

A Matter of Relationships: Dramatising, Staging and Planning Ecological Performances

Emanuele Regi
Emanuele.regi2@unibo.it

This article aims to explore patterns of the creative process in which performance faces ecological thought, placing about sustainability strategies. Many scholars have investigated the relationship between theatre and ecology since the end of the XXth century. Two positions have emerged strongly: ecology as a metaphor (Marranca) or as a performative tool (Chaudhuri). We will reflect on more recent points of view (Giannachi Stewart, Theresa J May, Baz Kershaw) and try to relate them to sustainability science (Bologna). Then, it will be important to focus on two phases of the creative process, dramatization, and staging, to understand the evolution of artistic practices about environmental issues. Finally, we are going to apply the methodological pattern outlined by the theoretical and practical analysis to two case studies: *weLAND* (2021), a contemporary circus show that staged climate migration, and *La möa* (2022), a choreographic work in nature that embodied the relationships in the river habitat.

Keywords: Sustainability, Ecology, Performance, Dramaturgy, Nature

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Emanuele Regi
Emanuele.regi2@unibo.it

1. State of art and new strategies

As Gabriella Giannachi and Nigel Stewart point out¹, the notion of nature is not only a scientific one, but it is also a cultural fact: «Whether we see nature as only in and through culture, feel it as the “real” or hear it between human and other-than-human, nature needs only to be physically encountered in order to be perceived»². This is why «ecology» – the science that studies all the relationships between organisms and their environment – is «not only one of the most interesting and crucial tools for the interpretation of nature but also an important model for cultural observation»³. If it is possible to think of nature and ecology as a deep part of our cultural framework, it can also be a part of the artistic processes.

Since the end of the twentieth century, theatre studies have been concerned with ecological issues. In 1996, Bonnie Marranca published *Ecologies of Theatre* – a collection of essays and reviews – in which she applied a «“theaterwriting” more conscious of the magnitude of performance worlds where landscape, myth, and cultural memory create and bear witness to all history life»⁴ and questioned about which way all these elements can influence the artistic practices. Una Chaudhuri criticised Marranca’s approach, stressing the need to define a «new materialist-ecological theatre practice that refuses the universalization and metaphorization of the nature» and is capable to represent «the wilderness»⁵. One possible solution to this mission is to «join ecological concerns with

¹ Cfr. G. Giannachi and N. Stewart (ed. by), *Performing Nature. Explorations in Ecology and the Arts*, Peter Lang, Bern, 2005.

² Ivi, p. 20.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ B. Marranca, *Ecologies of Theatre. Essays at the Century Turning*, The Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 1996, p. xiv.

⁵ U. Chaudhuri, *There Must Be a Lot of Fish in That Lake. Toward an Ecological Theatre*, in “Theater” 25 (1), 1994, pp. 23-31.

the protocol of “site-specific” theatre, creating works that directly engage the actual ecological problems of particular environment»⁶. These two perspectives outline different patterns in which performance can dialogue with ecology.

- 1) Ecology as a metaphor that can be represented by arts, used as a tool to raise the audience’s awareness through dramaturgical strategies.
- 2) Ecology as a practice that performance and show can embody with all the elements that play within it, in this case, used as a tool with a deep influence on the artistic process and the outcome.

Naturally, both these strategies can be used within the same artistic process. The ecological thinking applied to the performance is capable of establishing a complex system of exchanges and relationships between the performers and all the elements that inhabit the environment. Giannachi and Stewart underline how ecology allows the art to focus on the «inter-relationships, on in-between of the human and nature, on the idea of the possibility of a relationship of opposites within a given environment»⁷. This approach has an important impact on the political engagement «in an ecologically-oriented art», in which the «relationships between human beings and nature are being questioned, critiqued and even reinvented»⁸.

These perspectives outline an interdisciplinary approach that has been embraced by the next generation of theatre academics within the environmental humanities⁹. Baz Kershaw¹⁰, Wendy Arons, and Theresa J. May¹¹, Lisa Woynarski¹² have explored many aspects of ecological performances.

Close to this aesthetic theory focused on the *process*, the culture of the *project* influences the artistic path. A recent publication in this sense is *Building Sustainability with the Arts*¹³. The overall approach of the volume focuses on the positive relationship

⁶ Ivi, p. 24.

