In-Pandemic Theatre: A Socio-Cultural Reading of the Impact of COVID-19 on Theatre Industry and Dramatic Performance

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Abstract

The coronavirus 2019 rapid spread has caused a universal pandemic, affecting the whole world, not only the health-related sector but also the social, economic and cultural ones. Almost all aspects of human life have been either put on halt or converted into the cyber-space and the digital realm. To name some, the associated pandemic restrictions issued by governments have left a significant impact upon the theatre industry and dramatic performance, which holds dear the ethos of embodied practice and physical interaction. Most theatres around the world have been closed and ceased to stage their live shows. In this respect, the present paper aims to shed light on the substantial changes that the theatre industry and dramatic performance have witnessed as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. In order to achieve this intent, Lev Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory and his concept of *perezhivanie* are utilized to contextualize the common state accompanying the in-pandemic experience and the practices of theatre makers, playwrights and performers to manage the crisis with a resolved determination that 'the show must go on'. The paper has concluded that the theatre industry and dramatic performance have proved to be adaptive, innovative and interactive in pursuit of successfully navigating the pandemic despite the scale and complexity of the challenges of having to deliver dramatic performance via online premises and digital platforms.

Keywords: *In-pandemic Theatre- COVID-19- Digital Theatre- Virtual Drama- Socio-cultural Theory*

Introduction

During its lifelong history, the theatre industry has been attended and constrained by contagions and pandemic plagues and has also functioned as a dramatic carrier by mirroring them on the stage. Epidemics and diseases have been theatrically portrayed since the early ancient Greek tragedies that were developed to utter and mitigate the psychologically synchronized maladies and consequences of an outbreak. From Athenian drama until today, outbursts, epidemics and transmittable diseases have led to theatres' closures and performances' constraints. The rise and spread of epidemics constitute a danger to the theatre industry, while simultaneously serving as a dramatic muse for stagecraft and a communicative media sharing the concerns and fears of societies that are psychologically and physiologically plagued. Facilitating critical self and socio-cultural reflection, both societies and individuals resort to the theatre as a means of entertainment and artistic expression in the face of such catastrophic tragedies. Huge common disturbances "have been marked by reactionary theatrical performances that address the consequences, how people see and feel about the history that has just been formed. The stage is a crucial aspect of understanding civilizations from the past and now" (Latcham, 2020). The core of the process of meaning-making in the theatrical paradigm is manifested in the reaction of the actors and audiences who experience the journey altogether, at the same time and in the same site. This makes theatre a place for expressing suffering, confliction, chaos, or festivity to be shared and acknowledged socio-culturally.

Theatre and Pandemics throughout Ages: An Overview

There has always been an age-old association that binds theatre, diseases and pandemics, ranging from terror and confusion to muse and inspiration. According to Antonin Artaud "theatre, like the plague, is a delirium and is communicative" (1958, p. 15). Holding an ambivalent relation with the stagecraft, epidemiology both echoes and discards theatre's working paradigms. According to Fintan Walsh, the theatrical experience is "a form in which destructive forces can be summoned for scrutiny, and epidemiology dramaturgically interpreted and modelled" (2021, p.

308) in an explicitly artistic manner. The history of humanity has witnessed notable outbreaks of pandemics that range from the Athenian plague, the Black Death, influenza epidemics, the 2003 SARS outbreak and H1N1 pandemic of 2009 to the most recent eruption of COVID-19. Ironically enough, these pandemics both fuel and stall the theatre industry and dramatic performance. Although they represent a lingering menace that threatens the theatre's existence, they also trigger a necessity for a dramatic reaction that echoes the morose state of the outside world. Since ancient Greek theatre, many plays have been dramatized in the light of or as a response to a pandemic burst.

