored how technology and performance can engage with each other. Social media influences not only the performance and its theatrical experience at that moment but also the before and after of the event. This is what makes the analysis easier, to elaborate on this platform and their potential of making theatre, because they are already taking part in the performative action.

The research, however, examines an online digital theatre shift that was due to a current social problem and not because of an artistic pursuit despite its potential in this avenue. This is why this thesis seeks to offer a new perspective in the academic

discourse: by exploring the use of social media as a tool to create online performances during the current pandemic. The characteristics, and the way that online theatre can exist, are outlined via the specific dramaturgical uses of social media and communication platforms. What is important to note is that I am mostly orientated towards video-sharing platforms, such as Zoom. It is a platform that allows a lot of people to engage in one meeting-performance: it can bring together people from different places in the same call, and it provides a sense of togetherness among the members. Undoubtedly, creating a performance in a medium such as Zoom brings forward a different kind of liveness, a redefined here and now, and demands from the creators to follow various kinds of strategies to engage with their audience.

All of the above summarizes the main research question that this thesis probes: *What dramaturgical strategies characterize online performances during the Covid-19 pandemic?* The collection of the dramaturgical strategies, that this genre of theatre uses under a specific period, allow for further thinking. That leads to the sub-questions deriving from the main topic of this thesis. The exploration of *how do online performances enable the feeling of liveness?* becomes important in relation to the redefinition of the concept in the digital theatre. *How is the spectator/user being addressed in this context?* is another sub-question that emanated from the main question. The thesis seeks to examine how the spectator is reached by the artists in this "social media theatre context." This is related to *how is the theatre apparatus redefined in this context?* where everything has shifted in a digital theatre stage-space.

Using Zoom as the platform that will facilitate and broadcast performance is already a dramaturgical strategy a choice that the artist makes. The use of the tools and the options that the Zoom platform offers are part of this strategy. The spectator's approach, the instructions, to interaction during the performance, also demands dramaturgical thinking. The physical engagement, the concept of liveness, and intimacy become part of the dramaturgical strategy.

Theoretical Framework & Methodology

To address my central research question, and construct a framework on "social media theatre," I employ a variety of research methods including performance analysis and literature research elicited mainly from the fields of performance studies, theatre and social media studies, digital and networking theory. In addition, I conduct

dramaturgical performance analysis, and through it, I probe the above theoretical framework. In my research, I record the performances instances of that period, as a kind of method that helps me examine why these instances are important at that time and what does it have to say about the period that it was created in.

The majority of the texts deployed in this study were accessed online through the WorldCat search engine that the Utrecht Library offers, and some were personal in print books. The two case studies, *Digital Silence* and *Enter Full Screen*, were both available to me. Specifically, I attended (online) live via Zoom the performance of *Digital Silence* by Building Conversation in September 2020. For the online performance of *Enter Full Screen* directed by Wojtek Ziemilski, I had a prior recording that was shared with me and was 'courtesy of the artist' the piece on Nowy Theatr's Vimeo page and I personally attended (via Zoom) in March 2021. For the analysis of these two cases, I rely on my memory of experiencing these pieces (online) live, as well as in the written notes and reflections that I conducted mostly for the first case, in the available registration for the second case, and in the (online) "after talk" that both artworks had at the end of their performance.

This inquiry seeks to claim the term "social media theatre" or "social media performances" which can be part of the wider genre of "digital performance." I elaborate on central areas that we recognize in "in-person theatre," and examine how these areas are redefined in this online context. The concept of liveness is my main focus for investigating the experience of online theatre. What I have noticed during my online engagement, and specifically in online performances, was the relativity of the concept of liveness. Originally, this concept in theatre is easily related to the idea of "being there," at "here and now," and in the same space, while most has been related to the notion of authenticity of the event.

The type of liveness that I elaborate on in this thesis, is the one that relates to intimacy, which focuses on the act of always being connected (connectivity) to other people (togetherness). Liveness that generates intimacy is what actually makes the "social media theatre" to be considered theatrical. "Social media theatre" tries to develop strategies, aiming to retrace how to generate a sense of liveness and intimacy. This allows the experience to remain "theatrical." This kind of intimacy and theatricality is not associated with the physical proximity of the performer and the

spectator, as it has been defined by scholars as Lehmann in post-dramatic theatre (Lehmann 2006, 150).

I explore the digital and redefined intimacy that can be enabled through the online theatre, through the act of being all together in a video sharing platform, while we are enclosed in our houses due to the pandemic; the act of being together alone. Intimacy relates to the participatory culture, where the networking system can merge the local and the global together: glocalization (Bay-Cheng et. al. 2010, 98). The investigation of intimacy becomes even more essential at this point since it is placed in a period of isolation and loneliness, bringing forward the importance of the concept in the "social media theatre."

Also, liveness relates to the concept of online presence that demands a kind of participation in the process. It is important to explore, how the liveness of being present in a theatre venue is altered to the online presence of digital liveness in a virtual environment, and specifically in the social media environment. Although I am underlying both how the concept of liveness is incorporated into the social media platforms, and how social media can serve the concept of liveness. That leads me to the first sub-question: *How do the online performances enable the feeling of liveness?*

The starting point for my research has been Philip Auslander's book *Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture* (2008), which elaborates on the concept of liveness, and is described as a historical rather than an ontological condition of the term. Although I acknowledge the fact that the book is an old publication, it academically supports my arguments about online liveness, and, at the same time, it acts as a provocation for further development of "liveness" in my thesis, that corresponds to the current context. Moreover, I am focusing on the liveness and digital liveness binary as this is discussed in Auslander's more recent study on this matter (Auslander 2012). The reason for choosing Auslander's book as my starting point is that it is more technologically orientated concerning the concept of liveness, which can be paralleled with the current social media liveness that emerged in today's social media culture.

It is worth mentioning at this point that my main focus is not the technology and the Internet of online performances per se, but the social media use that allows the artist's work to be created. The nowness of the digital environment, the temporality of

the process, the cyberspace, the experiencer can be found in online performances (Bay-Cheng et. al. 2010; Lonergan 2016). This thesis examines not only the collaboration of technology and the artists but also technology as a constitutive element in order for the performance to be produced. That is why it is crucial to investigate my second sub-question: *How is the theatre apparatus redefined in this context?*

All of the above influence the concept of spectatorship and the way the artwork is experienced. This is also associated with the experience of the spectator-user in these platforms; the way that the spectator is treated in this context. Social media has the power to "expand the ways in which spectators engage a theatre work, and, equally importantly, the range of spectators engaging a theatre work" (Bree Hadley 2017, 3). The arrival of Web 2.0 in the late 1990s allowed users to interact with each other and experience a higher level of interactivity (Lonergan 2016, 16). The performative character of the Internet has always been there (creation of a digital self, the posting of the video, etc.), while the advent of social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube accentuated it more. Hadley Bree in *Theatre, Social Media, and Meaning Making* (2017) describes how the user-spectator is being addressed in this context. Amongst others, she elaborates on the performativity of social media and describes their participatory nature, wherein online sharing platforms users are not just receiving but also participating in the content (Hadley 2017, 23). I seek to reflect on the spectatorial experience and ask my third sub-question: *How is the spectator/user being addressed in this context?*

Therefore, Chapter 1 elaborates on the "Theatre and Social Media Culture" on the sociopolitical and performativity context that defines this period, specifically during the lockdown. Also, this chapter outlines the inherent performativity and theatre characteristics of social media how the artists have been using the social media platforms until now, and how this was changed during the pandemic. It is important to note the way the network system altered during the Covid-19 and led people to engage even more on online platforms. Consequently, this created new agentic relations with the digital environment (Wiederhold 2020). Social media literature is necessary to elaborate on the purpose of using them, how they function, what their features are, and how they can be used to create a type of online theatre.

In Chapter 2, I elaborate on certain media that can broadcast live videos linked with performances that were produced via them. With the help of the existing literature on intermediality in theatre, I interpret those platforms from the perspective of performativity; the way they allow a stage for one's self. Platforms such as Instagram and, Facebook live can be another form of theatre, a staging of the everyday self. Furthermore, in this chapter, I am collecting performances that were deliberately created or adapted to the digital online environment during the period of social distancing; those performances, helped me establish the theatrical reality of this period and visualize my arguments on the dramaturgical strategies that those platforms offer. I am also paying particular attention to the Zoom platform, which I will further elaborate on in the subsequent chapter.

In Chapter 3, I conduct a dramaturgical analysis of my central two case studies that are both deployed through the video-sharing platform Zoom to create their artistic product. The dramaturgical analysis of *Digital Silence* and *Enter Full Screen,* pertains to all my questionings which I am seeking to answer in this thesis. I attempt to establish the dramaturgical strategies of the online platforms based on this method. The dramaturgical analysis defines how the piece addresses the audience in the digital environment and how the meaning is conveyed.

For my study, I construct a method of analyzing online performances based on two existing dramaturgical analysis models.

Firstly, I am using the book of Konstantina Georgelou, Efrosini Protopapa, and Danae Theodoridou, *The Practice of Dramaturgy: Working on Actions in Performance* (2017), which treats dramaturgy as a practice, as a process of working on actions, posing questions, and productively disrupting or destabilizing the work. Secondly, the draft chapter offered to me by my professors in this Master program, Liesbeth Groot Nibbelink, and Sigrid Merx, "Dramaturgical Analysis: A Relational Approach" (2020)[1], who have created a model of dramaturgical analysis based on the interrelation between composition, spectatorship, and societal and artistic context.

The combination of the aforementioned models, suits the dramaturgical analysis of my case studies. This chapter of my thesis seeks to create a dramaturgical

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[1] The article is by courtesy of the authors, not yet published.

analysis model equivalent for analyzing "social media theatre." I am combining two dramaturgical models for the analysis since there is not a specific dramaturgical method for analyzing such performances online yet. Since these online Zoom performances are multifaceted to analyze, the combination of these two provides a layer of confidence in approaching those 'social media performances" by helping me approaching them in a more sufficient way.

In the Conclusion, I leave room for the concluding marks that emerge from the inquiry. I record the characteristic of the "social media performance" and specify again the dramaturgical propositions of the video-sharing platforms. I hope that this thesis and my endeavor can serve as a guide for more explorations on online performance and "social media theatre," which can emerge not only in moments of crisis but also out of artistic necessity. Finally, at the end of the thesis, I include a table of Appendix which includes all the mentioned online performances in this inquiry as well as, a small sample of online performances that occurred during the period of March 2020 until June 2021. The value of including a table is that it functions as a record in an archival format, which can then be used as a reference for theatrical research purposes and extracting findings.

Chapter 1 | Theatre in Social Media Culture

1. 1 Theatre under lockdown

The time of Covid-19 had a significant impact on the cultural sector. The theatres shut down, cinemas and museums got closed. Artists could not attend the rehearsals, and just like everyone, they remained under lockdown. As a result, artists started to explore new ways of communication and approaching their audiences. That was the time, around March, where the phenomenon of "online hysteria" occurred. Artists and theatre companies began to upload archival work from previous performances on digital platforms, such as on YouTube, as an act of sympathy to comfort people during this unprecedented time. Artists found a way to express their art even though art places were closed, as an act of resistance, expressing that art still operates amidst the pandemic.

