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# From staging to social protagonism: Digital transformation within The Experimental Theater of Cali

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**Abstract.** This article shows the process of carrying out an innovation proposal at the Cali Experimental Theatre (TEC) in the context of isolation measures due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Through a process of “infrastructural inversion” inspired on the canonical work of Star and Bowker, and following Simonsen and Hertzum, we revealed the deep historical connections that not only the TEC but the entire Colombian theatre movement of the 1960s had with the activists of social change such as workers' organizations, trade unions and revolutionary movements. We present the iterative process of how this proposal was co-created with leadership of the TEC exposing infrastructural points of resistance and opportunity in the realisation of digital innovation. Our resulting proposal to the TEC reconnects the theatre group with the equivalent current actants of social change, such as independent journalism, citizen movements and non-governmental organizations, through a digital transformation, positioning it not only as a product of artistic quality but also as a social and historical research group. All this without altering the identity and dramaturgical tradition that the group has maintained intact for 65 years of existence. We conclude the paper by discussing the disciplinary paradoxes and sociotechnical limitations faced by this type of innovation requiring a digital transformation of their performing and delivery infrastructures.

**Keywords:** Theater, Digital Transformation, Infrastructuring.

## 1 Introduction

Digital transformation refers to the changes that occur within a sociotechnical ecosystem, when the processes that used to occur in an analogous manner must be adapted or

reinvented to fit the digital world. This transformation differs from mere digitization in that it is not only the physical materiality that changes, but it is the meaningful human activity that re-shaped. Digital transformation occurs in as infrastructuring (Star, 1996), which is, not as something on which a system operates, but as the invisible sociotechnical structures that allow the system to work. Digital transformations occur on organized socio-technical practices, which are in continuous evolution and that can grow and articulate with other infrastructures, according to community interests. This transformation can even revitalize political positions that were previously weakened, or even disappeared, due to social, economic, and political changes.

During the year 2020, at the height of the confusion caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, we carried out an innovation process with the Experimental Theater of Cali, seeking to provide a solution, from digital transformation to the problem of the impediment of face-to-face attendance of spectators in theaters and public stages. This infrastructuring process in the specific field of the performing arts, not only evidenced the tensions between the mere change of material support and a true digital transformation, but also led to a deep ontological reflection of the social function of the Experimental Theater of Cali. This resulted in a review of the original postulates of the group that, based on the ideas of Bertolt Brecht, consider the theater as a determining factor of social change, which is fundamentally articulated with other social forces such as political movements, labor unions, theater groups and independent media.

In this article we offer an account about the process that was carried out throughout the semester, between September and December 2020. We seek to investigate the possibilities of digital transformation in an eminently analog medium such as theater, where the infrastructure can vary according to the specific context of operation, in this case the Latin American theater. Our work produced two different proposals, each one aligned to a different concept of infrastructure. The first proposal emphasized the infrastructure as the relationships between spectators and actors through staging, whilst reconsidering the function of the body, space and time of traditional theater. This proposal, based on the digital reconfiguration of the elements of the staging, was rejected by the group for distorting their artistic activity. The second proposal, understands the theater infrastructure as an agent of social change as Bertolt Brecht stated in the 1930, and was based on the articulation of the theater through digital media with the local political ecosystem. It was approved by the group for revitalizing its role as an agent of change.

This article reflects on the possible infrastructure approaches and the ontological conflicts that digital transformation can bring with it, when carried out in contexts with a strong analog tradition.

## 2 Literature review

Although the literature that deals specifically with Digital Transformation as a field of action and its application in theater is not extensive (Aebischer et al 2020, Boyle 2016), there are numerous theorists who have dealt with the relationship between theater and Information and Communication Technologies. Non face-to-face and the use of digital technologies present ontological conflicts with the theatrical act (Phelan 1993, Auslander 1999), and in turn, enable new aesthetic approaches that relate it to perspectives of the interconnected and networked post-human body (Giannachi 2007). This body unfolds synchronously or asynchronously in virtual or real multidimensional spaces, tipping the balance towards transmedia, over the traditions of the performing arts (Causey 2016). These approaches can be seen more clearly if they are compared to canonical texts such as Anne Ubersfeld's *Theatrical Semiotics* (1989), which proposes four dimensions for the analysis of theatre: body, object, space and time.

Regarding the subject of the body and its real or animated representation, Furniss (1998) proposed unifying photographic representation and animated representation in the same category. In the same way as Kaplin (1996), who proposed the unification of the human character, puppet and drawing in the same category according to the distance of the controller on the image.