The bond between theatre and pandemics can be traced to Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*, in which the raiding plague functions as the play's dramatic spinal cord and not just an indolent background. The epidemic ailment delineated in the Sophoclean theatre dramatizes the real outbreak that plagued Athens in 430 B.C. (Ringer, 1998, p. 78). It feeds and forges the dramaturgical membrane of most 5th-century plays. Likewise, but on a larger scale, the drama of the Elizabethan and Jacobean ages is perhaps the most remarkable exemplar of pandemic-provoked theatre, due to the recurrent raids of the bubonic plague. Many of Shakespeare's plays either covertly refer to a contagious disease or overtly allude to the plague and its associated measures of confinement and solitude. Katherine Duncan-Jones puts it, "plague was a defining context for all Shakespeare's writing" (2001, p. 54) as in *The Tempest*, *Twelfth Night* and *Romeo and Juliet*. This is such the case with the theatre of the 19th and early 20th centuries which demonstrates a dramatic interest in contagion and the scientific account for disease spread. This period is plagued with several severe pandemic attacks, including cholera and the intermittent fatal attacks of the Spanish Flu, ravaging Europe and other parts of the universe. Thus, many playwrights find in the pandemic and its scientific intent a source of inspiration for their dramaturgical content as in Anton Chekhov in *Uncle Vanya* and Henrik Ibsen's *Ghosts*.

The dramatization of pandemics also has to do with the statement and comprehension of world politics, ideological perceptions, socio-cultural paradigms, economic concerns, and interpersonal affairs. This is quite evident in "theatre's capacity to participate in the shifting ideologies concerning disease, sexuality and

citizenship in the United States during the formative years of the AIDS crisis" (Román, 1998, p. 44). Plays like *As Is* by William Hoffman, *The Normal Heart* by Larry Kramer, William Finn's musical *Falsettos*, and Tony Kushner's masterpiece *Angels in America* play a part in the process of pandemic awareness by acting out its implications and working mechanisms. In their entwined history, theatre and pandemics usually act as reciprocally reflective and corresponding entities, in the sense that disease wide-spreads most likely prompt closures of playhouses. Paying the tributary for its communicative nature, theatres, as venues of communal gathering, are always considered as hotspots for infection and disease transmission. In his iconic essay "The Theatre and the Plague", Antonin Artaud draws on the concept of theatre being plague-like. He identifies the plague as a metaphor that would abolish and re-construct anew, a means of dramatic conceptualization, as well as a "revelation, [a] bringing forth" to pronounce the theatrical reform (1958, p. 30). Thus, to examine in-pandemic theatre is both to speak of no theatre or a discursively latent theatre that awaits eruptive release in new premises and possibilities.

The Rise of COVID-19 and its Effect on Theatre and Performance

The rise of COVID-19 as one of the most globally contagious and transmittable ailments, and the horror and chaos accompanying its spread have led to numerous forms of instabilities and interruptions in the operations of several industries (Haroon & Rizvi, 2020). In order to break the virus's blast, a set of governmental and communal actions have been globally effected in an attempt to contain the disease. An immediate lockdown policy is carried out, by which all of the business activities have been halted. In most countries, people are not allowed to travel or to move from one place to another both on the national and international levels. As a result, theatrical performances and live shows have received a mighty hit since the restriction measures came into play in 2020. The entertainment industry has reportedly been found to be more vulnerable during this pandemic (Gu et al., 2020). In the European Union, arts and recreation was the 2nd worst-hit sector by COVID-19 restrictions (European Parliament, Policy Department for Structural and Cohesion Policies, 2021). More than 15,000 theatrical performances were cancelled over the first twelve weeks of lockdown in

the United Kingdom only (GOV.UK, 2021). The pandemic reduced live shows and performances by an average of 56.12% in venues across Italy, France, Germany, Spain, UK and USA in 2020 compared to the year before, and the total revenues dropped by a comparative 51.32% at the same time (Rurale et al., 2020).

COVID-19 contagion has been craved in humanity's socio-cultural collective consciousness. It has left its impact on the operation and production of theatrical performances and dramatic representations. Theatre's aesthetics and mechanisms have witnessed a major shift on the levels of both themes and dramatic techniques. In light of this, there appears an underlying academic concern to examine the implications of this global emergency on the theatre industry and performance techniques and its implications on socio-cultural awareness. Academic researchers and literary scholars are still in the process of unfolding the dynamics and allegations of theatre makers' immigration from live physical shows to online platforms. It seemed to be a great challenge for the theatre playwrights and performers to move to the virtual realm and utilize digital platforms and applications to make online plays and dramatic shows. Therefore, this study intends to answer the research questions: How did theatre makers and performers respond to the distressing impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic? How did Theatre's entanglements with digital technologies during this critical period affect theatrical aesthetics and provide an opportunity for the sector's survival?