⁷ G. Giannachi and N. Stewart, *Introduction* in *Id. cit.*, p. 20.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ Cfr. E. Fuchs and U. Chaudhuri (ed. by), *Land/Scape/Theater*, University of Michigan Press, USA, 2002.

¹⁰ Cfr. B. Kershaw, *Theatre Ecology. Environments and Performance Events*, Cambridge University Press, New York, 2009.

¹¹ Cfr. W. Arons, Theresa J. May, *Reading in Performance and Ecology*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2012.

¹² L. Woynarski, *Ecodramaturgies: Theatre, Performance and Climate Change*, Palgrave Macmillan. New York, 2020.

¹³ D. Curtis (ed. by), *Building Sustainability with the Arts: Proceedings of the 2nd National EcoArts Conference*, Cambridge Scholar Publishing, Newcastle, 2017. L. Woynarski, *Site. Participation and* 193

that various types of arts can have with sustainability science: «arts have a role in shaping values and beliefs [...]; in providing information; in creating empathy for nature (the landscaping); in helping us to think more deeply about consumption [...]. All such roles are important in building a ‘house’ called ‘Sustainability’»¹⁴. To understand how the process and project of the performing arts can embrace green-based planning, we need to put them in dialogue with this sustainability science. The environmentalist Gianfranco Bologna affirms that the whole of mankind’s history is made of the interrelationship between nature and human beings. Therefore, he focuses on how «interdisciplinary research initiated within the Earth system sciences is also yielding important results in these areas»¹⁵. These outcomes, according to Bologna, are being pursued by both «interpretive keys to reality» and «concrete proposals for action»¹⁶. Arts in general give an interpretation of the world and its problem, but we can interpret them also as a system of governance capable of ideas and projects that can influence society¹⁷.

This paper aims to demonstrate how the performing arts operate in these two areas (interpretation and proposal) of sustainability science through an ecological approach. In fact, what Marranca and Chaudhuri theorised about ecology and theatre is in the contemporary practices translated into new patterns of dramatisation and embodiment. These new methods of inter-relationship are applied by performance becoming, on one side, *ecodramaturgy*, and, on the other, *ecoperformance*. As we will see, both these approaches influence strongly each part of the performing process, because is a more inclusive way to think about the artistic work including and problematising the other element, building contact with the eco-system. This approach can be very attractive and fruitful to numerous green projects financed by national and supranational institutions.

Materiality: Eco-performance in the UK and Europe, in David Curtis (ed.) *Building Sustainability with the Arts*, cit., pp. 71-86.

¹⁴ D. Curtis, *Building Sustainability with the Arts: Introduction*, in Id. cit., pp. 4-18 (p. 4).

¹⁵ G. Bologna, *Manuale della sostenibilità. Idee, concetti, nuove discipline capaci di futuro*, Edizioni Ambiente, Milano, 2008 (2nd edition), p. 14, trans. by the author.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ Many festivals and conferences are dedicated to environmental issues, offer some important proposals both for society in general, and for reduce the impact within the creative and cultural industries sector in particular. The European Theatre Commission is pursuing the project STAGES (Sustainable Theatre Alliance for a Green Environmental Shift) project <https://sustainablestages.eu/> [last check: 04/04/2023]. In this sense, the researcher Ellen Jones has identified some sustainability strategies for a green theatre. (E. E. Jones, *A Practical Guide to Greener Theatre: Introduce Sustainability in your Productions*, Focal Press, Burlington (MA), 2014).

Two case studies will demonstrate how this framework, made of new ecological patterns applied to performance, can deal with sustainable-oriented planning.

2. Dramatising ecology: from dialectic to ecodramaturgy

Bertolt Brecht reflected on this relationship between science and theatre in many theoretical texts. He insisted on the need to know the scientific field to understand complex issues, affirming that his work strongly relies on a scientific background because the «great and complicated events cannot be sufficiently recognised» if we «do not provide [...] all the useful tools to understand them»¹⁸. What Brecht had in mind for science was closely related to Marxism, which he defined as a modern social science. If epic theatre is the tool he used to embrace the modern technological age, Marxism is the perspective to read the world scientifically. In this sense, «science and art meet» to «facilitate the lives of men» in the scientific age, in which the audience's theatrical attitude must be «critical»¹⁹. In this sense, Brecht outlined a dialectical approach applied to epic theatre that answered a scientific need to raise the audience's consciousness.