The National Theatre in London, during the first wave of the pandemic, uploaded their previous performances chosen from their archive on their YouTube channel. Specifically, the NT at Home scheme became one of the most successful performances during the lockdown, broadcasting 17 productions and gaining more than 1.5 million views from audiences in more than 170 countries. The performances recreated a theatre moment via YouTube premiere, free of charge, accessible for people from all over the world, wherein under different circumstances they wouldn't be able to afford such performances or have the opportunity to attend (Akbar 2020).

Despite the success described above, there were artists who felt that they were once again marginalized by the government due to the lack of support they experienced, during this moment of crisis. The lack of recognition of the art workers aroused during that time sparked many initiatives.[2] Offering their artistic products without charge would mean that they would underestimate themselves and their own work, and it would contribute to the existing prejudices about how working on art is not a real profession.

In the middle of this conflict, artists and theatre companies took advantage of the lockdown situation, and seized the opportunity to explore the possibilities of

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[2] In Greece, for instance, the lack of governance support was the reason for the Support Art Workers movement to arouse, becoming the largest network of art workers in the country. The initiative's main goal is to "give visibility to the current needs of art workers in terms of state support" (Support Art Workers 2020).

online theater through digital and video sharing platforms and to investigate what online platforms had to offer. They placed themselves in the position of dealing with creating or adjusting an already existing project into the digital space; how they can deliberately construct a performance for these kinds of digital environments. Livestreaming on video-sharing platforms, such as Zoom, became the number one strategy, and it doubled the platform's users overnight. Theatre companies such as Rinini Protokoll, a theater group known for the use of technology in the constructions of their performances, experimented with adapting previous performances on Zoom during the lockdown.

The use of video-sharing and social media platforms increased significantly. Over 20% use in web-trafficking occurred at the beginning of March, when the first lockdown happened, while this increase includes social media checking more often than before (Wiederhold 2020). Due to Covid-19, the networking system was modified, and it led people to engage even more on online platforms and created new agentic relations with the new digital cultural spectrum. At this point, I am not only referring to performances but also other performative instances that had to move to the digital space, such as dance and music rehearsals through Zoom, digital at home Festivals, theatre workshops through video-sharing platforms.

For instance, during the pandemic, the Onassis Foundation in Greece created the Enter Project, which was a series of original works created in the conditions of the "here and now" in order to surpass it and bring us together through the world of our digital platforms." (Onassis 2020). This project, premiered live on the YouTube Channel of the Foundation, is a collaboration between artists from all over the world, with new works created under 120 hours and under lockdown conditions.

In addition, during the pandemic platforms such as the Tik Tok, with its huge exposure, Instagram with features like stories, Facebook with the option of going live, became another form of theatre, a staging of the everyday self. In her article "The Theatre of the Selfie: Fictive Practices of the Instagram Artist Body, Space & Technology," Sarah Sylvester elaborates on the performativity that these content-sharing platforms, and specifically Instagram, and how it offers the creation of identity and encourages storytelling (Sylvester 2019). That already gives us a step for the performativity potentials of the social media platforms, on creating a form of performance.

The *24 Hours Plays* is an Instagram account that was created for posting monologues written by popular artists and played by a lot of performers. Each of these monologues appears in each follower's Instagram feed, a small dose of 5 minutes theatre in a simple social media scrolling (Frank 2020). Therefore, theatre-makers used the video-sharing platforms and their inherent performativity as a tool to create performance and theatre during the time where theaters and cultural spaces were shut down. Approaching the audience through them, seemed the only way at the time.

1.2 Theatre in the Era of Social Media

Technology, social media, and theatre have been influencing one another over the last few years, especially after the growth of social media. The rise and the power of social media, especially during the last two decades, have changed and affected the cultural landscape drastically. This influence becomes clear as we can observe more and more performances incorporating technology in the making of an artwork, or sometimes the artwork is an achievement of technology in each whole. The entrance of television caused people to use technology in theatre even more. In order to compete with the rise of the medium, theatre began copying it, such as the incorporation of video during the performance. Living in today's culture, television at some point has been replaced by the internet, online platforms, and social media. As we move further in this digital and now social media age, it becomes harder to separate the digital from reality, since we are constantly in collaboration with these technologies.

The above is correlated with the normalization of social media in our lives, on a scale we cannot imagine a performer playing on stage without the use of a microphone; it will surprise us. Platforms like Facebook and Instagram were created in order to bring together friends, and socializing with other people by posting pictures, sharing songs, and chatting with your friends. It is this certain "creation of community" that people felt that they belong into and have a sense of intimacy between the members. The intimacy also relates to building a shared space in between.

Starting from more recent publications, the above argument led me to Bree Hadley's book, *Theatre, Social Media, and Meaning Making* (2017). This book brings forward the use of social media and the importance of these platforms and provides a social media theory exploring it through the lens of performativity. It also discusses the way that the spectator is treated in this context, specifically when placed in these digital environments. Social media has the power to "expand the ways in which spectators engage with a theatre work, and, equally importantly, the range of spectators engaging a theatre work" (Bree Hadley 2017, 3).

Hadley's investigation on the interrelation between social media in the theatrical experience as well as their interaction before, during, and after the ephemeral event of the performance is what I rely on to argue on the concepts of engagement and participation that correlate social media and performance. Drawing from her elaboration on the different aspects that social media interfere with in the creation of the performance, not only for artistic reasons but also for practical ones such as advertisement. This helps me argue on the increasing connection with those platforms, which is not only a consequence of the pandemic, but it has already been happening years before.

Influenced by the current pandemic and the shift into these digital platforms, I became interested in understanding the relationship between social media and theatre, as it is portrayed in the book *Theatre & Social Media* (2016). Patrick Lonergan explains the relationship that over the years has been built between social media and theatre. He outlines the rise of social media and its impact on theatre. Important in Lonergan's argument is the concept of connectivity that the Web 2.0 brought when it arrived, as well as his interpretation of social media that "is not just a performance space; it is also a theatrical space" (Lonergan 2016, 16). The interpretation of social media as a theatre space, as is one of Lonergan's proposals, sets the stage for establishing social media theatre, perceiving social media as a theatre stage, an ephemeral event, in which even if one records this online instance, the experience will always be vanishing, and it will always be becoming something else (Lonergan, 2016, 32).

The book provided by Sarah Bay-Cheng, Chiel Kattenbelt, Andy Lavender, and Robin Nelson, *Mapping Intermediality in Performance* (2010), further elaborated on the connection of technology, social media, and theatre. Although it is an old

publication, the concepts of intermediality, networking, and spectatorship, are structured and analyzed in the book by a collection of researchers in a way that is fundamental in my research, and in my current social media theater covid era, that I am setting them in. It draws from arguments on the technological space expansion, the cyber aspect of space, that has transformed the ontology of the performance, and places it in the current context. The performative product is "no longer limited to the here and now, but rather transgresses local contexts and environments and playfully connects to telematic and other remote spaces" (Bay-Cheng et al. 2010, 94).

By exploring these online-social media instances in this research, the actions are no longer limited to a physical setting but a digital one, a creation of a third cyberspace, a space in-between, which is also local and global. This experience affects the spectator, whose original role as an observer cannot stand in this context, but now has the role of the experiencer instead (ibid., 137). The interaction and intimacy, that traditionally theatre offers to the audience, also relates to the aspect of the online liveness and the creation of a new hybrid digital-virtual space, which, just like the other elements of the performance, are redefined by the digitalization or the use of the technology.

Furthermore, the recent publication of Claudette Artwick's book *Social Media Livestreaming Design for Disruption?* (2019) is useful for exploring the livestreaming aspect of social media, since my arguments are more focused on the platforms that can broadcast live videos. In order to elaborate on the thesis about the livestream performances that occurred during the lockdown, I need to dive into the livestream and specifically on the social media livestreaming letting us not only witness the event but also offer us interaction, participation, connection, and personal perspective (Artwick 2019, 1).

Theatre has proven that it can adjust to cultural phenomena that altered the cultural landscape, as it happened with film and television and as it is happening right now with the digitalization of almost every element of life, including theatre itself. The pandemic and the lockdown emphasized that we are living in a culture that is dominated by the digital. "Digital cultures are performative cultures" (Leeker et. al 2017, 9), as the authors of *Performing the Digital: Performance Studies and Performances in Digital Cultures (2017)* state. Theatre and its aspects ought to be redefined in this societal context in order to function successfully and still achieve its

goal, as long as it is communicating its meaning to the audience-viewers-participants-experiencers.

Finally, it is worth mentioning the growing number of articles that are specifically about online theatre and have been written during the pandemic. Most of them provide an insight on what is happening in the theatre sector, while they proposing to the reader several performances that they can stream online. On BBC's website, at the start of the pandemic, Vincent Dowd in his article "How live theatre is still running despite lockdown" presents the variety of live stream performances by quoting the artists that comment on their lockdown theater experience (Dowd 2020). Noticeably, the Guardian has created a whole section on their website called "Lockdown Culture" which includes articles and reviews about the self-isolation theatre (The Guardian, nd).

I acknowledge their contribution, especially the ones that provided me with insights about the performance live streams at that time. It is also remarkable the way that they review some of the online performances, which is more related to describing the performance rather than dramaturgically analyzing it as it is observed in "The Picture of Dorian Gray review – the ugly face of social media" by Arifa Akbar for the Guardian (Akbar 2020). Therefore, these articles have not yet developed a dramaturgical inquiry that would prove useful for this thesis, their contribution is limited to mapping the theatrical existence of the time.

1. 3 Liveness, intimacy, and Social Media

My personal attendance at online performances, made me realize the crucial role in this kind of "social media theatre," which generates an experience of intimacy and liveness. I elaborate on the different aspects of liveness in the context of the current pandemic specifically. It is essential for my research to explore how theater-makers have dealt with evoking experiences of liveness and intimacy via the internet, and especially through social media platforms in order to reach their audiences in a different way.

A fundamental book in this research is Auslander's *Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture* (2008). Auslander interprets the concept of liveness through the correlation of time and through the lens of technological cultural development. He

places the historical, cultural, and economic effects that led to the mediatized culture that we are today, and that is why he believes that describes a historical rather than ontological condition (Auslander 2008, xii). The arrival of film and television was a determinant for a theatre turn, where the theatre had to follow technological achievements. Paradoxically, these new means were formed based on the characteristics of theatre, and that had used economic impact on theatre.

When television incorporated the technological achievements of cinema (the camera on stage with close-ups), the theatre could no longer exist in television (ibid., 21). Noticeably, its ability to broadcast events as they occur, just like sports events, and its low-cost accessibility to watch from one's living room imitated the same immediacy and directness that theatre has, "going live," and it merged theatre, film, and radio and for its own use. "It was thought to make the home into a kind of theatre characterized, paradoxically, by both absolute intimacy and global reach" (ibid., 16). This is similar to what internet and the video-sharing platforms are doing now.

Live and liveness, as it is illustrated in Auslander's book, is a result of the development of the recorded technology that made it possible to identify representations as live, and thus live has meaning only in relationship with the recorded. (Auslander 2008, 56). The layer of liveness in his book that I found valuable for my thesis is the kind that is related to intimacy, which refers to the sense of always being connected to other people, of an endless technologically mediated co-presence with the other, either in its familiar, as chatting with a friend, or unfamiliar, interactions with the machine (ibid., 62). Inevitably, this type of liveness is related to the Internet, and all online communication and social platforms.