The Echoes of the Socio-cultural Theory in Theatre and Dramatic Performance

There are reciprocal relations between drama and socio-cultural contexts and structures. The means by which meaning is made in theatre intensely echo those that make meanings in social life. Dramatic genres reflect and imitate types of daily lives, and people in everyday life reciprocally find in drama lessons to learn. As a result of these common grounds, facets of daily experiences are clustered, shaped, and reproduced into several cultural and dramatic shapes. Those processes crystalize significant aspects of socio-cultural circumstances that allow both audience members and theatre makers the opportunity to think, learn and critically reflect on the multifacets of societal and communal experience. Several formulae of

drama flow in the broader cultural sphere, making signs and meanings that respond to the ongoing socio-cultural situation. These dramatic structures are considered part and parcel of the sociocultural interactive experience that is semiotically mediated via physical performance. Theatre as a public space for social solidarity developed as collective comfort in response to collective trauma, following Ann Cvetkovich's definition of *trauma* as "a social and cultural discourse that emerges in response to the demands of grappling with the psychic consequences of historical events" (2003, p. 18). In correlation, there are strong grounds to believe that the Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky's experience in theatre-writing has a strong effect that molds his thoughts and the socio-cultural notion he initiated. According to Vygotsky, "Art is the social technique of emotion, a tool of society, which brings the most intimate and personal aspects of our being into the circle of social life" (1925/1971, p. 249). Vygotsky coined the term *perezhivanie* as a theoretic conceptualization to express the feeling and wisdom of having 'lived through' a hard experience. It is a notion that exceeds having an 'emotional experience' to form an analytical prodigy that accounts for the effect of the environment and subjective-self contributing to the process and dynamics of making meaning. In this respect, it sheds light on the distinctive and affecting nature of individual experience in response to the same environmental circumstances.

The most remarkable implementation of Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory is apparent in his late works, where he examines the notions of creativity and affect. He draws on Stanislavskian work in re-counting the significance of being affected and motivated in the process of engendering human will towards 'act-ion' (Michell, 2015, p. 21). This stresses the prominence of the interaction of an internal emotional life and external environment in arousing authentic feelings through 're-lived' experience. In this respect, this socio-cultural perspective can be considered a robust theoretic conception that could be used to identify how drama works. It is also a key concept for realizing the process of making meaning and learning. Within the borders of dramatic performance, human emotions and experiences are placed at the heart of the learning's wisdom. Drama provides a distinctive form of a 'living through' experience by employing authentic situations and life-like

concerns that allow audiences to indulge in a real-like experience, without tolerating its realistic consequences. Those who participate in and respond to the dramatic performance are both invited and prompted to 'feel' and articulate a wide range of diverse emotions, by means of expressively communicative and dramatic forms that can externalize thoughts and feelings and outspread the range of the individual's lived experience. This socio-cultural mechanism gives the opportunity to discover human beings' inner and outer workings and lead to the individual's subjective and social development. Experimentations in dramatic texts and theatrical performances can help cultivating 'lived, emotional experiences', thus contributing to *perezhivanie's* stimulation. They also affect the ways by which dramatic representation can offer opportunities for emotional engagement and embodied action to spread out of the theatrical realm into broad social and cultural structures and provide psychological agency for the audiences beyond the dramatic sphere.

Theatre's 'dramatic' Shift towards the Virtual Realm

With much of the world under shelter-in-place orders, spaces of appearance were mostly turned virtual. As Fintan Walsh describes, screens became "the means by which we continued everyday tasks or attended theatre…central to how we navigated love and loss, intimacy and separation" (2021, p. 397). From a socio-cultural perspective, in spite of the distressing effect of the epidemic, it provides an ultimate opportunity for renaissance and innovation and offers a space for a unifying artistic experience. Societies and individuals all over the world have established creative means in response to those 'unprecedented' circumstances. In his article, McCaleb referred to the increasing number of theatre makers who reacted to the disaster by resorting to the virtual realm arguing that, "for performers in lockdown, online is becoming the new live" (2020). This tragic universal emergency unintentionally necessitates new working mechanisms in the stagecraft to safely reach out for the spectators. Thus, it can be said that the pandemic provides new premises for the dramatic performance by which audiences can access the content via the internet to cope with the lockdown restrictions and claims for staying safe at home. Online plays and dramatic sketches performed on digital venues come as a savior to the theatre industry at the height of the outbreak.