Even if theatre nowadays might not have the same impact as last century, according to Timothy Morton, «ecological awareness means thinking and acting ethically and politically on a lot of scales, not just one»²⁰. Therefore, every range is important and should not be neglected, especially when the problems are complex and interrelated such as the ones linked to the environmental crisis, climate change, the loss of biodiversity, etc. All issues in which the critical and interdisciplinary approach outlined by Brecht can be applied to the dramaturgical strategy. This path is currently being pursued by ecological performance, where science, art, and political issues are brought together.

Recently, the actress, director, and playwright Nicoletta Nobile²¹ designed a theatrical strategy to talk about sustainability, starting from the assumption that «theatre is made by people: bodies and feelings I can identify with»²². The practice of embodiment entails a

¹⁸ B. Brecht, *Teatro di divertimento o d'insegnamento*, in B. Brecht *Scritti teatrali*, Einaudi, Torino, 2001, p. 66; trans. by the author.

¹⁹ B. Brecht, *Breviario di estetica teatrale*, op. cit., p. 122; trans. by the author.

²⁰ T. Morton, *All Art is Ecological*, Penguin, Dublin, 2018, pp. 32-33.

²¹ N. Nobile, *Making Theatre for Environmental Communication*, University of Bologna, 2022.

²² Ivi, p. 10.

process of self-interrogation that «allows [...] to understand something on a deeper level than the rational»²³ and leads to a dialectical strategy for both performers and audiences.

That means I have to find a way not to explain my message but to lead the public through a path where there is place for contradiction, conflict, debate, and dialogue. Where the world is not divided into bad and good, black and white, but where it is welcomed in all its complexity. Think about the stage not as a place where to judge but where to understand²⁴.

In other words, the theatre becomes a place where more different paths and thoughts through the process of embodiment converge in the name of complexity. Considering the otherness in an eco-performative relationship through acting or playing is possible to access systemic thinking, which is the foundation of the ecological one. This ramification is crucial within the dramaturgy process, which is intrinsically capable of establishing relationships and introducing into them all the elements that can be included ecologically. Lisa Woynarski has defined this approach as “ecodramaturgy”.

Ecodramaturgy considers ways of meaning-making in performance and reinterprets community to include more-than-human actants, operating at the intersection of nature and culture. Ecodramaturgy is a way of thinking about the dramaturgy of ecological relationships and considers: the way the performance was made, the ecological context of the work, and the way the performance operates within a wider understanding of ecology²⁵.

Within ecodramaturgy, Marranca's and Chaudhuri's approaches seem to meet and start a dialogue. On one side, it is a way of thinking as an ecological approach to the artistic process. Ecodramaturgical tools can help to understand this complexity – which is also part of environmental issues – and raise people's awareness of the problems facing our world. In other words, the dramaturgy does not have to become a conference²⁶, a manifesto, or a political action to address and reflect on environmental issues, but only to do what the artistic process involves: analysing, problematising, embodying, representing, and sharing the complexity of the issues without fixing or solving them. By

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ L. Woynarski, *Site. Participation and Materiality: Eco-performance in the UK and Europe*, in David Curtis (ed. by) *Building Sustainability with the Arts*, cit., pp. 71-86 (p. 74).

²⁶ This reference should not be interpreted as a criticism of those who have staged performances using this format. On the contrary, many artists have successfully used these formats because their main aim was not to affirm this tool of reality, but to put it into crisis through the performance processes. In 2014, Rimini Protokoll staged *World Climate Conference*, a mock UN meeting set in which people impersonated nation delegates. Marta Górnicka in 2022 used the manifesto format in *STILL LIFE*, where the chorus embodied the vision of a new world, bringing with it all the contradictions of the present.

using this framework and concept, we are closer to a communicative strategy in which the show becomes an interpretive key to reality, and nature/environment is used as a complex metaphor with many ambiguous interpretations. On the other, it implies environmental awareness considering the ecosystem as an active part of the (eco)dramaturgy. Indeed, taking into account the site is crucial to the development of all ecological relationships. This path leads from ecodramaturgy to ecoperformance and the space in which it takes place.