However, it is in the now classic approaches of Bertolt Brecht (1964) regarding innovation, where we can find a possible answer about the relationship between theater and digital transformation, since the play writer redirects the gaze from the pure theatrical form, towards the effect that the theatrical apparatus produces in society. This approach has been carefully observed by Boyle (2016), to propose that theatrical innovation must focus on the impact that it may have on the social system, rather than on the change in the artistic form that might be expected.

On the contrary, the literature on digital transformation applied to other sectors is extensive. The ontological collision in theater and digital transformation can be understood as the fundamental changes that the use of new technologies brings to organizations: changes in the values and characteristics of the end result, changes in the organizational structure that produces them, and changes in the financial structure that supports this new configuration (Hess, T et al, 2016). A tendency to develop taxonomies of the components of digital transformation can be found right here. Reis et al (2018) categorize the definitions of digital transformations around the concepts of technology, organization, or society, in similar manner to Henriette et al (2015), who categorize it around business models, operational processes and user experience. Contrary to these, there are points of view from Hess et al (2016), that propose four strategic dimensions: technology, product, structure, and finance, Floréz-Aristizábal et al (2018) focused on four fundamental technological aspects of digital transformation: the internet of things, social media, cloud storage and mobile devices.

Undoubtedly, these sociotechnical approaches could be observed from Bowker's framework (1994), who referred to this type of reinterpretation of sociotechnical systems as infrastructural investments, which can be understood as keen observations about changing contexts that a community took for granted. Star explains it from the point of view of the Gestalt between figure and background, withdrawing the gaze from things or people individually as causes, emphasizing their relational aspect, thus even inverting historical explanations about events that were taken for granted. Similarly, Leigh-Star (1994, 1996, 2002) extensively considers the perspectives of the concept of infrastructure.

When referring to sociotechnical relations and rediscoveries of human and non-human actants in information chains, it is inevitable to refer to the canonical texts of the Actor Network theory of Latour (2008) and Law (2004), whose application has been tested in fields as dissimilar as architecture, management, E-learning, finance, etc.

Finally, the equally classic text by Lev Manovich "The Language of New Media" (1998), without losing its validity, continues to propose taxonomic and referential bases to address the converging processes of digital transformation with solid perspectives. Such as?

## **2.1 The Experimental Theater of Cali**

The Experimental Theater of Cali was born in 1955, as a result of the rupture of its founder Enrique Buenaventura with the then financing government entities that opposed his political positions, as expressed on stage. Notoriously influenced by the postulates of Bertolt Brecht, the Experimental Theater of Cali was characterized by a deep interest in fundamentally relating their work to the people, whilst being an agent for the promotion of critical thought and social change. Its growth occurred within the general framework of the New Colombian Theater movement, an artistic and political movement that brought together countless professional, university, and school theater groups. This movement was articulated with labor unions and political movements, characteristic of the hectic Latin American 60s and 70s. In collaboration with other members of the movement, such as La Candelaria theater in Bogotá, the group developed the Method for Collective Creation, which sought horizontal participation of the members of the theater company, opposing the bourgeois vision of the director/omnipotent author that characterized theater from the nineteenth century. During the decades of the 60s and 70s, the Experimental Theater of Cali achieved worldwide notoriety and has since been widely studied by theorists from all over the world. The Experimental Theater of Cali maintains its respect and notoriety intact, even though, stylistically, they remain far from new trends in vogue and from the massive audiences that once filled its room.

## **2.2 The Method for Collective Creation**

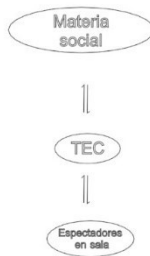
For a good understanding of the second digital transformation proposal, it is necessary to specify the method for collective creation published by the founder of the

Experimental Theater of Cali, Enrique Buenaventura, and Jacqueline Vidal, who's the current director of the group. By collecting the initiatives and processes that several of the directors and actors had been using since the 1960's, the method for collective creation was published in 1972, and subsequently modified throughout the years. This method, following approaches articulated between semiotics, epic theater, and Marxism, sought the deconstruction of the author's rhetoric in the work, seeking a deeper analysis of the relationship between the work and its context. It aimed at allowing the horizontal participation of the theatrical group and the spectators in the writing of the rhetoric. The former during the staging, and the latter through forums organized after the performance. The group wanted to provide an infrastructure and become a dynamic and living agent of critique and social change, rooted in, and articulated to the context where the work was being produced.