According to the UK Government's *'Boundless Creativity Report'*, the in-pandemic virtual dramatic content can fall under three categories:

- Pre-recorded content being streamed, either through bespoke platforms or existing streaming services;
- Live intra-media performances making use of new popular technology like Zoom and occasionally including interactive elements;
- Live streaming entirely new content, either free to view or to paying audiences. (2021)

Drama, which communicates a specific mode of fiction that is deliberately written to be performed lively on stage, is transformed into remote, online performance and socially-distanced spectatorship. In writing drama, the playwright enjoys the privilege of using the literary devices available to poets and novelists such as foreshadowing, flashbacks, allegory, allusion, irony, imagery, satire, symbols and personification, in addition to the dramatic techniques suitable to the stage in order to keep the audience enthralled. It "combines speech, background music, and special sound effects with visual stimuli in the form of actions, facial expressions, gestures, body movement, and props' handling" (Kaminski, 2019). Thus, socio-culturally speaking, the dramatic genre "provides a meaningful basis for the use of multiple modes of meaning-making. Its representational meaning is portrayed by the playwright's messages in the script, interpreted by the readers, and performed by the actors through their stagecraft skills" (O'Neill, 2018, 26). According to Nicholson, "drama has the power to address something 'beyond itself' (2011). Accordingly, it is largely indebted to engendering new promises for every-day living by providing a venue for multidimensional representations of meaning and drawing on the spectators' sociocultural experiences in the formation of theatrically performed scripts. Thus, theatre plays a vital role in reflecting and shaping the socio-cultural fabric of society. It provides an artistic platform for diverse voices, narratives, and perspectives.

Digital Theatre: Trials and Challenges

In response to the pandemic crisis, digital theatre has emerged as a creative alternative solution that works in a multiplicity of ways. According to Gallagher et al., "virtual drama is a show that is performed or broadcasted online through certain

applications" (2020, p. 639). In the COVID-19 realm, the substantial transformation from the traditional way of producing and communicating plays and dramatic performances to online streaming has converted digital performances from occasional trials to prevalent paradigm, with which the performing art sector and most theatre types and troupes have been involved since March 2020. Virtual reality (VR) social platforms and applications are used to present live theatre and performance in a deeply interactive experience. Plays and performances are streamed via Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, Zoom or Google Meet. Canva and Pinterest are graphic design platforms that have user-friendly features that can be used in Zoom, designing the drama poster and unique virtual backgrounds and sharing them on social media. The digital archive also plays a vital role in the formulation of digital Theatre. It offers a data-based approach to virtual performative streaming where the audiences and participants are regarded as data-identified subjects.

However, performing drama via online vehicles seems to be the only way out to reach to the audience in times of compulsory lockdowns and social distancing, it is obvious that this approach of drama performance faces a number of shortcomings that affect the overall experience. Accordingly, the vital question remains: how does this compulsory collaboration between dramatic performance and the means of the digital realm affect the theatrical aesthetics and dramaturgical doctrine? Despite its utmost importance at the time, making performance while being locked down at home introduces a number of quite challenging technical and theoretical issues for theatre makers. The features of stage performance are not fully and properly realized when virtually presented. At one point, this has to do with the shortage of stage props and poverty of theatrical devices. The designer here is committed to create new joint relations via the non-conducive means of the video conferencing applications and programs. The scenography of any scene becomes mainly dependent upon the performer's assignation to realize intended ideas. The size of the performance space and the backstage for costume change become limited and the lively stage props are transformed into mere images. Costumes are from the performers' own wardrobe, scenery and lighting from the home setting or a mere background designated by graphic-based applications.

Against the theatrical conventional canon, each of the theatre makers is working alone and doing his/her own part separately of a supposedly group work. The actors are making their performance from different places without face-to-face interaction with each others while facial expressions, gestures and body movements are very important in telling the story and conveying the action. According to Costa, "body movement creates sensations, impulses, and images… that can eventually find their way to understanding the meanings of a text" (2016). Likewise, physical touch is very much needed to present feelings and establish certain relations, through hugs, hand-holding, beating, and slapping, etc. Another challenge to digital theatre is the audience constriction which is derived from the idea that most people believe that virtual drama is not as interesting and entertaining as that performed on stage. A dramatic text can provide quite different modes of expression when it is a written script, performed on stage, or streamed through virtual means. According to Cope and Kalantzis, "meaning expressed in one mode cannot be directly and completely translated into another... The image can never do the same thing as the description of a scene in language" (2009).