3. Staging ecology: from environmental theatre to ecoperformance

To understand how the elements within the space act ecologically in the performance, it is necessary to adopt an interdisciplinary approach that combines architecture, landscape studies, and the performing arts. The qualities of the environment influence the creative process and its result through the principle of an ecological structure of the scene, which can be a theatre stage or non-purpose spaces within the city or nature.

The link between the performing arts and the environment (architectural and natural) is therefore based on interdisciplinary strategies within the framework of ecological thinking. A perfect synthesis of this is the pairing of Anna and Lawrence Halprin – a dancer and a landscape architect – who have approached their work through the RSVP Cycles, which include four phases: Resources, Score, Valuation and Performance. RSVP is a method they developed in 1959 to realise different types of projects and performances based on an interdisciplinary approach (performing arts, architecture, biology, ecology, and psychology) and a complex system of relationships. In particular, L. Halprin described Score – the second phase of the process – as *ecoscores*, a «term to denote temporal notations of environmental processes and configurations»²⁷. The interrelations between the performer and the spatial entities are always present because «connectivity is common to the performance of artificial and urban environments as well as uncultivated rural ones»²⁸.

Outdoor shows, in particular, develop a special strategy, because they often relate to a found space rather than a constructed one. In this sense, they do not artificially simulate

²⁷ K. John-Alder, *Processing natural time: Lawrence Halprin and the Sea Ranch ecoscore*, in “Studies in the history of gardens & designed landscapes”, 34/1, 2014, pp. 52-70.

²⁸ Ivi, p. 49.

ecological relationships but try to involve those that already exist in the place. In *6 Axioms for Environmental Theatre*, Schechner perfectly describes the criteria to be adopted in this particular creative process:

The principles here are very simple: (1) the given elements of any space-its architecture, textural qualities, acoustics, and so on are to be explored, not disguised; (2) the random ordering of space is valid; (3) the function of scenery, if used at all, is to understand, not disguise or transform, the space; (4) the spectators may suddenly and unexpectedly create new spatial possibilities²⁹.

Since the Seventies, many theatrical strategies have been applied according to the rules theorised by Schechner, which obviously cannot be described in this paper³⁰. This approach opens the performer or the dancer (even the architect) to an ecological relationship with the world. Anna Halprin applied a similar approach in numerous workshops, where she used to recommend: «Stay open to the relationship between you and the external world and be responsive to everything that happens around you, with other people and nature. Did you hear the bird that just sang? Did you see the change of light on the branches of that tree?»³¹. Sista Bramini, founder, director, and actress of O Thiasos-Teatro Natura, sums up the reciprocal relationship with nature with the term synchronicity, which defines «those connections that are created between the performance and the unpredictable act of nature»³². What emerges from these practical theories is that in open-air shows creative authority pertains also to the environment and ecosystem and not only to the human. Therefore, the artists cannot control the totality of their actions. The performers must negotiate their role with the environment and remain open to what it suggests.

²⁹ R. Schechner, *6 Axioms for Environmental Theatre*, in “The Drama Review”, Spring, 12/3, pp. 41-64, p. 54.

³⁰ Some performative forms that adhere to this framework outlined by Schecher are site-sympathetic, site-specific or site-generic performance, which can be identified as the most appropriate to create a dialogue between space and creative action. Fiona Wilkie distinguishes three types: «*site-sympathetic* (an existing performance text physicalized in a selected site); *site-generic* (performance generated for a series of like sites); and *site-specific* (performance specifically generated from/for one selected site)» (M. Pearson, *Site-Specific Performance*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2010, p. 8).

³¹ A. Halprin, in L. Colomban, *Anna e Lawrence Halprin: il ciclo RSVP* in “Danza e ricerca. Laboratorio di studi, scritture, visioni”, 9/9, 2017, pp. 173–187.

³² S. Bramini, *Dialoghi con il genius loci*, in M. G. Borelli (ed. by) *Teatro Natura. Il teatro nel paesaggio di Sista Bramini e il progetto “Mila di Codra”*, Spoleto, Editoria&Spettacolo, 2015, pp. 155-200 (167), trans. by the author.