**Fig. 1.** This is how Experimental Theater of Cali understands how the social forces interact in a play.

As can be seen on Figure 1, the method was based on the investigation of the social context in which the work was inscribed, using dialectical materialism as a tool (distributed by thematic commissions among the members of the group), with the purpose of identifying the forces in conflict represented in each of the scenes and in the total fable of the text. By using improvisation through analogies and the permanent dialogue of the group, the theater, supported by research methods based on dialectical materialism, explored how to allow themselves to analyze the rhetoric and the context of the work. Key to this, was to remain open to the permanent transformation of the end result through dialogue with viewers after the performances. The method sought, in the words of Enrique Buenaventura, to bring knowledge and a critical stance to the public with the best level of entertainment possible, and became a form of permanent interactive dialogue between society and its conflicts through dramaturgy (Fig. 2)



**Fig. 2.** The Experimental Theater of Cali understands itself as a dialogical vehicle between the social material that's included in their work and the spectators.

### 3 Methodology

For this research, an ethnographic design strategy based on non-participatory observation was used. The purpose was to understand the ETC as a social system, including their knowledge, practices, beliefs, ideas and meanings (McLeod & Thompson 2009). The group was initially invited to a session to experiment with motion capture, 3D animation and virtual reality technologies and gather their impressions of it. After this, the field work was distributed in weekly visits to the theater headquarters for a period of approximately two months. We observed the collective work dynamics, their personal relationships, hierarchies, methods, and general attitude towards the group itself and the audience that attended their shows.

Then, 8 semi-structured interviews were conducted with 7 members and the director of the theater group. The questions were related to the historical relationship between ETC and the local context, the methodology of collective creation, and the acting technique as applied to it. These questions aimed at providing a clear profile about the vision and identity of the group. All these experiences were systematized according to the three categories - body, space, and time - proposed by Anne Ubersfeld (AÑO?), and served as the basis for configuring the range of possibilities for the digital transformation of the staging, or the aesthetic and narrative aspects that crystalize on stage during a play.

For the second proposal, which sought to identify the network of actants articulated throughout the history of the Experimental Theater of Cali, it was necessary to review the extensive archive that the theater maintains, which includes costume sketches, character designs, drafts of the plays, news, and abundant reviews and bibliographical references. In the same way, two series of interviews were conducted with six experts not only on the theatrical subject but specifically on the trajectory of the ETC in Colombia and the world. Some of them are active actors, some of them retired actors, two of them were members of the ETC during the 70s and 90s respectively. All of them, without

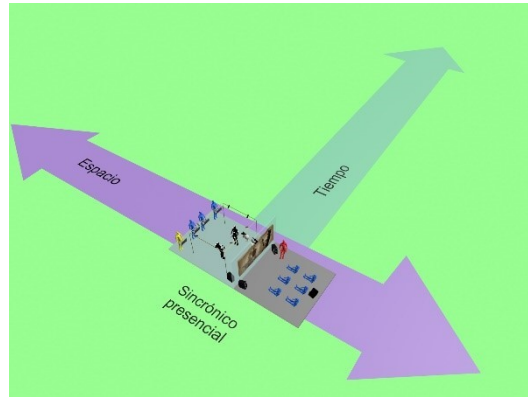
exception, are dedicated to teaching theater research. Using Latour's Actor Network Theory (cita) as a theoretical basis, the interview and archive material were systematized into categories of physical space, cultural institution, social association, or political movement, and served as the basis for the second proposal of digital transformation through the re-articulation of the ETC with current peer actant networks.

## **4 Proposals**

As previously mentioned, the group was approached during the period of August-December 2020, amid the Covid-19 crisis, in order to find a solution that would solve the impediment of face-to-face presence of spectators in theaters of Colombia and the whole world. For both proposals, the definitions of infrastructure by Star and Ruhleder (1996), which they understand as the relationships between organized practices that remain invisible until the moment of rupture. In this case, evidently, the rupture is the impossibility of people presence in the theater. The first proposal considered the infrastructure as a dynamic relationship between the narrative and aesthetic components as displayed in the play. The second proposal, which expanded on the first one, considered the infrastructure as network, including academic, social, institutional, and independent actants, linked by social and political mobilization in relation to theatrical content as research and communication agents.