The normalization of the use of media, as I have already mentioned, is obvious not only in theatre but in daily routine, by keeping in mind the use of television, computers, laptops, and smartphones. Auslander in his book applies Nick Couldry's observations and refers to an "[O]nline liveness: social co-presence on a variety of scales from very small groups in chat rooms to huge international audiences for breaking news on major Web sites, all made possible by the Internet as an underlying infrastructure" (Auslander 2008, 61), a perfect description of today's social media liveness; liveness has obviously transferred to social media platforms. For Auslander "mediatized performance" is a performance that is circulated on television, like audio

or video recordings, and in other forms based in technologies of reproduction" (ibid., 4).

These platforms offer not only the ability to chat with friends but also give agency to other practices (videos, photos, etc.). We are constantly in front of a black mirror (black mirror as the black screen of television, computer or laptop screen, smartphone screen), connected to the internet, a constant liveness; the media are omnipresent. As Bay-Cheng points out that that "cyber temporality is always on the present moment the internet structure is "there" when I log on and when I log off" (Bay-Cheng et al. 2010, 90).

Auslander's later article "Digital Liveness: A Historico-Philosophical Perspective" (2012), published in *A Journal of Performance and Art*, discusses the digital liveness and the presence that derives from our interaction with technology. According to Auslander (2012, 10), digital liveness emerges "from a particular way of being involved with something" while the "experience of liveness results from our conscious act of grasping virtual entities as live-in response to the claims they make on us." Drawing from this specific argument, the liveness in the social video-sharing platform, specifically related to the recorded live performances that were broadcasted on YouTube channels or on the websites of many theatre groups. During the lockdown, it was observed that this "online theatre hysteria," [3] is a "patchwork" creation of online theatre pieces, an endless bombardment of online artworks.

Cormac Power in his book *Presence in Play: A Critique of Theories of Presence in the Theatre* (2008), outlines the concept of liveness in relation to the concept of presence. The reason for using this book in this research is that it elaborates on the separation between liveness and presence. The separation allows me to strengthen the concept of liveness that is used in the research. "Liveness is a relatively limited notion that applies only to events within a technological context" in contrast with the concept of presence, which is a more complicated and multifaceted concept (Power 2008, 166). Another essential reason why this research uses Power's book, is due to his elaboration on the wide range of the notion of liveness, by

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[3] I borrow this term from the Greek director Antzela Brousko, from her interview "The Future of Theatre? Antzela Brouskou: We have become consumers of an unspecified free time" (my translation, original title in Greek: Ποιο είναι το μέλλον του θεάτρου; Άντζελα Μπρούσκου: Γίναμε καταναλωτές ενός απροσδιόριστου «ελεύθερου χρόνου») conducted by Alexandros Diakosabba. She elaborates on the future of theatre and the consequences of the pandemic in the cultural sector.

presenting arguments from other scholars. Thus, while Peggy Phelan defines a performance by its necessary disappearance, Auslander defines performance by its very participation in the "circulation of representations of representations" (Power 2008, 170). Therefore, for Phelan, "live" performance is not more real (and authentic) than a recorded performance, but it provides the potential for highlighting the problematic status of the real in a mediatized age" (ibid., 170).

The above brings forward Lonergan's interpretation of the concept of liveness in relation to the internet, contradicting what Phelan proposes. Although he acknowledges Phelan's argument that the two main characteristics for defining a theatrical experience are the concept of liveness and ephemerality, he argues that these two can also be recognizable in the online context, thus in an online performance that Phelan denies. As I have already mentioned Lonergan believes that an online context, as an online performance, is not just an archival piece, a recorded version that can be repeated exactly the same, but instead as the internet is constantly "modified by the users" the same applies for the online context, which is "always disappearing it is always becoming something else" (Lonergan 2016, 33).

Drawing from this, I understand that the theatrical experience in an online performance, such as an online performance on YouTube, can never be repeated and can never be the same, even if the performance does not occur at the moment, being recorded version. Something will always be different the setting around me, the mood that I have that day, the different advertisements that may appear, and the new comments that the viewers leave on the comment section. Therefore, this constant change and modification that social media platforms have but also allow to the user, as Lonergan continuous with his argument, is similar to the liveness of theatrical event leading to the fact that "social media is always being performed in real-time before us" (ibid. 2016, 340).

This feeling of the liveness of an event that is unfolding in real-time, recorded or not, is interrelated with the creation of an intimate feeling to the viewer, that is being built through social media and video-sharing platforms. During my research, it was challenging to find a proper theoretical framework for contextualizing the concept of intimacy in relationship to liveness, which can additionally be related to the mediatized form of theatre. In the existing literature, the concept of intimacy in theatre has been associated with the feeling of being together physically in space.

In the old publication of Roger Pierce's article in 1968, "Intimacy in the Theatre," he elaborates on many arguments around the concept of intimacy, which does not seem entirely separate from the perception of the concept of intimacy today. Its relevance from over the years is obvious since intimacy is related to concepts such as closeness, nearness all in relation to the architecture and physical proximity (Pierce 1968, 147). A couple of decades later, in the post-dramatic theatre, intimacy was still associated with physical proximity. Lehmann in his book *Postdrmatic Theater* (2006) refers to the kind of intimacy that is related to the building of a shared space, which is equally shared by performers and visitors (Lehmann 2006, 122). Similarly, Alan Read in his book *Theatre, Intimacy and Engagement: The Last Human Venue* (2008) refers to the intimacy that is related to the proximity of relations (Read 2008, 1).

After searching how the concept has been discussed through the years, I found that the existing literature was inadequate for this thesis since they all perceive the concept as it is defined etymologically; physical closeness. There is a lack of defining the concept in each totality and placing it in the current digital culture. It does not place the notion of intimacy in the digital theatre. Therefore, I am using the above literature, even though it is comprised of old publications, to "re-articulate" the concept of liveness that is suitable for this research. The shared space between bodies can be transferred and redefined in a digital form in the "social media theatre," such as virtual bodies in the shared space of Zoom, YouTube, Instagram, and other video-sharing platforms that artists find their "stage" to create their artworks during lockdowns. Furthermore, I am defining the concept of intimacy through the concepts that are inherently in the fundamental characteristics of social media, such as community, togetherness, participation, and engagement concepts that Hadley based her discussion on the co-creative profile of those platforms (Hadley 2017, 24).

I propose a virtual kind of intimacy, that is not associated with any physical involvement, except the individual physical involvement of the user-experiencer-participant-spectator of the social media performance that is behind the computer screen. Platforms like Facebook and Instagram were created in order to bring together friends and promote socialization with other people by posting pictures, sharing songs, and chatting with your friends. It is through this creation of a community that people gain a sense of belongingness as well as foster intimacy between the members.

The intimacy that assemblies a shared space in between, the intimacy that a group of people is viewing together a performance on YouTube or a group of people that they are together in a Zoom call, as it would happen if they were together in a theatre auditorium. Specifically, I draw on the concept of intimacy in contrast with the isolation that the Covid-19 caused in that period of time; the need for intimacy at that time. I am trying to find answers to the question of whether or not is intimacy is a part of the social media culture, and how technology, the pandemic, and social media have revised the notion of the concept.

1.4 Dramaturgy in Social Media performance

The research investigates how artists develop and create performances through video-sharing platforms, such as Zoom. To answer this inquiry, a dramaturgical approach is more suitable. This method allows me to not only answer but also develop a further questioning on how these video-sharing platforms operate and how they can be used in a way that is more bearable for the artists and the spectators. There is not exactly a dramaturgical model to follow on how to approach those online instances that were produced through video-sharing platforms and limited chronologically in the Covid-19 era. That is why I attempt to combine the following two dramaturgical models.

First, I am using the book of Konstantina Georgelou, Efrosini Protopapa, and Danae Theodoridou (2017), *The Practice of Dramaturgy: Working on Actions in Performance*, that treats dramaturgy as a practice, a process of working on actions, poses problems, and questions, productively disrupt or destabilize the work. While I understand that this book was created to analyze artistic processes, it can still be applicable to performances, and specifically to social media performances that are yet not analyzed, and they are still in an embryonic stage, in a way, of figuring out how to approach them dramaturgically. These instances have a lot of room to grow and expand.

Drawing from the principles that the book proposes, and specifically, the principle of mobilizing questions, as a process that does not want to give answers but to push further questionings, is where I rely on, considering the constant modifications of the video-sharing platforms, in order to further question the

dramaturgy (Georgelou et. al 2017, 20). The book strongly suggests the notion of togetherness, the shared responsibility, while emphasizing the social experience. The "dramaturgy as a type of working that belongs to many that are taking part in an artistic process" as a crucial element for the principle of commoning (ibid., 31) brings forward the dramaturgical practice that directly relates to societal engagement and experience. This connects with the social context found in "social media" and "social media performance," that act of togetherness in the artistic process.

Secondly, I am using the dramaturgical model by Liesbeth Groot Nibbelink, and Sigrid Merx (2020) in the, "Dramaturgical Analysis: A Relational Approach." Their method of analysis is based on the interrelation between composition, spectatorship, and societal and artistic context. I find this model suitable for the dramaturgical analysis of the "social media theatre" that I want to claim because their method relates to the "world at large" (Groot Nibbelink & Merx 2020, 3). Drawing from the "plane of composition," I relate and explore the strategies that the artists had to take into consideration when building a performance in a video-sharing platform. This leads to the "plane of spectatorship," finding how the spectator being addressed via these platforms mediated through the computer screen. That ends up to the "plane of context" since I take into consideration that the performances are constructed during the period of a lockdown due to the pandemic in a culture that is, now more than ever, dominated by social media (ibid., 11).

The dramaturgical models that my thesis combines seek to bring forward that this type of "social media theatre" needs to be explored even further since the times demand a proper method of approaching such performances. What this chapter unpacks is the theatrical existence of the social media culture, which was amplified even more due to the pandemic, a line that I further develop in the subsequent chapters.

Chapter 2 | Social Media Performativity

2.1 Social Media staging, livestreams, and social distancing

During the full and global emergence of the lockdown in March of 2020, as already mentioned before, a lot of practices of our everyday life switched into the digital environment. Consequently, this meant that working, studying, and socializing online and from the confines of one's own home became the norm at this time. The pandemic altered the networking system and made it impossible for people not to depend on it. Social media seemed to be the only way for people to communicate at the time and to keep up with the current news. The internet traffic rose significantly by 25%-30% compared to before (Branscombe 2020).

The normalization of online activities increased the usage of video-sharing and communication platforms. Universities, schools, and companies had to find the most suitable, easy to operate, comfortable, and functional digital-online environment to host their activities. The same was applied by theatre companies since the theatre venues were closed. Many theatre organizations found a solution in uploading previous recordings of their performances on social platforms such as YouTube. Others started experimenting with video-sharing social media platforms by using their features to create new performances adapted to this digital environment.

Undoubtedly, social media platforms, especially the ones that can share video and images, offered a stage for the everyday self. Platforms such as Instagram, where video and image exchange is at the core of their use, allow users to not only share their social life but also to build a whole other digital self. "Our social media identifies are not just a representation of who we think we are, but a performance of how we wish to be seen by others" as Lonergan states in his book on the elaboration of our digital persona (Lonergan 2016, 28). Therefore, social media becomes a performance stage not only for people but also for artists and theatre companies too.