In this context, Maura Baiocchi, dancer, performer, and choreographer, has been at the centre of the development of a new performative model. She has been creating environmental performances since 1988³³. In 2010, she coined the term *ecoperformance*, which is based on this principle of tension: «the assumption of energy interrelationship between all forces and forms of life (including performance) and postulates tension as the necessary condition of creativity»³⁴. Therefore, ecoperformance works through a «porosity, and interactivity» of the body, capable of becoming «natural landscape, cityscape, light-, color- and soundscape which, in turn, become part of the body»³⁵. In this sense, the theses of ecoperformance, conceived by Maura Baiocchi and Wolfgang Pannek, reform Schechner's axioms to include all the elements that inhabit the environment and establish a strong relationship with eco-ethical and eco-ethics form. Firstly, ecoperformance consists of a reciprocal relationship between environment and performers: «Ecoperformance conceives environment and body as an inseparable dimension of life and performative creation»; «Environments are complex and interactive games between heterogeneous forces and forms»; «Ecoperformances can occur in any kind of environment - natural, urban and virtual»; «Ecoperformance conceptualizes itself as an environmental process and considers environmental interactions as performative»³⁶. Not only the environment is a part of the performing process but is an active entity because all the elements inter-acts as a co-creator.

Another crucial aspect underlined by ecoperformance theses is the relationship of the performer's body to the environment: «The body is an environment»; «Ecoperformers are receptive and active agents moving and acting with the environment in terms of intensity and transformation»; «Ecoperformance is inseparable from the eco-poetic and eco-ethical presence of the performer»³⁷. Ecoperformance is strongly linked to a “poethic” and political framework in the creative process that includes the environment as an active presence rather than a screen or a scenography: «Ecopet[h]ic presence is always co-presence and motivated by perception of a (problematic) mutual immanence

³³ Some performances were dance-based with iconic titles: *Isadora Duncan and the Bull*, *Martha Graham in the Forest*, *Pina Bausch Sleeping*; other more eco-politically engaged: *When the Butterflies Get Lost – Transparent Dance, Forest* (1989) and *Himalaya, the Ancestral* (1990).

³⁴ W. Pannek, *Ecoperformance*, in Id (ed. by) “Ecoperformance”, vol. 1, 2022, pp. 16-29.

³⁵ Ivi, pp. 26-28.

³⁶ Ivi, p. 29

³⁷ *Ibidem*

between environment and body»; «Consequently, ecoperformance should not be confused with self-aestheticizing poses, gestures, and movements in front of picturesque and passive backdrops»; «Ecoperformance is political because it generates and problematizes forms of life and coexistence of natural and cultural beings of the environment»³⁸. These last theses help us to understand that ecoperformance and ecological performances are constitutively capable of embodying political issues, without characterising them as a problem of dramaturgy, but 'simply' with the presence and mutual interactions together with the environment. In this sense ecoperformances perfectly embody all the ecological relations and make them part of the artistic process and performing result.

In conclusion, Ecodramaturgy and ecoperformance are not fixed categories, but an open methodological and practical framework that can be freely crossed by the creators and performers about the environment. The variety and the many possibilities of these approaches can relate to sustainability financial programmes, as we will analyse considering two case studies.

4. Two case-studies

The field of ecological performance and funding for sustainable projects is expanding, but the methodologies of study and traditional cultural-economical actors do not always seem ready to provide good theoretical and practical support to bring these two worlds into a positive connection. Scholars and planners should identify themselves as a necessary bridge between artists and policy-makers, otherwise, the artists will rely exclusively on project culture while neglecting processes. If the scholars cited attempt to provide new perspectives on the dialogue between planning and practices, certainly the shows that will be processed here not only tell of action within the framework of ecodramaturgy and ecoperformance, but also of a project dimension that can intercept funds in sustainability programs and transform them into cultural production. The two case studies are *weLAND* (2021) by the MagdaClan contemporary circus company and *La mōa* (2022) by the choreographer and dancer Lorenzo Morandini.

³⁸ *Ibidem*

They pertain to the frame of the sustainability-based project. In fact, the productions are financed or co-financed by specific funds that pursue operational strategies in communicating climate change or exploring the possibilities of performance in nature. In other terms, what Bologna defined as concrete proposals for action. Moreover, they are both recently staged as Italian productions with an international tour/creative process.

Even if they are both an example of the relationship between ecology and performing arts, the shows pertain to a different ‘traditional category’: contemporary circus and dance. Moreover, *weLAND* pursued the approach of problematising through ecodramaturgy and is performed on a traditional open-air stage. It is the result of a collective process within the company, including musicians, acrobats/performers, scenographer, playwright, director, etc. On the other side, *La möa* takes place in natural spaces and the creative process concerns the individual performer/creator dealing with the environment in an ecopeformative system.