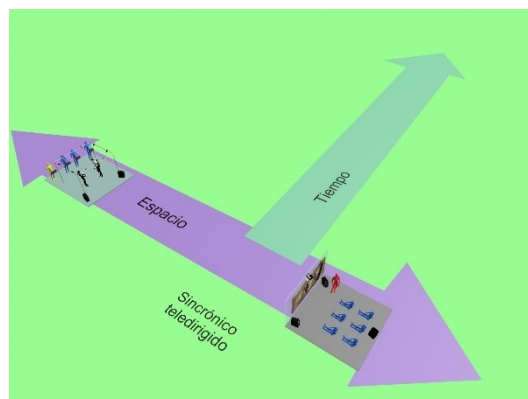
### **4.1 First proposal**

Anne Ubersfield (1989) considers four categories to analyze the elements of theater, and we start from that basis to carry out the first proposal. These elements are character, object, time and space. If we observe these four elements from the perspective of the dimensions of infrastructure proposed by Star (1996), it can be said that theater is embedded in a series of conventions and practices as old as humanity itself. These conventions are based on ontological approaches as 'natural' as the space-time or body-movement units. Theater is thus assumed as a narrative ritual, which takes place when face-to-face conditions are present. In turn, the absence of any of these elements challenges the theatrical nature of a play.



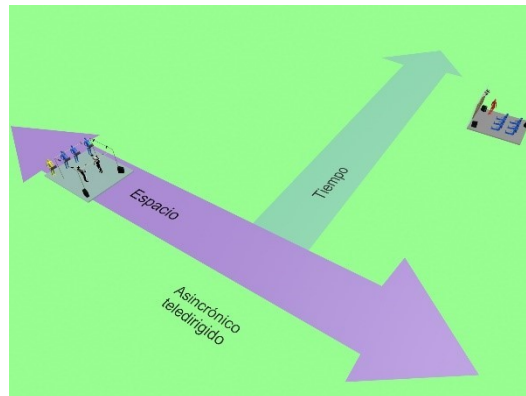
**Fig. 3.** As understood by ETC, theater has a synchronic and face-to-face nature, as seen in this figure.

As can be seen in Figure 3, the theater represents a unity of space-time and body that implies the joint function of synchronic action and human presence. The breakdown of this unit, as a consequence of the impossibility of sharing the same space between the public and the actors, implies a series of possible solutions, which keep some aspects of the theatrical nature active while others are permanently lost.



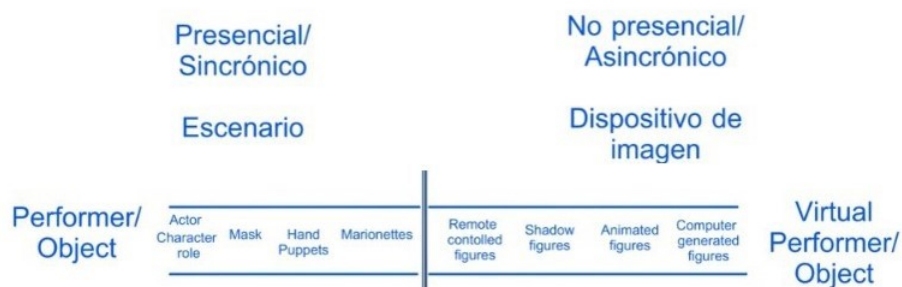
**Fig. 4.** Synchronous and non-face-to-face theater

The first solution is based on working on different spaces at the same time (Figure 4), that is to say, a more non-face-to-face synchronous play, such as a live transmission of the play. The second solution proposes different space, different time, like the projection of a film (Figure 5). Evidently, the mediation in both cases transforms the free movement of the theatrical spectator's gaze into the characteristic "forced" gaze of the cinematographic frame and assemblage that Vertov promulgated in 1922.



**Fig. 5.** Asynchronous and non-face-to-face theater

Contrary to what happens with time and space, character and object become a single category. Since 1998, Maureen Furniss anticipated the discussions that are growing day by day with digital transformation and proposed to eliminate the distinction between photographic image and artificial image, proposing a continuum between them that was developed in terms of iconicity according to its similarity with the real referent. Stephen Kaplin (1999) also anticipated the same context by proposing a taxonomy of the characters based on the distance between the puppet controller and the represented object or puppet, the human body being the first category of this taxonomy in the that the distance between controller and object was equal to zero. This taxonomy allows indistinctly including living, inert, digital and analogue objects such as puppets, animated characters and shadows, in addition to the sources of movement like motion capture technology and animatronics, as well as allowing the grouping of face-to-face and non-face-to-face techniques (Fig. 6).