Social media, in a way, has already been practicing social distancing. It is one of the reasons why these platforms have been gradually updating their systems and data which a whole vocabulary of performing icons, in order to engage the users and create liveness and intimacy more visible between friends. The ability to comment on a posted picture of your friend is connected with the theme of interaction and

participation we find in post-dramatic theatre; in a way, the green dot icon that stands for being "active" right now in the chat, the performing reactions on a post (the "like button," "care button," "sorry button," etc.) that represent our key feelings, or the performing emojis that a lot of people use instead of words, are some valid examples. The above is related to what is called Social Presence (SP) "that allows a user to feel that everyone is psychologically present" (Fernández-Robin et. al. 2020, 503).

The "participation by the beholder as a user," "the feedback loop" of co-evaluation, where "the perception becomes production," and the creation of "net-based community," are observations from Meike Wagner and Wolf-Dieter Ernst about networking (2010) in the book *Mapping Intermediality in Performance*, which illustrates what these digital social platforms built (Bay-Cheng et al. 2010, 175). The variety of social media and video-sharing platforms-spaces that each artist used during the pandemic is linked to Lehmann's remarks about the space in the post-dramatic theatre, where it presents itself as an autonomous co-player that is coming to life (Lehmann 2006, 152). Technological achievements are the reason that online theatre and digital performances can occur.

Social media platforms have developed the ability to produce live content. Livestreams have, at their core, two crucial elements, there will always be a streamer/performer or, producer of the content and viewer/spectator, who consumes the offered product, while "time bond" between them based on the fact that the streaming unfolds in "real-time" (Fietkiewicz 2020, 227). There are a lot of different types of livestreams depending on which platform they are being broadcasted. A lot of theatre companies find YouTube as a suitable platform to stage their performance since "it offers livestreaming that can be seen by the public and can be saved and searched for later viewing," thereby allowing a post-theatrical engagement with the audience (Artwick 2019, 9).

2.3 *"Welcome to Zoom Theatre"*

One of the most shared and used platforms during the lockdown has been the Zoom Communications platform. Specifically, during the isolation in March, due to Covid-19, Zoom doubled its users from 100 million to 200 million (Yuan 2020). What makes Zoom so popular among other video communication platforms is the

range of features offered to the user, ease of usage even from a less tech-literate user, its quality on calls without frictions. Federal governments, schools, universities, religious committees, regular people hangouts chose Zoom to communicate online. The platform depends on its simplicity, its lightweight format, and on its practical features, such as Gallery View, which allows people to see all the participants at once. It can also accept up to 1000 participants[4] (Antonelli 2020).

Many artists and theatre companies gravitated toward Zoom as their "digital stage." The "Zoom Artists" that created performances for the at-home audience deliberately broadcasted for the digital environment. *Allegedly* by Mallika Taneja, *Impossible Conversation* by Building Conversation, and *Call Cutta at Home* by Rimini Protokoll are amongst the many performances all broadcasted through Zoom and created an interactive engagement between the viewers.

What makes Zoom different from other aforementioned platforms, such as YouTube, is its direct engagement with the spectator; the direct virtual interaction. Therefore, I will use dramaturgical analysis as a method for my two case studies in the upcoming chapter; *Digital Silence* (2020) by Building Conversation and *Enter Full Screen* (2020) from Nowy Theatr directed by Wojtek Ziemilski. The analysis will allow me to establish the dramaturgical strategies of Zoom and explore how a performance is designed in this context. At this point, it is vital to clarify that I am not aiming to compare the online theatre or the "social media performance" versus the in-person theatre or performance and declare which theatre is the best. Instead, I am exploring the space of "social media performance" and social media that have the agency to build a performance.

I perceive Zoom as if it would be considered as a theatre that can host staged and experimental performances. The Zoom meeting screen is generated into the digital stage, while the waiting room into the digital foyer. The host of the meeting can be thought of as the director of the performance, managing the view of the spectator and having control of the meeting features. The Gallery View option is considered as the orchestra. The audience seats could be transformed into their rectangle frames, randomly chosen by Zoom's algorithm. In this theatre, you are only

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[4] Zoom can support 1000 participant, but requires the Large Meeting add-on.

sure about your seat in the digital orchestra, the second rectangle in the first row.[5] The "Zoom Theatre" is a theatre without borders or limits and, such as, can merge people from around the world simultaneously, live, "alone and together."

Lastly, it is crucial to clarify that Zoom meetings or online performances do not render one "virtual." Attendants are still physically present somewhere, but through the use of technology and the way that is trying to mimic, real interactions, intimacy, and presence, there is often a tendency to think of one's self as virtual. In this context, the spectator is no longer an observer, but an *experiencer* of the digital performance "practiced in dividing her/his attention simultaneously between screened and non-screened versions of reality" (Bay-Cheng et. al., 137). The expression "all the world is a stage" (Kattenbelt 2006, 38), can be paraphrased into "All the room is a stage," to demonstrate the transformative power of digital performances; our rooms are the stage or an expansion of the stage.

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[5] Here I am referring to the basic format of Zoom. Also, Zoom.us keeps updating, so changes may appear to this.

Chapter 3 | The Zoom Artists: *Digital Silence* and *Enter Full Screen*

During the lockdown, many artists and theatre companies gravitated toward Zoom, as their "digital stage." In this chapter, I discuss two performances that were deliberately created for the audience at-home and were broadcast on Zoom. Specifically, I will dramaturgically analyze *Digital Silence* (2020) by Building Conversation and *Enter Full Screen* (2020) from Nowy Theatr directed by Wojtek Ziemilski.

I chose these two performances because they approach the Zoom platform differently, considering what each of them wanted to achieve. Also, I have attended both performances, so I rely on my research on a primary source and my personal theatrical experience. I will be deploying and combining two dramaturgical models for their analysis, using the book *The Practice of Dramaturgy: Working on Actions in Performance* (Georgelou et. al. 2017) and the article "Dramaturgical Analysis: A Relational Approach" (Groot Nibbelink & Merx 2020), since there is not a specific dramaturgical method for analyzing such online performances yet. The analysis will allow me to establish the dramaturgical strategies of Zoom and how each performance is designed in this context.

3.1 *Digital Silence*

On the 21st of September 2020, Building Conversation presented *Digital Silence* via Zoom, a performance that aims to create ways of talking together online. *Digital Silence* was an already existing project, an in-person performance, that has been adapted to Zoom. The team wanted to explore how the performance could work in the digital environment and to establish a third hybrid-cyber digital space. As they state on their website, the participants attend the event both physically and digitally, both present and absent, both in their rooms and on the web; "floating between bricks and pixels" (Building Conversation 2020).

Before the performance starts, an email is sent to the participants to inform them about some practicalities, such as what to prepare, how to attend, when to join in, the link for the meeting and who to contact in case of needing any technical support. The performance starts with an online gathering of people in the Zoom

environment, where Lotte van den Berg, the director and one of the curators of the performance, welcomes and explains the aim and the structure of this digital performance to the attendees. The piece is divided into three parts.

Upon entering the performance, people start appearing on the Zoom space screen, inside their individual rectangles, attending from their rooms. The Zoom environment becomes a digital foyer overtaken by an atmosphere of excitement alongside a feeling of awkwardness. There is the enthusiasm to be part of a theatre experience that has not been explored and tasted yet. Once all the participants have joined the meeting, the event began with a welcome, alongside some practicalities. The instructions are essential to establish a mode of view on this new and vague way of attending a performance. Although using these kinds of video-sharing platforms is normalized and familiar to many users, it still feels a bit bizarre to perceive them as a theatre stage at the time.

I remember that it was the first time I was using Zoom, ironically, and that made the experience of the performance even more extraordinary for me. I did not know how to use it properly at the time, so the waiting time, in the beginning, was necessary for me to adjust to the digital environment. At the start of this digital encounter, a specific comment on the Layout View made by Lotte van den Berg helped me engage with the performance properly. She pointed out how to change the Layout View to Speaker View to Gallery View. That meant that I could see all the participants simultaneously, in one big Zoom call.

The clarification of the process is essential to understanding the theatrical experience that the piece wants to explore and establish. The instructions are used as the first dramaturgical strategy in *Digital Silence*. The split of the participants into two groups in two different breakout rooms of Zoom by the host is an exciting moment since the participants are relocated into another digital space within the larger one. I recall being eager to discover if I would be in the same group with any of my university classmates that attended the performance with me. This unknown, improvised essence of the performance is another dramaturgical method, provided by the platform itself.

The second part is at the core of creating the performance, the actual performative conversation, as it builds throughout the sounds of each one's room, a

shared digital stage. The instructions for this process of doing theatre were simple. The participant only needs to turn the camera and sound on in the Zoom platform, position their laptop so that their room is visible to the camera, and go behind the laptop screen for an hour (figure 1). The rooms become mediatized and hybrid spaces from the moment that the camera transmits them into the digital environment of Zoom.

As the performance begins, the attendees are both present and absent from the process. They are physically in their rooms and virtually in the digital space of the Zoom call. In the beginning, it seems that there is silence, a non-sound space, but then the silence breaks as the first noise bursts into the participant's room. Zoom selects the loudest sound to broadcast to the meeting. As a result, a game between the sounds deriving from each participant's room begins. A loud computer buzzing noise overwhelms the Zoom meeting, while distant laughs from afar try to take over. A song echoing from another room transfers you to a party theme, while it is being interrupted by the sound of a dry cough.
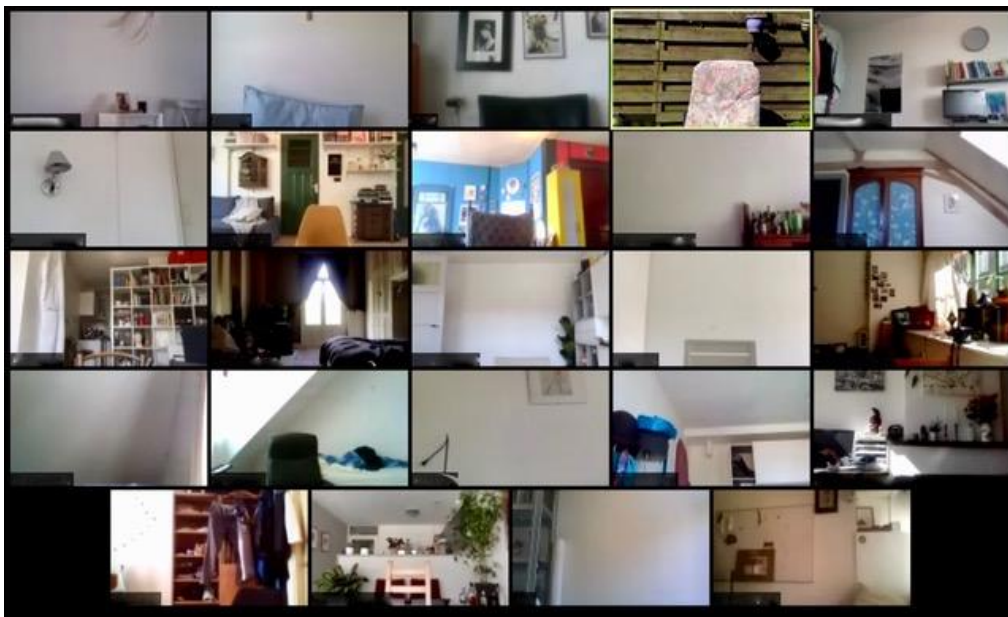

Figure 1: *Digital Silence*. Photo by Building Conversation. Accessed from
https://buildingconversation.nl/en/conversation/digital-silence/

At some point in the performance, I remember allowing myself to close my eyes, where suddenly I feel and hear the sound of my heart, as it bounces, and the noise of my clock in my room as it tick-tocks. Thus, the sounds coming from the space of Zoom blended with the sounds emitted by my room. A multitude of sounds is

occurring simultaneously, thus creating the third cyberspace of non-verbal communication. Our rooms have become the extension of the digital stage of Zoom.