4.1 *weLAND* by MagdaClan

weLAND is a contemporary circus show created by the company MagdaClan in collaboration with the NGO WeWorld. The organisation won a tender (European Commission project) entitled “#ClimateofChange” based on the issue of climate migration, which could be defined as an invisible problem. Economic migration is often linked to the scarcity of resources and job opportunities, but it is not always known that these conditions are caused by factors related to climate change (desertification, thawing of the permafrost, etc.). WeWorld had to implement a communication strategy to raise awareness of this problem, as we can see from the documents submitted for the project.

Be practical and concrete - Communication needs to make the practical solutions that each one of us can put in place to contrast Climate Change clear. Make youth aware of what they can do and why it is important. **Be clear and direct** - Climate Change is a topic widely debated and present in public opinion. [...] The campaign will provide clear and comprehensible data and interconnections, linking data to behaviour as to make the consequences explicit. [...] **Be engaging** – involving young people as actors of the campaign with concrete materials and actions³⁹.

³⁹ We World, *Annex I.A: #ClimateofChange Campaign Description*, 2020.

In this context, the NGO decided to use the performing arts as a tool to pursue this strategy through an ambitious European tour⁴⁰. In the documentary *The Making of Climate of Change. A contemporary circus project* (2022) directed by Daniele Poli⁴¹, Rachele Ponzellini, WeWorld communications specialist, and Stefania Piccinelli, WeWorld international project manager, explains why the organisation chose circus.

[Rachele Ponzellini] When we were writing the Climate of Change campaign for the project we considered several activities as possible main actions for the campaign. [...] [Stefania Piccinelli] I think that circus and arts are a way to watch reality and to also tell stories and also tell terrible stories. [...] [Rachele Ponzellini] We decided that we wanted something that could really translate the change [...]. We thought about the performing arts and something that could translate the message and our objectives breaking through the barriers of language and also the prejudices and the stereotypes that may lay within each national context⁴².

If the European Commission outlines the structure of the project and WeWorld's communication strategy applies the conditions, the artistic process follows an autonomous necessity within the externally indicated path.

Flavio D'Andrea's dramaturgical work highlighted the difficulty to «raise the awareness on the topic of mobility so we have data, statistics stories of people and an impact quite close to our reality, therefore it isn't so easy to abstract and take it to another level of comprehension»⁴³. However, the director, Petr Forman, emphasised the need to create «images, ambient, atmosphere» within the show to create «strong images»⁴⁴ that could have an impact on the audience. In this interesting exchange of views, different strategies of ecological communication emerge to inform or shock. Following this mixed approach, the show is divided into different scenes in which each climatic phenomenon is presented to create the atmosphere described by Foreman. On the other hand, the presenter – a traditional circus figure – introduces and dramaturgically links the scenes. The story is also a criticism of the rich European who wants to profit from the exploitation of the Earth's resources until he realises that the solution is to move to another planet. But

⁴⁰ In 2021 the tour touched these cities: Sofia (Bulgaria), Nova Gorica (Slovenia), Lublin (Poland), Budapest (Hungary), Karlsruhe (Germany), Milan (Italy), Oerias (Portugal) and Bruxelles (Belgium).

⁴¹ In this part of the paper, we will make numerous references to the documentary *The Making of Climate of Change. A contemporary circus project* (2022), directed by Daniele Poli, as a good witness to study both performance process (1st part) and the whole touring show (2nd part). The film is currently being distributed, but it is not yet available online.

⁴² D. Poli, *The Making Of*, Part 1, Interview to Rachele Panzelli and Stefania Piccinelli.

⁴³ Ivi, Interview to F. D'Andrea.

⁴⁴ Ivi, Interview to P. Forman

the spaceship has broken down. The show ends with the presenter's daughter asking, "Dad, it's just a circus show, right?" bringing the audience up to date with the current situation.