**Fig. 6.** Continuum that exists between the actor that works with its body vs. the one that works with virtual objects.

To tackle the problem of the spectator's gaze, it was proposed that 360 recording devices could work to develop a stage around a stationary or mobile center that could be

controlled by the public, either by manual control devices, such as a mouse, or by virtual reality devices such as head mounted displays. Likewise, it was proposed that body and space, in addition to the option of recording the real image, could be represented by means of three-dimensional models that were controlled through the motion capture device (Fig. 7).

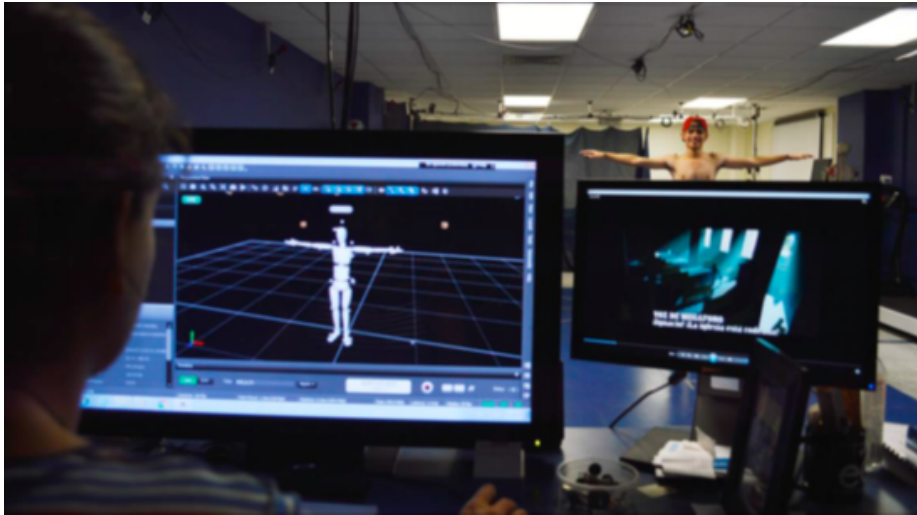


Figure 7. Capture motion lab at Universidad Autónoma de Occidente, Colombia.

The proposal materialized searching to starting a narrative project of collective creation, which could integrate the group of actors with the group of designers and programmers, based on three possible technological platforms, which sought to dialogue with three essential dimensions of the performing arts: body, space, and time:

- 360 video in animation and motion capture, not synchronous with the viewer.
- 360 video of the actors on stage using HMD devices, which were not synchronous with the viewer.
- Streaming of interaction between real or virtual actors made through motion capture, synchronous with the viewer.

This innovation proposal was rejected by the group, arguing that theater happens only in the physical and shared presence of the actor and the spectator. Theater, as declared by the group, is a single unit that blends body, space and time. Therefore, the proposal wasn't an actual solution, not even temporary, for the problem of the closing of theaters.

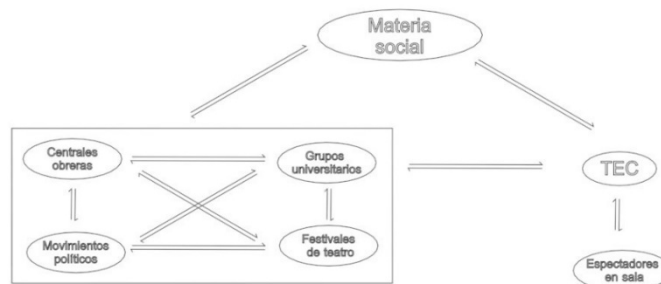
Its director, faced with this proposal, reflected on the urgency of accessing the public during the pandemic, concluding that the digital transformation should aim to recover the public, not only away from the pandemic, but also increasingly absent from theaters, compared to the years of maximum activity. This meant a change of route for the digital transformation project, since the obstacle to overcome was no longer the regulatory

consequences of the pandemic, but a sociocultural condition that indistinctly affects the performing arts in Latin America and the world.

## 4.2 Second proposal

The ETC works through a doubly dialogical way: it establishes the dialogue of the company with the text and the posterior dialogue of the public with the company. This way of working consists of a deep deconstructive investigation of the play and its context, which seeks to highlight the social, political, and economic conflicts that intervene in the formal elaboration of the narrative and visual aspects of the play.