After one hour, everyone gathered again in front of their laptop screens. I recall being one of the first to appear in the Zoom meeting, and it was interesting observing the different "stages": the rooms of each participant, as they were coming back to their laptop screen. The curator of my group, Katja, informed all the attendees, that it was time for a five-minute break, preferably taken on a balcony or a yard, to breathe some fresh air. The break-time on the balcony was liberating for me. This builds a physical awareness although it is online, that is perceived as a dramaturgical choice. Also, it accentuated the act of being alone together, since we are apart together as long as we breathe the same air and live under the same sky. It brought forward the act of creating "alone together" since we are participating in performative conversations from different parts of the world simultaneously.

After the brief intermission, the structure leaves room for observations in a twenty-minute talk with the rest of the group, to share experiences. I remember a participant saying that they were excited to participate in creating something with "strangers." A girl stated that she found it funny hearing the repeated buzzing noise of a computer. She also commented that she cleaned up and tidied up her room before the performance because of the camera. Throughout the performative conversation, I felt that time flew away extremely fast. It was that moment where I understood that everything is relative: time, liveness, intimacy.

The last part happened after the end of the break-out rooms. The participants were transferred to the primary Zoom environment for the ending of the performance. The closure was determined by the participants, who were free to leave the meeting whether immediately or not. The responsibility of the performance is in the hands of the participants, who are active members in the process and are part of the dramaturgical strategies. The "departure" of the last Zoom participant was the end of the performance. I was one of the last ones to leave the meeting because I was still attached to the piece. Also, I was wondering what more can this process bring forward regarding doing theatre online.

3.1.1 Building Conversation Together-Alone on Zoom

Groot Nibbelink and Merx (2020) argue about three interrelated planes: composition, spectatorship, and context of dramaturgy, to which the performance relates. The plane of the composition exposes the strategies that are creating the performance, by always associating to the other two planes: spectator and context (Groot Nibbelink & Merx 2020, 4). In this case, *Digital Silence* builds upon the concept of liveness and togetherness, which is entangled with how the spectator is being addressed, engaged, and presented. The attendees are forced to participate in the "here and now" of the digital space, in the Zoom meeting, with everything that surrounds them, such as the ambient noise of their rooms. The liveness is a direct dramaturgical tool that the performance relies on. The spectator has no clue which room the sound derives from during the performative event. The lack of vision in the Zoom stage is a crucial element for the piece since the spectator sinks into the conversation and focuses only on the sounds. Thus, the theatrical experience is organized in this way, so it can provoke conversation between sounds and build a third-cyber space.

Digital Silence is "going against" the video-sharing platform that it seems to be servicing. The main feature that Zooms offers is seeing each other in its digital environment. And yet, the performance eliminates this aspect during the actual performative conversation, but still manages to ensure that the spectators of the piece are feeling connected to each other in the Zoom call. That happens through the building of non-visual and non-verbal communication a dialogue between sounds. The participants were invited during the one hour of the performative conversation to be present with their sense of hearing.

The performance forms the aspect of liveness connected with the homemade condition, attending it from our homes, thus creating a familiar and friendly kind of liveness that offers intimacy. The intimacy when someone is invited to someone else's room, to their personal space, is adjusted to the digital space of Zoom. The participants are attending from their familiar and protected environment of their home-rooms but are simultaneously exposed to the digital-cyberspace of the meeting. Specifically, they are exposed to online liveness, which Auslander discussed in his book, as the "online liveness: social co-presence on a variety of scales from very

small groups in chat rooms to huge international audiences for breaking news on major Web sites, all made possible by the Internet as an underlying infrastructure" (Auslander 2008, 61). Therefore, intimacy acts as another dramaturgical agent in the building of the performance.

The online Zoom environment of *Digital Silence* brings forward a "group liveness," a building of a community within people who are watching and participating in a performance, at the same time and together. Consequently, the liveness of the Internet transmits the performances as it develops, thus creating a digital here and now, "in which multiple aspects of a single production occur in multiple locations simultaneously" (Bay- Chang et al. 2010, 99). *Digital Silence* occurred simultaneously in the cities of The Netherlands, in Greece, and in the United States. A noticeable non-border Zoom theatre, allowing as many people to have access to the performative conversation from all around the world, from different time zones, but still, together at "here and now."

The "here and now" of the digital liveness generates a specific relation between the self and the other, the certain involvement with something, where "liveness results from our conscious act of grasping virtual entities as live, in response to the claims they make on us" (Auslander 2012, 10). In this case, the digital liveness is attached to the performative conversation in a Zoom call, where the spectator is engaging with several people from different places. It is the involvement and the commitment of the attendee to be part of a performance virtually within a digital environment.

The online environment, via Zoom, in *Digital Silence*, forces us to explore new ways of muting, between the attendees, while "the intermedial experience seems to entail a not knowing; the spectator does not know what they see, what they hear, what she feels, where she is or what is what," which sums up the online performance (ibid., 219). Lotte van den Berg, as she told us in the debriefing,[6] shared that what this digital performance wants is to build a conversation without words, a nonverbal communication, but with sounds. Silence is at the core of the performance, becoming the main dramaturgical choice, where all the other ones are surrounding it.

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[6] An after talk with Lotte Van den Berg about the performances *Digital Silence* and *Dying Together* was held by Utrecht University online via Zoom, for the students, on September 28th, 2020.

That explains the need to go behind our laptop screens for an hour. Not being able to watch the digital stage of Zoom accentuates our sense of hearing. It would not be as powerful if we were asked to stay in front of our Zoom call, at this point, and we would not focus on creating non-verbal cyberspace. In a sense, we were not absent from the digital stage of Zoom, but present in the physical setting of the performance, our rooms. The sounds coming from the rooms brought a sense of closeness and togetherness. The noises resonate in each viewer's room, without knowing from which place they are emitted. *Digital Silence* creates a common ground for a shared performative experience among the participants, where it transfers them to one shared room together.

3.1.2 The third cyberspace in between

In *Digital Silence*, a very full digital space is recognizable. The participants cannot see each other live through the Zoom environment. The viewers do not know who is watching who. They may think that they have a connection with someone, but they do not know for certain if they are watching them. The spectator cannot predict what sound will burst, from which room it will come, or how the rooms are decorated. In this Zoom call, it is impossible for someone to look at the other person in their eyes. Instead, they are looking at the screen, where it becomes both the audience's space and the stage. I find it valuable at this point to quote Lotte Van den Berg's words about perception processes:

> "What is looking, and what does it mean to see something? (…) You can look at something without changing anything, and still be involved. (…) The way you relate to the world doesn't only concern the things you do, but also the way you are present in that world. One actualizes this presence through the act of perception and the close survey of this perception."[7]

> (Bay-Cheng 2010, 226)

The performance exists through the process of creating and being together on Zoom. In *The Practice of Dramaturgy: Working on Actions in Performance* (2017),

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[7] Interview from 2007 in Dutch, translated by Liesbeth Groot Nibbelink.

the authors treat dramaturgy as a practice and as a process that can allow many possibilities. They elaborate on three dramaturgical principles: mobilizing questions, alienating, and commoning. Although the book proposes a model of dramaturgical analysis that namely focuses on creation processes, I draw upon the last two principles to approach dramaturgically specific elements of *Digital Silence.*

It is important to note here, that the performance is already created, but it can be perceived as a practice, where an assembly of people are experimenting together with communicating without talking online and how to build a third cyber digital space. The project seeks to articulate the agency and the importance of mobilizing a process of questioning, which specifically sparked one of the main research questions on what is happening now and how do we do that. Further questionings emerged focusing on how to bring together space and time, absence and presence, virtual and the physical.

The principle of alienating is helping me articulate the second part of the performance: the thirty minutes of discussion and observation. Relying on alienating, I argue that the participants during this process are being reintroduced to the piece through the interfaces and the perceptions of others by revealing something new about the performative event: how we build conversation online (Georgelou et. al. 2017, 8). As a result, during these thirty minutes of the performance, the space of observations acts as the process of alienating, hijacking, and intervening with each participant's experience. This discussion enabled a more profound look at the work.

Most of the attendees expressed their feelings and thoughts on the performative conversation. As a result, the talk brought forward new agencies that occurred during the actual building of the conversation, allowing new relations between humans and the digital dimension. I remember that most of the attendees expressed their gratitude that even though they were in lockdown, they did have the chance to experience a theatrical event, as participating in a performative conversation, even online. They agreed with the fact that Zoom is a platform that allows the building of dialogue. Technology may keep us apart physically but brings us together virtually.

Consequently, this leads to the book's third principle of dramaturgy of commoning, which refers to the practice of working, making, and thinking with and

between many (ibid., 13). *Digital Silence* is a performance that operates between a variety of aspects that allows creating a piece online. The digital environment of Zoom, their rooms, the process of being together virtually and alone physically.

All of the above are influencing the design of a performative non-verbal conversation online. The experience of the participant is both individual and shared with the others. The artwork itself invites others to work experimentally in the performance by relating to all the elements that create it. *Digital Silence* creates the conditions for spectators to reflect on their cultural reality at the moment, the online and social media theatre, which was generated due to the Covid-19. It is a kind of project that leaves a mark on your memory because of the uniqueness of the process, specifically due to its online aspect through Zoom.

As I have already mentioned, Zoom tracks and broadcasts the sound that is coming from the loudest space that occurs at the same time online and broadcasted live in real-time, from different parts of the world simultaneously, merging the local and the global networking: "Glocalisation" (Bay- Chang et al. 2010, 98). Clearly, there is an observed virtual presence and interaction in *Digital Silence*. Two points that add a layer of intimacy to the online process are worth mentioning at this point. First, in the online premiere of the performance, one can see the number of the participants, how many people are watching right now, as the performative event is taking place, that creates a feeling of being transferred in a way to a digital auditorium, a shared audience digital space.

Although the participants are attending the performance through a digital video-sharing platform, they are connected. Here, it is worth noting Hadley Bree, wherein her book *Theatre, Social Media, and Meaning Making* (2017) argue about engagement on social media platforms. She explains that meetings on a social media platform "are still live encounters, even if they are not physical face-to-face encounters" (Bree 2017, 58). Thus, in *Digital Silence* the attendees are limited to a "virtual-face-to-virtual-face" encounter that achieves digital intimacy and a digital liveness between them.

The attendees are all connected and required to connect, in the *Digital Silence* performance, simultaneously in this digital cyberspace of the Zoom environment, that represents the audience and the stage at the same time, the space of our private rooms

as an extension of the audience-stage space. The sounds are mobilizing the process of creating a dialogue between the members of the performance. Therefore, the silence in the title is referring to the fact that we are not speaking in order to create the third space a sound space deriving from each spectator's room that is not dominated by words but by noises. That reminded me of John Cage and his thoughts on the use of noises: "I BELIEVE THAT THE USE OF NOISE

Wherever we are, what we hear is mostly noise.