The dramaturgy is just a pretext to stage the acrobatic actions in an ecological-architectural space. Within the scenography, each staged object is «metaphorically represented by elements associated with shipping, storage, consumption, global market»⁴⁵, which are identified as the main causes of the climate crisis. The acrobats perform in this space, reacting to the metaphorical architecture of the stage. Each performer embodies a migrant figure reacting to different phenomena linked to climate change: Desertification, the Rising of the sea, the End of permafrost, and Forest fires. The performers' skills are ecodramaturgically linked to the climatic phenomenon, for example, the hair suspension metaphorizes the migrant's extreme attempt to escape from flooding. In addition, the scenographer built a cage structure for each acrobat, based on the visual effect and the movements they had to perform to represent the effort of migration: «This is [End of Permafrost] cage [...]. [The performer] proposed to imagine a structure that worked like the pawns of the game Subbuteo, therefore with a spherical part below, actually almost impossible to keep in balance. His character faces the problem of melting ice»⁴⁶.

The performers respond to the soundscape – played live by a sound designer, musicians, and a singer – which is crucial in allowing the audience to associate the action with the different landscapes through which the show passes. Marco Rip, the sound designer, defines the sound as «environmental music» that was composed as a part of the artistic process «with the creation of the scenes», in fact, many microphones were placed under the stage to use the noises as «big stuff [...] strong and powerful to mix and sample»⁴⁷.

weLAND describes the example of an environmental communication show to express something that is not-so-well-known, but the form of the message is mainly made up of atmosphere (i.e. stage environment), movement, acrobatics, and action, then the playwriting has a marginal role in the artistic process. This explains how performing arts

⁴⁵ F. Fassone, *Set design concept*, in MagdaClan Circus Company, *weLAND: A Journey to a new era*, show private documents, 2021.

⁴⁶ D. Poli, *The Making Of*, Part 1, Interview to Francesco Fassone.

⁴⁷ Ivi, Interview to Marco Rip.

can stage complex ecological issues without expressing them as a conference. In this sense, the stage, with all its inner relationships, is the ecodramaturgical resultant of the phenomenon, while the acrobats' actions are the result of an eco-performed relationship with climate events. Moreover, the whole project is a synthesis between sustainability theories and the performing arts: on the one hand, it offers an interpretation of the real through the story of climate migration; on the other, it is a concrete proposal for action, providing a new tool for communicating ecological issues within the framework of European Community programs.

4.2 *La möa* by Lorenzo Morandini

Lorenzo Morandini has taken a different approach to the ecological and natural stage in his latest work, *La möa*.⁴⁸ *A dance for body and creek*. It is a contemporary dance performance in a specific natural setting: rivers. Morandini began to think about this while walking through the Trentino Alto Adige's forest and the Travignolo stream during the pandemic period: «with *La möa*, the landscape became the place to carry out the stage action [...] after a time of great enclosure, returning to open space made this need stronger»⁴⁹. The project then won a grant from the Bodyscape artistic residency, managed by Danza Urbana's Dancescapes program dedicated to dance creation about the landscape. This opportunity enriched the creative process by confronting other rivers and habitats: the agricultural canals of Crevalcore (Emilia-Romagna) and the Ebro (Saragozza, Spain).

Rivers are powerful ecosystems, and Morandini focuses on the capacity of the performance to respond to complex systems of environmental exchange but he also investigates these spaces as important for human relations and social gatherings. During the restitution of his work, the choreographer described how he works with natural spaces, which is, of course, an approach to the eco-performance.

First, he observes [...] and remains with his body in space, calibrating temperatures, and sensations. Then he initiates contact with the environment, working through the elements of sensitivity to the surroundings. Finally, he imitates and embodies the landscape, a process

⁴⁸ Möa indicates in Trentino dialect a stretch of water where one can meet with other people.

⁴⁹ Dancescapes Academy, *Testimonianze. Bodyscape-percorsi di ricerca coreografica nel paesaggio*, 10th September 2022. https://www.danzaurbana.eu/associazione/dancescapes/progetto-dancescapes_academy/ [last check: 13/04/2023].

that can also take the form of play; for example, in a reed bed near the Crevalcore residence, he pretends to be one of the amphibians hidden among the branches⁵⁰.

This approach highlights a specific way of working that places the body and the environment in a very close relationship to the pattern described in Baiocchi and Pannek's ecoperformance. Thanks to the grant and the residency, he adopted a variety of approaches depending on the quality of the rivers and the relationship that humans have with them. In the first river, in Val di Fiemme, he found «a very strong and intense unspoiled natural landscape», but in Crevalcore (Bologna) he dealt with Valbona canal artificially built for «agricultural use»⁵¹. In his abroad experience in Saragozza, he met the Ebro River, which was completely different from the others because of the «greater flow, the related urban development characteristics of the city, and the social relationships that emerged under the bridge»⁵². Therefore, his whole work was strictly influenced by the ecological relationship that different human communities have established with the various rivers' ecosystems.