In this second proposal, the theater was considered as a center of thought and agent of social change and, therefore, an infrastructure that articulated dramaturgy with social, academic, and political organizations. Thus, considering the Actor Network Theory (Law, xxx) as the monitoring of information along a chain of actants, in addition to interviews with experts in the history of ETC and the extensive bibliography available, mapping was carried out of controversies surrounding the theatrical text that occurred at the moment of greatest impact of the ETC, at the beginning of the 70s. In this way, in addition to the theater audience, a network of mediators was identified who were not only receivers of the theatrical text but also a permanent source of feedback of information and criticism, who formed a rhizome through which the information came and went towards the dramaturgical text, thus forming an ecosystem of critical thought that articulated art with society (Fig. 8).



**Fig. 7.** ETC is an articulated actant that engages unions, political movements, student groups, and theater festivals.

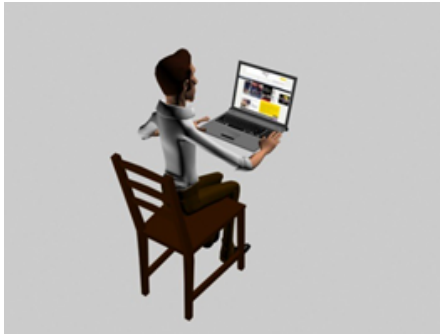
It is not the purpose of this book chapter to give an account of the causes for which this social ecosystem disappeared due to the weakening, mutation or extinction of some

of these actants, but nevertheless it is necessary to realize that its reconfiguration left the ETC in a state of isolation (Piedrahita).

There is an intersection between the investigative, social and interactive activities typical of the specific dynamics of the ETC and the new independent digital journalistic media, increasingly strengthened and valued in digital networks. New digital media are characterized by hypertextuality, interactivity, and multimediality (Varela 2005). Some of these, offer a horizontal relationship with citizens capable of communicating, acting, and leading virtual communities to create and promote social movements. All these characteristics have similarities with the mission and vision of the ETC.

It was proposed to strengthen the ETC's network work through a combination of journalistic editorial, graphic design and digital marketing, which makes the investigative material of the works in repertoire available to the user and establishes a critical dialogue between social matter, the theatrical group and the users, in such a way that the play maintains its nature and the investigative and social derivative functions as an independent product with simultaneous artistic and social positioning purposes. This proposal is best explained through the storyboard.

### 4.3 Storyboard



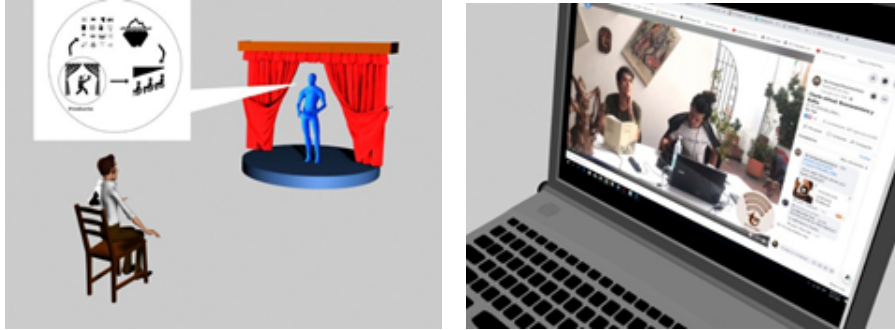
A user prospect is browsing. The usual websites of this user are opposition journalism and opinion sites.



Whether through advertising or an advertorial, a graphic appears alluding to the premiere of an upcoming ETC play. This graph seeks to reflect similarities between the contents raised in the work and the current events that this type of portal usually deals with.



Upon entering the link we find the transmedia content of the work, organized around the investigative file that took it to the stage (seeking to generate interest in assisting the user physically close to the theater and interest in users in the opposite condition), as well as editorials in charge of the director and its members in which they relate the national news with the content of the work in function. In addition to this, it is found that the page contains a fascinating database of the investigations of her plays, as well as an animated audiovisual with the biography of the master Buenaventura.



In addition to the above, the people who attend the play, whose profile is usually associated with interest in current social and political issues, are told during the dialogue after the show that there is extra material available online, such as talks by the group with experts and researchers, bibliography, images of trials etc. They are also told that there is a digital space for discussion and contributions to the content of the work.



From the digital and direct comments that the play receives, the group will make reflections, whose discussions and processes will be shown online and will be staged as reworkings.