When we ignore it, it disturbs us.

When we listen to it, we find it fascinating." (Cage 1961, 3).

Our rooms become performance spaces, where an "intertwinement of the private and the public" is recognizable (Bay-Cheng et al. 2010, 228). The actual performative conversation occurs in the participant's rooms and the shared Zoom meeting. The participants share equal responsibility for creating and being part of the performance. We can observe the shared space that Lehmann finds in post-dramatic theatre, which is equally shared by performers and visitors (Lehmann 2006, 122), but now has moved into a digital form. The ambient sounds are performed both in all the rooms and in the Zoom meeting. The two spaces the Zoom meeting and our rooms become one big stage, one big apartment, where the spectators coexist in it and co-create the artistic piece.

When a participant is in a Zoom meeting with someone else, there are not two but three people as, they are watching themselves and the other participant. A return of the gaze, watching, and being watched is noticeable, but it is not only the other that is being watched. In this context, the participants are not only looking at the other on the screen, but they are looking at themselves too. The space that the individual is watching the performance from their home, is now transformed into an auditorium of the performance, an extension of a stage. The room space is both private and public, as we see in the *Digital Silence* performance.

To conclude, I argue that the performance does not want to give us direct answers on how to build a conversation online or how to create the third cyberspace. Instead, it is still experimenting on how to approach questions regarding how we feel our presence and absence. This relates with to context in which the digital

performance is created. The unprecedented of experiencing a pandemic correlates with the unknown process of creating a performance online. The lack of a formulated way of approaching what is happening around us due to the pandemic is a mobilizing process that allows connections to emerge between humans, the digital, and the online.

3.2 *Enter Full Screen*

On September 29th, *Enter Full Screen* (2020) premiered on Zoom from Nowy Teatr. The performance was exclusively created for the Zoom platform, a technological artwork, directed by Wojtek Ziemilski for Nowy Theatr. *Enter Full Screen* is a multilayered performance that explores how we make theatre through the aforementioned platform by employing features that the platform offers, where these explorations can lead us, and how we can feel the reality that exists in it. Also, it is trying to find out how can the message of the performance be delivered in this "social media theatre." As they describe on the theatre's website:

> "Zoom seems like a bad thing. (Close but far, human but square, normal but exhausting....). So, we start from Zoom. And we feel awkward. Like it's a substitute that we're trying to make ours, to believe this is not just a sex doll. (Because it's not) We want to make it bearable. Not just bearable. Cozy. And nice"

(Nowy Teatr 2020).

The performance deploys the features of Zoom and builds a certain plot. Specifically, we are following a young boy named Jan, in his afternoon walk on the LGBTQ+ free zones[8] in the suburbs of Warsaw where he encounters a variety of Zoom creatures and ghosts. A young gay boy, as he states in the beginning, leaves his protected room to find the reality in the unsafe outside streets, runs into a variety of virtual entities throughout his exploration of finding "the real world." The virtual entities that represent the ghosts and creatures are hijacking Jan's reality. Although it

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[8] LGBTQ+ free zones are the regions that are free from queer ideology, and consequently free from queer people.

is a performance made for a video-sharing platform, it is still staged, with theatrical elements and "tricks," combined with post-dramatic and digital elements.

The performance introduces the spectators to two kinds of worlds: the virtual world of the Zoom platform and the physical world of the streets of Warsaw. It blends the digital reality of Zoom with the physical reality of the outside world and explores how these two elements can exist together. The piece is merging and establishing a new hybrid reality. It builds upon the concept of reality and fairytale, which can easily devolve into a nightmare. Sometimes the so-called reality of the "real world" can be more surreal than the virtual reality that is perceived as artificial. The beginning of the performance inaugurates an online theatre inspired by the current virtual reality of today's digital age. The spectator is watching the actors experimenting with the snap-filters[9], which transform them into many different forms: a slice of watermelon, a cat, an anime figure, a llama, a clown, an elephant, a bug, etc. (figure 2). The use of filters as a dramaturgical strategy works as a prologue to what is about to follow.
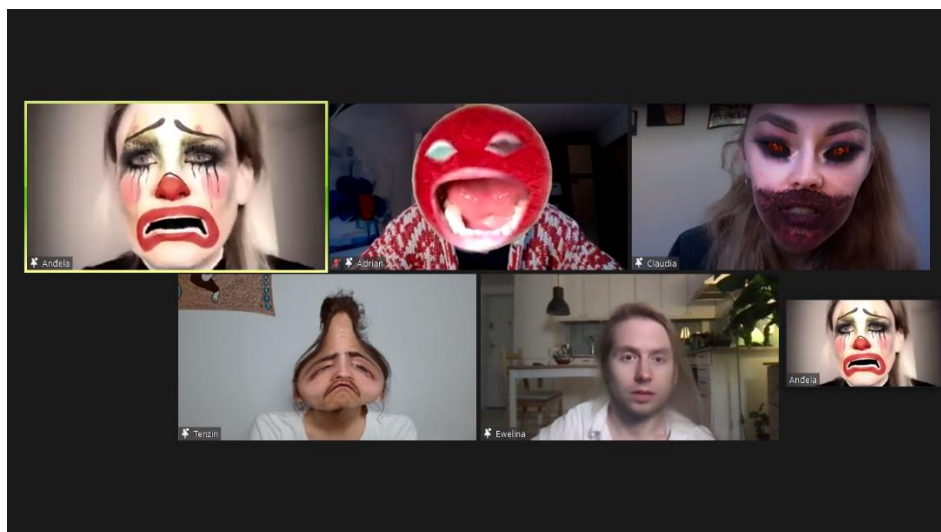

Figure 2: *Enter Full Screen*. Still from the performance by courtesy of the Nowy Teatr

It is important to note here that, before the beginning of the actual performance, a recorded video introduction by the director appears on the Zoom call. He welcomes the spectator and clarifies that this show was made exclusively for the Zoom communication platform: "Your computer screen will be a theatre stage tonight." He characterizes the video as a manual on how to navigate yourself on the

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[9] Snap camera lenses are augmented reality effects that allow adding animations on self-camera mediums. Zoom has its Zoom filters, but it collaborates with third-party filters like the Snap Camera, which has more options and popular lenses. The performance uses the Snap Camera application.

Zoom platform so that you can have the best experience of the digital performance: "a tutorial for the best possible experience, because Zoom is tricky." Thus, the participant engages and interacts with the event, even by clicking the correct buttons. There are vital steps in this tutorial to attend the performance properly.

The attendee needs to follow four main steps to experience the performance. In a way, the host is directing the spectator's vision. Initially, the first step is to click on the "side by side view" option in the View Button located in the right up corner of the meeting. Also, this button gives access to the enter and exit full-screen. Secondly, the participant needs to mute and turn off their camera. Third, the participant needs to deactivate its rectangle spot in the meeting and hide the others so that he cannot see them by clicking "hide self-view" and "hide non-video participants." For the small video rectangle that appears during the show, the participant must press the choice that allows you to watch more than one person who has their camera and mic turned on simultaneously. Now that everything is settled within the Zoom environment, the spectator can "sit back and enjoy the show." Lastly, the director invites the spectators to stay if they want for a little longer at the end of the performance for an opportunity to talk with the cast.

3.2.1 The stage of camera filters

What is demonstrated from this performance, about the Zoom theatre, is that navigation is crucial for the concept of spectatorship. One mistake can ruin the spectator's experience or conceive a different one. The spectatorial address emphasized "on community, collaboration and participation relations" making these social media platforms "fundamentally co-creative" (Bree 2017, 24). The composition of the performance relies on the Zoom platform, which relates to the wider context of being in lockdown in our homes and online on the Web and our engagement with these kinds of technologies. The performance employs almost all the features that the medium offers thus making all of them dramaturgical strategies. The snap camera lenses (also known as camera filters) that are creating the illusions, the characters, and the fairytale essence of the experience, the pin option that allows specific speakers to be shown, in this case, the actors, the shared screen, the Zoom poll.

As New Media Dramaturgy observes, the use of media in the performance has consequences for the acting practice, since images perform alongside humans, the media is creating new agentic relations by making the performer and the spectator a co-worker of its process (Eckersall et al. 2017, 5). In this case, filters are creating the illusion of a redefined complete digital theatre. In *Enter Full Screen*, the actors are performing through the technology of Zoom and the filters. A collaboration between the digital and the human for the production of a theatre experience online.

The camera filters are specifically vital to the production of the performance; the main dramaturgical method. This intangible tool for the actor, the snap camera lenses or as the director calls them masks, are performing identities, creating the illusions and add to the fairytale essence that the performance wants to establish. The actors are performing most of the time through their snap camera identities. Each filter becomes a character played by the actors as if they wore masks to deliver a particular aspect to the story, aside from interacting with Jan, who is the only person throughout the whole performance without any snap-filter on. Also, he is the only one that performs throughout the play outside of a room, in the public space.

It is worth mentioning, the director's clarification in the talk after about the performance's impression on the spectator's feelings. It produces an atmosphere of danger since it seems that the protagonist is in jeopardy during his walk in this neighborhood. He explained that this was theatrically staged. The places that the actor walks were checked and safe, so there wasn't any risk for him. That said, the danger exists in the ideology that the area is representing: a gay boy stepping and walking through an LGBTQ+ free zone area.

The performance officially starts when Jan departs from a train station platform to begin his journey to the suburb's streets of a city in Warsaw. During this walk, he meets and discusses with several animated beings, influencing his experience. These encounters between Jan and the creatures are appearing on the spectator's screen consecutively. I have already mentioned that this performance relies on a specific plot to stage the theatrical experience. A cockroach appears on the screen as the narrator of the protagonist's fairytale. This virtual creature appears to introduce Jan to the viewer to describe his background and his obsession with the

virtual realities of video games. The narrating cockroach reveals that Jan now wants to seek reality in the outside world.

A virtual cracked egg as the ghost of questioning appears on the spectator's Zoom screen as soon as the cockroach disappears. This ghost wants to trouble Jan by asking him how lonely he feels. The Zoom meeting is taken over by an old aged wrinkled lady named Europe. She is his friend with benefits, and she arrives to assure him that he can ask her anything. She soon leaves the meeting the moment Jan asks her a question. Then, a blue creature similar to a teddy bear joins the Zoom call as the ghost of worrying to warn him that the world is not what he thinks or sees. The moment the ghost of warning vanishes, a gender-free figure enters, sporting a wig made out of hair rollers with big hoop earrings and eyelashes, with a ghetto flair to inform Jan that this is an LGBTQ+ free zone. That practically means that he is not allowed to be there, and in order to survive leaving this place, he must hide his sexuality.

This is the moment when the ghost of truth shows up, a blurred colored face and a crown made out of leaves, to expose the reality of this free from queer ideology area. It displays photos of queer people that have been physically abused there. During this part of the performance, the spectator directly witnesses the violence of this ideology. The viewer and Jan are forced to face the raw reality and the seriousness of the situation. The moment this part ends, the ghost of superpowers, a blue screen with two eyes and lips, visits him to acknowledge the impact of live streaming an experience to other people via the phone. The ghost highlights the influence that video-sharing online has on someone, as he feels the power of being connected with others who are watching the content.