From a socio-cultural perspective, despite the shortcomings, the COVID-19 pandemic significantly affected the theatre industry as a performing art, mirroring its mighty impact on almost all other sectors. During the pandemic period, theatre makers have had to choose: either to put the theatre industry on halt or adjust it as a means of crisis management. The dynamic feature of the theatrical experience leads to the rise of new formats to show diligence in the face of any crisis. Theatre has had a rich history since the ancient Greek rituals and has been present in almost all civilizations and cultures. Live theatre performance survived Civil Wars, the Great Depression, and both World Wars. Thus, when physical presence became a troublesome and a precarious state, virtual theatre emerged as an alternative means of co-presence. There was a determined intent that 'the show must go on' whatsoever the situation was. Thus, most of theatre performers and playwrights did not pay much attention to the aesthetics, worth or efficiency of performance's mass immigration to the virtual sphere. They have come up with this ad hoc and transitional adjustment, seeing it as an imposed chance to experiment with new technologies and means of engaging with audiences while still staying safe at

home. These alternative options allowed the theatre to become more accessible and recruit a wide range of audiences, including those who could not afford the theatre high ticket prices, and disabled people whose handicap does not allow them to enjoy the 'classic' live theatre experience.

Ancient: A Rhetoric of Common Socio-cultural Experience

In the face of this mighty pandemic, theatre artists make digital performances forwarding discourses that "we're all in this together" leaned into intersubjectivity, employing a rhetoric of common experience. These performances socio-culturally situate the act of sheltering in place as the shared facet of community belonging, implicitly encouraging audience members to participate in this community and maintain quarantined isolation. There is an indexical quality to the artists who undertake these performances—they represent themselves as social beings or actual humans who are really sheltering in place, and also symbolically stand in for other humans who are similar to them in some way or other. In this respect, Mike Sears and Lisa Berger's *Ancient* kicked off La Jolla Playhouse's WOW Festival; the run was announced to be from May 14 to June 7, 2020, while the digital performance remained available to stream after the end of the initial run. The performance features text from Rainer Maria Rilke's poem "Go to the Limits of Your Longing" set to a score composed by Shawn Rohlf. It was inspired by Ragnar Kjartansson's *The Visitors*, an installation that featured synchronized films of nine individual musicians playing repetitive loops of music in different rooms of the same upstate New York house. Echoing this, Sears and Berger create their own nine-panel video installation that playhouse audiences can watch from home. Stepping into a new realm that is both super thrilling and chilling, *Ancient* intends to explore the monotony and solitude of being locked down where ironically nothing is taking place while literally everything is looming ahead.

During the pandemic, people find themselves in a solitary confinement where repetition and dullness become a sociocultural rhetoric in itself. Sears and Berger want to convey this state and communicate the story in a quite different mode that is both non-linear and unconventional theatrical construction. One at a time, images of people engaged in repetitive everyday chores appear onscreen. A middle-

aged Asian man does tai chi in front of a red barn under a bright blue sky. A white woman in her thirties plays the cello in front of windows looking out at the lights of a city at night. A middle-aged Indian American woman in a wheelchair shucks peas in her kitchen. An Asian woman in her forties rocks a toddler in a rocking chair. A white man in his forties plays the guitar in a basement studio. A man in his twenties, who looks to be of Latinx or Indigenous descent, washes dishes in his kitchen. A young Black woman folds laundry while sitting on her bedroom bed. A white woman in her forties plays the piano. An older white man with tattoos plants sprouts in front of a garage containing a motorcycle. As each is introduced, they appear in a large box in the center of the screen to establish their action. Their boxes then shrink and shift away from the center until all of the performers are in a grid of boxes filing the screen. Each performs his/her own old-as-time action in their own domestic space, separated by thin black lines. Sometimes, they all make the same gesture, echoing a shape from tai chi with simultaneous movement in their own spaces incorporated into their own actions.