The result was staged as part of the Danza Urbana XXVI festival (2022) in a peripheral area of Bologna near the Reno River. Many aspects of the ecoperformance emerged during Morandini's choreography: how the body and movement interacted with the long trees and the water according to their movements, the touch of the stones and the vegetation near the stream, and even the synchronicity was achieved by a beautiful heron that flew towards the horizon at the end of the dance. In the same final moment, however, another element marked the dramaturgical strategy. Lorenzo Morandini picked up an abandoned plastic bottle from the ground and threw it into the middle of the river. He then sat silently, watching the water flow accompanying the piece of trash at the edge. A powerful end to an ecoperformance in front of an audience particularly sensitive to environmental issues. The dancer explained how he has come to it.

The first time I saw these trash elements immersed in the landscape of Travignolo. I noticed their diversity in the natural environment where I was immersed. I asked myself how to deal with them. My primary answer was ethics. Then, the first thing I did was collect and throw all the trash away. Continuing my work in other rivers, I had to deal with much more trash. [...] I tried to watch them in a more specific way about the other elements of the environment.

⁵⁰ E. Regi, *Le parole per danzare il paesaggio – Il glossario di Bodyscape*, [Blog di Danza Urbana](#), 28 febbraio 2022 [last check: 17/03/2023].

⁵¹ Dancescapes Academy, *Testimonianze*. 10th September 2022.

⁵² *Ibid.*

For instance, I must not remove the plants because they have their roots in that place. This trash is part of the landscape too. In conclusion, I was divided between facing the ecological and ethical issues (and to be rigorous I would have had to collect all the trash) or using those elements in a performative way. This action was intense, naturally launching an object is more strong rather than setting it in the space. Mine was a dramaturgic choice, but there is still an issue: these elements are part of the landscape, we can remove or interact with them as we interact with the environment in general⁵³.

Morandini's choice presents us with an ethical and aesthetic dilemma: is the artist supposed to clean up the world, or is his role to underline, through his performative tools, how the world is made? Could the performance also become a manifesto for the climate and ecological crisis? Perhaps arts should not be sustainably correct, but ecodramaturgically concrete and real to generate debate, discussion, and awareness. Surely it was not a beautiful gesture as not cute are the new tendencies of eco-activists that use paint on the monuments. Maybe both try to represent something awful, what humankind did to planet Earth, in a non-conciliative and politically active way.

La möa is close to the ecopeformances' pattern described by Maura Baiocchi, but it also has a strong element of political and environmental communication in its ecodramaturgical composition, which generates conflict and criticism through an ambiguous message. Even in this, the two souls of ecological performing arts are pursued: metaphorization of a problem (trash) in the river through dramaturgical strategy and the human/non-human embodiment of habitat environmental relationships.

Inheriting Marranca's and Chaudhuri's ecological approaches, ecodramaturgy and ecopeformance, theorised respectively by Woynarski and Baiocchi-Pannek, fully reflect a different position of the arts to the environment and the biological and non-biological elements that inhabit it. In this sense, the role of the unique creator does not exist anymore but is divided between the ecosystem and theatrical/dance/music minds, which brings a non-hierarchical and post-anthropocentric for the performing art process and the human artist. The outcomes are that performing arts reflected many different possibilities to apply these attitudes, in which traditional categories do not seem to persist and hybridisation occurs not only between different arts but also between various methodologies (natural sciences, architecture, psychology, sociology, etc.). Moreover,

⁵³ *Ibid.*

the sustainability approach and the culture of the project, which we individuate in the last paragraph as fundamental financial support for implementing these types of performance, request an interdisciplinary and systemic approach to artistic productions that are strongly influencing the process. In this sense, the art product becomes something able to deal with the hyperobjects⁵⁴, using an expression coined by Morton, which could have an impact on the audience and be an active part of the socio-political strategy that institutions are (more or less) applying to face the climate and environmental crisis.

⁵⁴ T. Morton, *Hyperobjects. Philosophy and Ecology after the End of the World*, Minnesota University Press, Minneapolis, 2013.