In the end, the statistical data of the evolution of the work should remain and will become part of the group's repository file.

The digital transformation proposal was reconfigured in expanding the scope of the dialogue between the group and its viewers, opening new channels of opinion through websites, social networks, and digital communication platforms. It also included providing free public access to the research archive, the plays in the teams' repertoire and the historical works that remain archived in the cabinets of ETC's headquarters. Moreover, the proposal sought to position the social media representation of the company at the same level as other independent opinion sites that currently carry out the tasks that face-to-face meetings and the written press did during the political turmoil of the 1960s and 1970s. In other words, the aim was to expand accessibility and dialogue between the public and the company, allowing access to its research and processes, and to position the company as a center for current critical thought expressed through art.

This proposal was presented to the ETC and was received with excitement and approval by the group. The change in attitude was diametric and evident. They felt represented by the idea, which reflects the historical spirit of the group, and understood the intention of recovering political space. The only caveat was to keep the balance between politics and art, since, in the words of the director, they are first and foremost artists.

## **5 Discussion**

### **5.1 Third Level Problems**

The rejection of the first proposal led us to a reflection based on the so-called Third Level Problems. Susan Leigh-Star (1996), following Bateson's (1972) three levels of communication, distinguishes three levels of problems and discontinuities in information hierarchies. Level one refers to the problems of expertise, and level two refers to procedural clashes, and level three refers to disputes between schools of thought and paradigms that can lead to ontological incompatibility. In this case we face a third level problem, in which the ontological definition of theater for the ETC differs diametrically from the forms proposed by innovation based on information technologies.

Although there are numerous authors who work with new technological forms and there are numerous theatrical companies that experiment with animation, animatronics, streaming and video, Star tells us that although it is possible that the participants of an infrastructure can develop tools that allow communication through these paradigmatic walls, it will be difficult for the participants to identify a clear reward for it. And this is perhaps the case for the ETC: in not finding a clear utility or reward in the development of activities that, from their point of view, have nothing to do with their field, they logically prefer to reject them.

This reflection led us to consider the integration of the specific human needs of the project, in this case the emotions and purposes of the group of artists, their relationship

with the dramaturgical tradition, and its relationship with the user experience (Pedersen 2020), seeking to break with conceptual boundaries that could be leading us towards a hasty solution focused on technology and not a mature solution focused on human values (Zinder et al 2016). That is why we took on the task of understanding the tradition of the ETC, of investigating its value network throughout its 60 years of existence, with the purpose of understanding the circumstances that elevated it and the changes in the context that made it the group lost connection with mass audiences. In other words, the framework of the infrastructure was reconsidered and expanded from a formal relationship between text-staging and audience in the room, to an infrastructure of training, dialogue, distribution and return of knowledge through dramatic form.

#### Infrastructural investment

It was found that during its beginnings, within the framework of the great movement of the New Theater, the ETC was articulated with a network of professional, university and college theater groups, festivals and labor unions, all in the context of social mobilization and political change, lined up to produce a huge cultural and political impact that was recognized nationally and internationally throughout the 60s and 70s. However, political, artistic and economic changes of globalization weakened and disappeared not only the New Theater movement, that led to more commercial professional forms of performing arts that nurtured the 1980s and 1990s, but also the entire political movement already mentioned (Piedrahita 1996). The ETC, along with a few small groups, stayed out of this transformation, and has continued for 60 years with the ideology of culture and commitment, facing both artistic and political detractors. In other words, it was found that the infrastructure that supported the theatrical proposal of the ETC gradually vanished throughout the 1980s and 1990s, causing it to lose its validity and artistic and political influence beyond the small local circle.

Bowker (1994) tells us that the past cannot be defined and that we are always looking at it in the light of new developments in the present. Therefore, the definition of the standards, categories and technologies that converge in the infrastructures that govern is an ethical act as much as a political act. Thus, the concept of infrastructural investment, which seeks to make visible the activities that support the existence of an infrastructure, is a doubly political act: it reveals an implicit view of the infrastructure studied, and it will receive a new explicit view from the observer who interprets it.

A condition of all infrastructure is to be embedded in other infrastructures, be it technological or social, and these have a spatial and temporal scope according to their nature. For the Experimental Theater of Cali, the infrastructure encompasses not only the context contained in the theater, but also extends to a network of social and political action that links dialogue with communities, labor unions, and university groups whose common goal is social change, and for which the play represents an effective form of communication, but no less artistic for that, alien to the economic and political hegemonies of the traditional mass media such as television, radio or cinema.