At one moment, the music fades and the sounds of domestic activities can be heard: the clatter of silverware, the rhythmic click of a rocking chair on hardwood, the rattle of soil hitting the inside of a pot. Fifteen minutes into the twenty-minute-long performance, they all stop and look at the camera, breaking the fourth wall and including the audience members in the experience. The musicians sing, "Let everything happen to you: beauty and terror. /Just keep going, No feeling is final. /Don't let yourself lose me" (Rilke, 1996, p. 119). The lyrics ask the spectators to let it in emotionally—the beauty and the terror—and to find the beauty in these quiet moments of repetitive caretaking action. The performance does not incorporate the full text of Rilke's poem, which frames this imperative as the word of God, imploring God's human audience—*you*—to experience fully everything life has to offer, and in so doing, "embody" the divine: "God speaks to each of us as he makes us / then walks with us silently out of the night" (Rilke, 1996, p. 119). This source material invokes a divine spirit infusing human experience, supporting humans through moments of pain and struggle. *Ancient* takes these three lines of Rilke's poem out of context, and in so doing removes any religious reference. It directs itself to *you*, its singular and plural remote audience, but does not identify

the *me* offering such advice. This lyric is set to a repetitive, almost dirge-like melody. When sung, the final directive "don't let yourself lose me" elongates the word *me* and modulates its playing field through multiple harmonic chords, making it sound like the word *meaning*. This sonic ambiguity reinforces *Ancient*'s claim to make mindful meaning from the journey through the frightening, mundane, uncanny experience of in-pandemic sheltering in place.

Ancient steers an emotional engagement as a means of psychological relief in an in-pandemic period through participation in an imaginary collectivities. It encourages audience members to accept all the feelings of this strange moment of quarantine with as little judgment as possible. The arts have been proactively adopted by many as part of supportive coping styles to help them manage the stress of the pandemic. Looking at it from a critical socio-cultural perspective, the performance represents inclusive practices into which viewers are invited to write themselves, offering a range of healthy mechanisms for tolerating and enduring the pain of sheltering in place. It presents people of diverse races, abilities, and ages in environments representing class positions ranging from lower middle to upper middle classes, either playing musical instruments or doing domestic activities, including chores (cooking, laundry, washing dishes) that need to be done regularly in most households, configuration, and social classes. It fits into the tradition of American theatre that Jacob Gallagher-Ross describes as focused on "mundane subject matter" dedicated to "transforming spectators' conceptions, both on and offstage" (2018, p. 3). *Ancient* dramatically presents glimpses of the in-pandemic life and the distinctive nature of the individual experience in response to the same external conditions. By attending primarily to the aesthetic qualities of routine action, it urges audience members to "truly see the ordinary world around us, to pay homage to the worlds of experience that arrive and disappear in every sensate moment" (Gallagher-Ross, 2018, p. 4).

From a socio-cultural perspective, *Ancient* represents the experiences of people of diverse races, genders, ages, and abilities as fundamentally similar, obscuring the material and psychic ways in which its subjects' relationships to hierarchical systems of power render them different. Aesthetically, the performers are all given the same amount of visual weight or emphasis performing separate

actions at the same slow, steady tempo. The only heard voices are those of the musicians, while the spectators see the images of a diverse array of people, singing text written by an early twentieth century Austro-Hungarian poet. Echoing Vygotsky's *perezhivanie* that expresses the feeling and wisdom of having 'lived through' a hard experience, *Ancient* stimulates the audience members to view the experiences it represents as fundamentally similar to one another and to their own lived experiences of quarantine. It relies upon the capacity of performers' diverse bodies to fulfill an indexical function and facilitate a process in which the spectators read themselves through the imagined community. The intent behind this heterogeneity is clearly inclusion; the diverse bodies give a wide array of audience members a performer who shares a noticeable facet of their identity. An unintended byproduct, however, is that in so doing, it reproduces colorblind discourses, obscuring real differences in people's experiences of the onset of the pandemic.