An avocado, as the ghost of Zoom, comes into the view to remind Jan to feel "the here and now, at the moment," and to emphasize the togetherness that the virtuality creates. A crowned potato, as the last virtual entity that comes in Jan's way, recognizes his frustration, that all he wants to do is to act and be on a real theatre. Therefore, it invites Jan to play the game of crying since crying is a way of being together, especially now, that is more important to be out there than in a theatre.

3.2.2 A Digital Theatre of multitude actions

The way the performance structures itself and through its context tries to convey a statement. The statement of the performance, as Groot Nibbelink and Merx elaborate, is to show "a particular worldview or understanding of the world, or questions or criticizes that world, or offers a set of propositions for alternative worlds" (2020, 14). *Enter Full Screen* proposes a model of doing online theatre together on a video-sharing platform, considering the current circumstances, by creating an overview of a redefined performative world. It is a multifaceted piece that accentuates the reality we live in during the pandemic. A worldwide view of the present that we are both virtually and physically engaged with, questioning what is the reality during Covid-19, a criticism against Europe and the non-LGBTQ+ zones of Warsaw, and a suggestion on how we can achieve a theatrical reality and specifically during the pandemic.

The political aspect relies on the theme of the performance. It is ironically commenting on this non-queer ideology in certain areas of Europe. Although according to the director, the topic of the LGBTQ+ arrived late in the process of creating the performance. In the beginning, they were talking about Zoom to feel the reality of the platform. Through the discussions about Europe, they found a very concrete example to dive into; the LGBTQ + free zones of Warsaw, a hot topic at that time.

Consequently, the performance acts as a political agent not only due to its composition and its context but also due to the way that the spectator is situated into the art piece and due to the way the performance invites for interaction and participation (ibid., 15). During the performance, the actors directly address the audience a few times. In the beginning, the actors are welcoming the audience by saying that "this is a theatre performance not made in a theatre, but we are doing this on this digital platform because of the Covid-19 pandemic," while simultaneously trying different kinds of snap camera filters, preparing the audience in a way for what is coming next. "This is us," the Zoom filters switched off, and the actors appeared with their actual presence on camera, from their homes.

The actors started showing and describing their view from their windows. At this moment, the performance tries to build a kind of intimacy between the

audience by personalizing the process. Thus, the actors performing from different parts of the world, from Zagreb, Berlin, Stuttgart, Warsaw, and Argentina. Also, this reveals a crucial feature of Zoom and of digital theatre in general, that it has no borders allowing the actors to perform from many places and by not being simultaneously at the same physical space. This is the first time the actors deliberately address the audience, with their actual status, they are actors performing a play each of them through their laptops and through Zoom.

Moreover, this type of "social media theatre" allows the correlation between the inside world with the outside one. Jan, as already mentioned, is the only actor performing outside in the suburbs of Warsaw, giving the audience the chance to experience a walk in a neighborhood while they are enclosed in their houses. This performance allows both the outside world to come alive in the digital environment and the digital universe of the performance to exist in the outside surroundings, all merged by the Zoom meeting.

The Zoom poll that the performance deploys precisely invites the spectator to interact and participate anonymously. The questions are related to the subject, which is at the core of the performance, that is about the LGBTQ+ community. Questions such as "Has your country legalized gay marriage? Are you part of the LGBTQ+ community? Do you live in an LGBTQ+ friendly zone?" The outcomes from the Zoom poll were available to the audience for observation. This is a thought-provoking aspect of the performance that contributes to its political character. They also provoke and question the spectators if they believe that coming together online makes a difference.

The performance ends with Jan's monologue without being interrupted by any guest. He speaks directly to the camera and invites the spectators to be part of the performance by turning on their Zoom cameras: "Hey dear spectators…those of you who feels or wants to, if you do not mind just giving me a little of you so we can be a little more together, can I kindly ask you to turn on your cameras, great to see you I think the Gallery View would be better for this." The viewers started appearing in the Zoom meeting. That is the most interactive part of the performance since the audience becomes part of the piece in the most profound way. Dramaturgically, this moment accentuates the connectivity and the importance of liveness that the platform

offers to the viewers. I had both attended it online and seen a prior recorded version of it. I recall in the online performance feeling the togetherness with the rest of the participants. We are all together in "here and now" on the same platform, attending it from our rooms individually.

Paradoxically, the performance combines both a conservative type of theatre that follows a specific script, acting, a play, and a contemporary one since it is created digitally in Zoom with its features. Post-dramatic elements, such as the direct address to the audience and the participatory aspect, are mixed with traditional acting and emotion that are recognizable in the physical theatre. The performance merges all of that sarcastically. The acting game of crying, the play from Sarah Kane, 4.48 psychosis, the demand "to feel the here and now at the moment" are elements that want to remark on the theatre process, on the redefined Zoom theatre. Also, it brings a nostalgic essence by the actors, that all they want to do is to perform in a theatre.

Whenever the actors feel that they are stating something important, they choose to deliberately "unmask" themselves from the filters and directly look at the camera. From a dramaturgical perspective, this act adds to the layer of intimacy in the performance. Before the ghost of superpowers enters the screen, the actress that plays him described to the viewers her experience during an earthquake in Zagreb not a long time ago. Moreover, the actress that enacts the ghost of Europe reveals herself when she has to read the poll results to the audience.
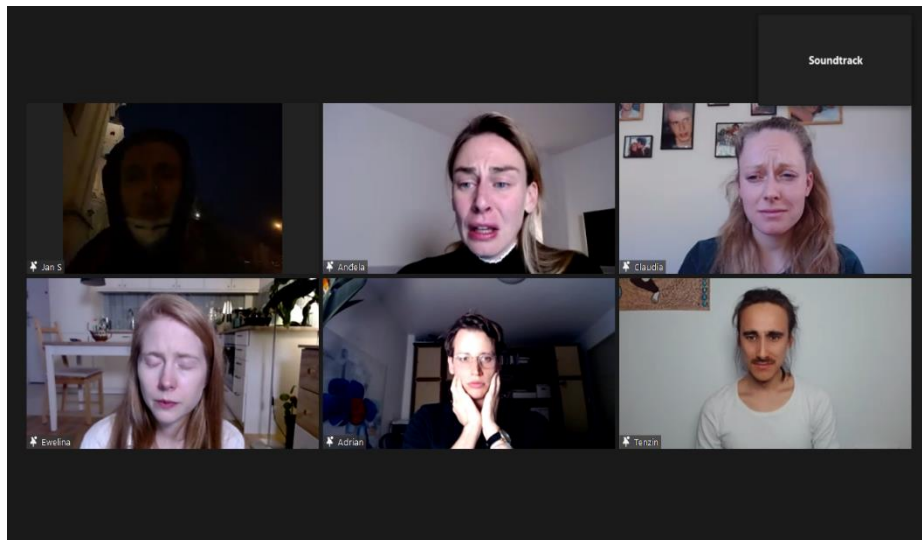

Figure 3: *Enter Full Screen*. Still from the performance by courtesy of the Nowy Teatr

Specifically, during the crying game, the viewer sees all the actors with their original character on the digital theatre stage, without the filters (figure 3). This

crying game, where the winner is determined by which one will cry first, ironically comments on their profession and the people's standards about the theatre. The spectators are attending a performance, even online, and they need to see the actors delivering an act to be satisfied.

In *Enter Full Screen*, we can observe a multitude of actions occurring simultaneously. The Zoom technology allows the combination of audio music, shared screens and images, audio speaking, and video-sharing among the members of the call. This type of digital theatre exposes its system and the way the performance is digitally staged. It represents the model of "theatricality" that is making visible how the performance addresses and positions a spectator, "illuminating how the means of theatre are deploying to present a specific argument and to expose the conditions of staging itself" (Groot Nibbelink & Merx 2020, 13).

The audience knows how the Zoom platform operates. The staging of the piece is visible as it is occurring and from the way it happens, which options are used, through the filters, and through the specific choices that the host of the meeting has activated in the platform. *Enter Full Screen* is a performance that relates to the world in the wider sense. The global and local reach that is offered by the Zoom meeting, the way that the performance combines the outside and the inside virtually and contextually, can be part of the "major dramaturgy" as it is being established by Marianne van Kerkhovenm where "around the production lies the theatre and around the theatre lies the city and around the city, as far as we can see, lies the whole world and even the sky and all its stars" (ibid, 11).

To conclude, the performance is a type of theatre that is digital and conducted on a social media platform. Patrick Lonergan, argues in his book *Theatre & Social Media* (2016), that the two elements of theatrical experience are "the liveness and ephemerality" (Lonergan 2016, 32). He elaborates that the online creative content is always disappearing, which enables it to always become something else and for the experience to always differ (ibid, 32). These elements can exist in the "social media theatre" too, since the experience cannot repeat itself; something always will be different, something new will be revealed to you.

3.3 The Zoom stage

In this subchapter, I will elaborate on the Zoom communication platform as a stage. The above dramaturgical analysis allows me to draw on how an artist can use a video-sharing platform to create theatre. Therefore, based on the similarities and differences of the aforementioned analysis of the two performances, I can extract the dramaturgical strategies of this type of theatre genre, "social media performance," and explore if it appears to operate under a pattern.

As I have already mentioned, these kinds of performances rely on the homemade aspect. The "social media theatre" is transmitted through the Web exactly to your computer and to your room. The rooms are becoming the theatre space, accommodating both the actors and the spectators. It follows the common belief that "theatre, as a live art form, lives and dies it the moment when stage and spectator meet" (Bree 2017, 113). This homemade motif relates to the universal social context of the Covid-19 pandemic since everyone was in lockdown. As a result, that brings the agency of merging the global and local to the process. The audience is attending the performances from all around the world simultaneously from their homes, an international reach.

The Zoom platform, which is already a dramaturgical choice, conveys the vision of the artist and creates the performance. Therefore, "social media theatre" is a collaboration between artists and machines. In *Enter Full Screen*, the actors using all the features that the platform offers to create an immersive experience for the spectator. It is a staged performance that is based on a more traditional theatre model, in contrast with *Digital Silence* where the performance is structured as a performative experiment. The latter employs Zoom in an experimenting and unconventional way to explore how dialogue art can function online.

In this type of theatre, there is a need to be given some sort of instruction, as it appears in both of the performances that I analyzed. Navigating through one's own Zoom account, enacting the choices that the performance is asking to be made, and turning on or off the camera for instance are considered to be dramaturgical strategies. Specifically, the silence in *Digital Silence* is used not only to create the non-verbal word of sounds but also to become aware of the space that surrounds us, including the digital space and its silence, which became a strategy. That is related to

the physical engagement of the spectator in the performance, who is asked to leave their seat in front of the computer and go behind.

The audience interaction is another strategy; the viewers, are not only witnessing the piece but are also becoming active members of the piece, either by making sounds that they can use to spark the conversation in *Digital Silence* or by turning on the camera to be visible to the rest, as was experienced in *Enter Full Screen*. That is in the free will of the participant, who decides if they want to be an active member or just follow the instructions. Contemplating these two more dramaturgical strategies arising from the above, they are seemingly in contradiction with each other. On the one hand, we have the strategy of use of instructions that the participant has to follow, and on the other, the improvisation that leaves room for the spectator to make a choice. Both these two dramaturgical choices contribute to the creation of the artistic product. The direction of the human vision during the performance is based on the instructions and the choices that each participant is making.