The infrastructural investment made to the ETC's value network revealed to us not only the mistake we were in looking through technology new formal and syntactic aspects to experiment with the group, but also that this technology sought an approach with anonymous mass audiences interested in playful entertainment, leaving aside the political aspects that the ETC has dealt with throughout its history.

Bertolt Brecht, who is among the great influences of the ETC, had already reflected on the value of innovation (Brecht 1964). Brecht lamented that the artists' efforts to bring the opera genre up to date consisted in renewing its methods of staging, since this type of innovation only succeeded in nurturing institutions that had become obsolete. The German playwright considered that innovation should entail a fundamental change in the theatrical institution's function, and that even if revolutionary works were written, they would have no effect if the theatrical apparatus owned the artists and not the other way around. In other words, exclusively creative innovation of the theatrical apparatus could little do for social change. Brecht called for innovations that would press for changes, that would attack the base of the theatrical apparatus so that it would fulfill its function as a revolutionary catalyst (Boyle 2016). Thus, following Brecht's postulates of innovation, in line with the innovation perspective of the ETC, it became clear that digital transformation had to be related to the impact on the social apparatus that the ETC could have, rather than a massive search of spectators eager for technological novelties and formal dazzle.

## 5.2 Data bases and algorithms

When carefully observing both proposals, it is inevitable to think of the similarities with the approaches of Manovich (1998), who says that although modernity, through the novel, cinema, and theater, privilege the narrative form, the new media privilege the database, the latter understood as the set of total information that enables the user to create the form from their actions carried out through an algorithm. What the second proposal presents can be understood as an exposition of the data base with aesthetic and political ends. Also, according to Manovich, since the theatrical form would remain intact in its analogical and face-to-face aspect, he raises the need to ask about the aesthetics of the database: Is it a list of hyperlinks? Is it a political editorial? Is it an infographical elaboration of the research? Is it all the above in a multimedia piece of content? Whatever the answer, what is proposed from the point of view of digital marketing is to reach the niche of consumers who are looking for artistic content with marked social and political characteristics, and from the historical point of view a repositioning of the ETC against the rhizome of actants of the events of social criticism and formation of the state of opinion.

Thus, the digital transformation at the ETC is configured in a double life of the theater infrastructure: a face-to-face life that happens at the theater headquarters and on company tours, which shows the visible form, the algorithm if you will, of an investigative process that seeks to question social dynamics, and that implies the movement

of the spectator to be appreciated. And a virtual life in which the database is given shape, whose infrastructure covers a space-time range superior to the face-to-face form, with its own specific aesthetic dynamics that, paradoxically, implies the configuration of an alternative and completely new group of work that, in permanent contact with the base group, must give shape to this new dimension of the theatrical infrastructure.

### 5.3 Conclusions

If we compare this proposal with other forms of digital transformation in theater (Kapsala, 2018; Aebischer et al, 2020), that impact the stage and the dramaturgy itself, we clearly see how in our proposal we concentrate in keeping intact the ontological nature of the theatrical act, transforming the articulation between the theater group, its political postulates, and the context in which it acts. This, for a group of designers, represents an infrastructural investment, and for the group of playwrights represents a renovation of their fundamental pillars, as are the postulates of Bertolt Brecht. We can consider the insight of similarities between Brecht's concept of "apparatus" and Bowker's "infrastructure" as the innovation that made the proposal possible.

However, following this line, it is also evident that the group must come into contact with the current issues of the independent information networks, just as they did with the issues of interest of university groups and labor unions, their public goal, throughout the 60s and 70s. Thus, it would be possible to recover a public base interested in simultaneously cultural and committed theater, which is currently dispersed and atomized, and which seeks information and political structures that were previously available institutionally through unions and theater organizations.

In addition, practical and procedural concerns arise. The implementation of the proposal requires, following the canon of digital transformation, changes in the organizational and financial structure of the group. Not only is it urgent to obtain computer equipment and audiovisual software, but also the training or permanent hiring of at least one graphic designer who must become a fundamental part of theatrical activities. In the same way, the constant advice of a web manager that enhances the digital articulations between the group and the digital context to permanently position it as an artistic and political protagonist, must be considered among the new budget sections.

Surely it will initially be difficult to convince the direction of the group that the sacrifice of one part of the budget will bring great benefits. But once this happens, this measure will be quickly standardized.

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