Conclusion

Socio-culturally speaking, the COVID-19 pandemic has significantly impacted the theatre industry and live performances. One of the most immediate effects of the pandemic was the closure of playhouses and performance venues. These in-pandemic induced closures and restrictions have led to the cancellation of many productions and performances, resulting in financial losses for theatre makers, troupes, and companies that heavily rely on ticket sales, sponsorships, and donations to sustain their theatrical operations. The pandemic has severely crushed their revenue streams and deprived audiences of the 'live' theatre experience, thus disrupting the social and cultural fabric of many communities. The loss of jobs for actors, directors, stage crew, and other theatre makers has also been a matter of significant concern. The pandemic also has affected the role of theatre as a means of social and cultural exchange, limiting the opportunities for artists to express themselves and physically engage. Theatre, as a unique art-form that relies on immediate connection between the audience members and performers, has lost this distinctive interactive nature. The absence of live interaction during the pandemic deprived both actors and spectators the vitality and spontaneity of this shared experience. Accordingly, many communities have lost the socio-cultural benefits

that theatre brings, including shared experiences, collective dialogue, binding, and a sense of belonging.

Despite the challenges, the theatre industry has demonstrated resilience and creative adaptation in the face of this exceptional worldwide predicament. Many theatre makers have found innovative ways to engage with audiences through live-streamed performances, online plays, and virtual productions. This digital turn that the condition necessitates has allowed for theatre's resurrection to maintain artistic expression and socio-cultural engagement, albeit in different forms. Moreover, the pandemic have prompted introspection within the theatre industry and ignited artistic conversations about its future. Artists and organizations have started experimenting with new means and possibilities to make theatre more accessible, inclusive, and resilient. The pandemic crisis has drawn attention to a number of systematic and operational issues concerning funding, diversity, and representation, leading to cultural discussions and initiatives aimed at addressing and handing these technical concerns. Thus, the pandemic has disrupted the traditional modes of theatrical expression, challenged the financial viability of theatres, and forced the industry to redirect and reimagine its future. The path to recovery involves finding a balance between cyber-space productions and the restoration of live, in-person performances while addressing the systematic and operational issues that the pandemic laid bare.

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مسرح الجائحة: قراءة نقدية من منظور المدرسة الاجتماعية الثقافية لتأثير جائحة كوفيد-19على صناعة المسرح والأداء الدرامي

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المستخلص:

لقد تسبب الانتشار السريع لفيروس كوفيد-19 في تحوله إلى جائحة أثرت على جميع دول العالم وتركت بصماتها واضحة على كافة القطاعات ومناحي الحياة بلا استثناء. اذ لم يقتصر تأثيره على قطاع الصحة فحسب بل امتد الى القطاعات الاجتماعية والاقتصادية والثقافية وقطاع الفنون وغيرها. حيث أدت سياسات التباعد الاجتماعى وغيرها من القيود التي فرضتها الحكومات على التجمع والسفر والانتقال كإجراءات وقائية بهدف الحد من انتشار المرض إلى توقف العمل في معظم القطاعات واللجوء إلى حلول بديلة كالعمل عن بعد باستخدام وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي والتطبيقات الالكترونية. وفي هذا السياق وكجزء لا يتجزأ من نسيج المجتمع، أغلقت معظم المسارح أبوابها أمام الجمهور وتوقفت عن تقديم عروضها المباشرة في سابقة لم تحدث كثيرا في تاريخ المسرح منذ نشأته منذ أيام الاغريق. وعلى هذا تهدف هذه الورقة البحثية إلى القاء الضوء على أثر جائحة كورونا على الدراما والأداء المسرحي والتغيرات الملموسة التي طرأت عليهما من ناحية الشكل والمضمون. وفي سبيل تحقيق هذا العرض، استخدمت الباحثة النظرية الاجتماعية الثقافية كإطار نقدي لتحليل تأثير الجائحة والأدوات والممارسات التي استخدمها صناع المسرح والكتاب المسرحيين والمؤديين في محاولة منهم لاستمرار التجربة المسرحية خلال فترة الجائحة. وتوصلت النتائج إلى قدرة صناعة المسرح على التكيف والتجديد والتفاعل في مواجهة الأزمات والمتغيرات بالرغم من حجم وصعوبة التحديات التي واجهتها في تقديم المسرح عن بعد باستخدام وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي والتطبيقات الالكترونية المختلفة بعيدا عن الشكل الكلاسيكي القائم على الحضور المباشر والتفاعل الجماهيري.

الكلمات المفتاحية: **مسرح الجائحة ـ جائحة كوفيد-19ـ المسرح الافتراضي ـ الأداء الدرامي ـ المدرسة النقدية الاجتماعية الثقافية**