The way that the features of Zoom are going to be used in the performance is also part of the making of "the social media theatre." In *Enter Full Screen*, as we have already mentioned, the performance utilizes of all the options that the platform offers the Zoom poll, which relates with the strategy of interaction, and the Zoom filters as a method of creating characters. The latter example can be paralleled with the mask of the ancient Greek theatre, where now these tangible tools have been redefined and transferred into the intangible tools of the virtual space-theatre. Both of them are used in the same way, which is to say that these tools are utilized to stage a performance.

The Zoom meeting has the same ability that Auslander finds in television. It "transmit the event as it is occurred" (Auslander 2008, 12). The analyzed performances are unfolding in front of us live. Thus, liveness becomes a dramaturgical strategy, where the spectator is a part of that. The noises that happen during the *Digital Silence* are occurring live, while in *Enter Full Screen*, the viewer is watching Jan walking in real-time. The viewers thus become part of a group in the "digital here and now."

Similarly, intimacy is an aim that relates with the strategy of creating structures of participation. Specifically, a virtual intimacy where the participant is experiencing

through two dimensional spaces: the video-sharing platform and their home. The interaction, the participation, and the feeling of being part of a piece contribute to the virtual intimacy, in the encounter between the group of people who attend a performance even though the most related to virtual intimacy is the liveness of the process, as it has been mentioned above.

To conclude, the interrelation between liveness and intimacy is crucial for the establishment of "social media theatre." Hadley Bree argues that liveness on social media, when are used as a theatre stage, can be recorded, thus repeated, but "it is still real-time interaction in a way that a pre-recorded film, television show or book is not" (Bree 2017, 106). The spectator feeling a "digital here and now" exposed to the notion of togetherness. The piece becomes a shared space between people that are all together attending, participating, and engaging in a theatrical experience. Intimacy derives from the fact that we are all under the same conditions, the pandemic, the lockdown, and under the same desire for making theatre. The act of being together alone, where a group of attendees co-create the theatrical event.

Conclusion

Throughout my research, I had to make several choices on this new yet sensitive topic, of "social media theatre" and accept its limitations. This new kind of performance, which is part of the wider genre of social media theatre, is still in the process of creating a contextual inquiry. The lack of a dramaturgical approach on these instances during the pandemic was the stimulus for entering this unexplored field and investigate how it operates. In order to find the answers to the questionings that I proposed, I built upon the existing theatre literature, concepts, and dramaturgical models and I redefined them and placed them in the current context of the research.

By elaborating on the social media culture and the social media domination during the lockdown, I recorded the instances that emerged. Using social media and specifically social video-sharing platforms is already a dramaturgical strategy that the artist has to consider. Zoom, which is the main platform that I examine in my thesis, and the most popular used in the Covid-19 period, is the choice. The dramaturgical analysis of the two case studies, *Digital Silence* and *Enter Full Screen*, extracted the dramaturgical strategies in which this kind of theatre uses.

This research is just a first attempt of trying to approach this new theatrical reality. As I have already mentioned, there is not a specific dramaturgical inquiry on how to approach these new instances. It is valuable at the moment to collect them, record them, and analyze them in order to extract some of their main characteristics. We can already name a few strategies and aims of this type of theatre, such as liveness, silence, participation, intimacy but more steps can follow.

During the lockdown, there were performances deliberately created for these video-sharing platforms and there were others that were adapted to discover something new about them in relation to where it is performed. *Enter Full Screen* is a performance specifically for the Zoom space that is not repeatable on a theatre stage. In contrast, *Digital Silence* was an already in-person existing project adapted for Zoom that wanted to create a new version of dialogue art that relies on an online aspect. Both pieces designed a theatrical experience that cannot function properly in a theatre venue. That makes "social media theatre" a genre due to its certain way of

approach and uniqueness. It derived from our urge to finally do art in times of Covid-19, but it is not a less poor version of the in-person theater; instead, it is a separate type of performance.

It is essential to note the problem of the accessibility of the "social media theatre." Technology is a crucial element for this type of theatre to exist. For instance, a bad internet connection can destroy the spectator's experience. Thus, in a sense, this type of theatre becomes restricted based on the media that produce it. The platform itself can also be a limiting factor for the production of the performance. Bearing this in mind, most of the online artworks, in the beginning, provide the spectators with instructions to navigate themselves in this digital environment. In *Enter Full Screen*, there is a long-recorded video for the spectator to follow specific steps to attend to the piece correctly.

The instructions as a strategy are helping the spectators to navigate themselves in the reality of the performance. They also create an atmosphere of mutual trust between the members of the call. Everyone has to follow the correct steps to enjoy the performance. Thus, "social media theatre" becomes an act of shared responsibility, where everyone is responsible for their part so that the art piece can function accordingly.

By taking into consideration the above difficulties, these performances dramaturgically decide precisely to be small in duration. The participants in this one hour must keep their concentration and focus on this experience. The element of interaction is visible in this type of theatre genre. The spectators are participating in the piece long before it starts, by joining the link, by muting or not themselves, by switching on-off their cameras. A more profound engagement is observable during the performance. In *Digital Silence*, the spectators created the performative conversation from the sounds of their rooms. In *Enter Full Screen*, they were encouraged to interact by participating in a Zoom poll and turning on their cameras. Consequently, the participant sinks into the experience and becomes one with it.

These video-sharing platforms are building an experience that makes the viewer feel both excited and frustrated. There is an excitement for participating and creating something with other people by being part of an artwork. At the same time, there is also this feeling of disappointment that this is not happening in person. A

nostalgic atmosphere of making theatre in a venue influences with the satisfaction of attending a performance online, even though being in lockdown. As a result, the experience bears with it a constant battle between finding this type of theatre both bearable and unbearable. That is why the audience interaction as a strategy becomes crucial in this type of theatre. People must participate, be and feel the presence, the liveness and the intimacy of the process in order to relate, and engage in "social media theatre."

Reflecting on the above research, it is observed that it is essential to look back again in this type of "social media theatre" that arose due to Covid-19. It might have seemed a temporary solution to use these video-sharing platforms because of the isolation of the pandemic, but what if there is more to that? What if we explore the Zoom more exclusively, and not only try to make it bearable but also closely find its dramaturgical underpinnings for creating this type of "social media performance." Is this theatre going to fade out in the future now that venues are reopening or it is further needed to be developed for an upcoming new pandemic? These are questions that I cannot yet answer, but we ought to investigate what is happening right now, which is important not only for archival purposes but also for possible use in the future.

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Appendix | Table with performances on Online Platforms

This Appendix includes all the mentioned online performances in this inquiry as well as, a small sample of online performances that occurred during the period of March 2020 until June 2021.

Performances on Zoom
- ***Digital Silence***. 2020. Building Conversation. Concept: Building Conversation. Curator: Lotte Van den Berg. Amsterdam, The Netherlands. September 2. 2020. https://buildingconversation.nl/en/aanbod-item/digital-silence/   - ***Enter Full Screen***. 2020-21. Nowy Theatr. Dir: Wojtek Ziemilski. Cast: Tenzin Kolsch, Claudia Korneev, Ewelina Pankowska, Adrian Pezdirc, Andjela Ramljak, Jan Sobolewski. Poland. 29.09.2020. https://nowyteatr.org/en/kalendarz/enter-full-screen   - ***Allegedly***. 2021. SPRING. Dir. &Concept: Mallika Taneja. Cast: Aditee Biswas & Mallika Taneja with Aman Mohammadi, Anahita Sarabhai, Anomita Sen, Bonita Rajpurohit, Dipali, Drishti Chawla, Gunjan Gupta, Hansa Thapliyal, Katyayini Pant, Ritika Singh, Rituparna Pal, Shweta Pasricha, Tanima, Thinley Chodon. India. 25.05.2021. https://springutrecht.nl/programma/allegedly?language=en   - ***Impossible Conversation***. 2021. STRP Festival. Building Conversation. Concept: Building Conversation. Curator: Daan t's. Amsterdam. 27. 04. 2021. https://buildingconversation.nl/en/aanbod-item/impossible-conversation/   - ***Call Cutta at Home***.2020. Rimini Protokoll. Concept: Haug / Stefan Kaegi / Daniel Wetzel. Perf: Madhusree Mukherjee, Sunayana Roy. https://www.rimini-protokoll.de/website/en/project/call-cutta-at-home
Performances on Theatre's Website
- ***Our House is on fire***. *2021.* Nicole Beutler Projects. Dir. Nicole Beutler. Cast: Rob Polmann, Christian Guerematchi, Lucinda Wessels, Hellen Boyko, Marjolein Vogels, Liam McCall, Melyn Chow, Robin Lesley Nimanong. Frascati Livestream page. Amsterdam. 11.2.2021. https://www.frascatitheater.nl/ourhouseisonfire-nbprojects-eng?language=en

- *End Meeting For All*. 2020. Force Entertainment. Dir. Tim Etchells. Cast: Robin Arthur, Tim Etchells, Richard Lowdon, Claire Marshall, Cathy Naden, Terry O'Connor. Force Entertainment's Website. England. April 2020. https://www.forcedentertainment.com/end-meeting-for-all-free-to-view/

Performances on YouTube

- *Skakespreare Table Top: At home*. 2020. Force Entertainment. Dir. Tim Etchells. Cast: Robin Arthur, Tim Etchells, Richard Lowdon, Claire Marshall, Cathy Naden, Terry O'Connor, Based on Shakespeare plays. Force Entertainment YouTube Channel, England. September 17th- November 15th . 2020. https://www.forcedentertainment.com/tabletop-live-catch-up/

- *La Maldicion de la Corona*. 2020. Digital Theatre by Fundación Épica La Fura dels Baus. Dir. Pep Gatell, Cast: J. Moras, N. Gradolí, L. Illa, C. Vogler, S. Barroso, M. E. Bueno, M. Sala, C. Herranz, A. Cueva, E. Costilludo, A. Jimenez, V. Guindal, A. Engelhard, M. Rodriguez, D. Algar, K. Rother, A. Majcan. Based on Macbeth by William Shakespeare. Fundación Épica La Fura dels Baus Youtube Channel, Kalliope app, Jitsi Meet. April 28, 2020. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4t6opJPRbD8&t=58s

- *Hamlet, A Desktop Performance*. 2020. Direction: Elias Adam. Collaboration: Christina Mavrommati. Performers: Jeo Pakitsas, Styliana Ioannou, Sofia Priovolou. Onassis YouTube Channel. May 7th 2020. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FJSZVhaUoEY&list=WL&index=71&t=47s

- *Enter:*. 2020. A series of artworks created within 120 hours commissioned by the Onassis foundation. Onassis YouTube Channel. April 28th – June 29th. 2020. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ia-8XRkOcjk

Performances on Other Social and Video Sharing Platforms

Instagram

- *24 Hours play*. Project, United States of America. 2020-21. **https://www.instagram.com/24hourplays/?hl=el**

Gather Town

- *Hamlet's playground*. 2021. Concept: CREW. By/with: Eric Joris, Mesut Arslan, Jerry Killick, Thomas Dudkiewicz (Urland), Benjamin Verhoeven. May 3rd 2021. https://crew.brussels/en/productions/hamlet-s-playground

Skype

- ***Distant Thoughts***. 2021. STRP Festival. Building Conversation. Concept: Building Conversation. Amsterdam. https://buildingconversation.nl/en/aanbod-item/distant-thoughts/

*The following links are all last Accessed June 8, 2021.