

“Online” Choreography versus „Real” Choreography

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Diana BEJAN (CHIRIPUCI)

PhD student, The National University of Theatre and Film „I.L. Caragiale”, Bucharest
diana.chiripuci@gmail.com

Abstract: “Online” Choreography Versus “Real” Choreography

With the installation of the COVID19 pandemic in our lives, already for a year, dance, an art mostly viewed live, on different stages and in theaters, has moved its activity online. It tried to adapt to the new requirements, managing to survive in these conditions. Most of the theaters started to post often on social networks, hoping that through this increased activity, they would still keep their audience. The purpose of this writing is to pre-sent the advantages and disadvantages of passing choreographic performances in the online environment. Was this compelling to stop the physical meeting a barrier from all points of view, or did it also bring positive parts in the choreographic field? Has it increased or restricted the imagination? What will happen to choreographic art in the next period? In the future, will the audience want to watch live choreographic performances or will they prefer the online environment?

Key words: *dance; choreography; online environment; pandemic; shows.*

Most people, imagine dance as a movement, a beautiful and pleasing art form, or a multitude of movements that articulate a story. Dancing may be more than that. For some performers, dance is not just movement, it is attention, thought, interaction, anticipation, training and, most importantly, emotion. In order to have an emotion when they dance and to convey it to the audience, performers need a thought. So, when they dance, they do more than move: they have a thought, an intention, a story, an emotion they want to convey, something that motivates them, and in the process, their whole body helps them to convey that emotion. Also, dance requires a deeper knowledge for the spectators.

When someone dances, they need to pay attention to their partner/s, the space they need to move, the speed with which they perform the movement, the scenery that surrounds them and, last but not least, the movement that follows. So, if we think ”mathematically”, they do several things at the same time.



We can consider that dancing trains people both physically and mentally. Physically, because of the intense effort and mentally because they have to think about several constructs at the same time and they need to react quickly.

In addition to the physical and psychological benefits that dancing has on people, the factor of relaxation and good mood is not to be neglected. Dancing has the role of lowering the level of anxiety, because dancing is, after all, a way of psychological discharge and communication of feelings, through nonverbal language.

Dance also makes us more aware of the space and time that surrounds us. In this sense, the teacher and choreographer Liliana Iorgulescu remarks: „Every gesture changes space, and this ceases to be the environment in which things are situated, it becomes their pulsation, their dynamic component.” (Iorgulescu 2014, 48). When we dance, we move inside a space which is made visible precisely because we move, and the movement we make takes time to be seen. However, this time created by the choreographic art is subjective, because each spectator perceives it differently. „Time is nothing but the form of our internal sense, that is, our intuition and our internal state.” (Kant 1982, 282). Sometimes a day seems to pass quickly, other times it passes slowly. The same happens in the case of a performance. Sometimes it seems very long, on other occasions it passes fast, depending on each viewer, and on their current emotional state.

With the appearance of the COVID19 pandemic in people's lives, dance became a secondary preoccupation, being pushed to the lowest level of concern.

The pandemic came unexpectedly in our lives, so the choreographic performances suffered from the beginning. The theaters were not prepared for this situation, so they closed their doors, hoping that this pandemic will stop soon. This didn't happen, so the whole art industry had to adapt to change. The online environment has become the only viable option for several months. Some theaters adapted quicker than others. Any change might be uncomfortable because you don't know what to expect. This new state of affairs caused fear at the beginning: the fear of the unknown. So, what happened during this period? How did the theaters adapt? How long did it take for the theaters to get used to the new reality? For some a few weeks, for others a few months. However, some didn't adapt at all and they are still waiting.

Even if in the first months, this pandemic stopped all artistic activities, as it did with choreographic performances, later many good ideas and constructive initiatives were observed within the specific institutions, like online shows, online workshops, small entertainment videos meant for keeping in touch with the audience.

Next, I will list and analyze the advantages and disadvantages of switching choreography performances to the online environment.

The disadvantages of moving the choreographic performances to the online environment that I have taken into consideration:



1. Watching shows only online
2. The transmission of emotions is not so intense as *real* choreography
3. Fatigue and inattention due to gadget screens and home environment
4. Dancers do not have adequate space to train
5. Interruptions due to internet connection

1. Watching shows only online

In the first months of the COVID19 pandemic, the shows posted online were free to attract the public, which reduced the profits of the theaters. For example, Constantin Tănase Theatre from Bucharest posted on facebook various shows during several months. These shows were older recordings that were broadcast during the COVID19 pandemic. Or, there were other variants in which some theaters (like "Ion Dacian" National Operetta and Musical Theater or Comic Opera for Children, both from Bucharest) preferred to play live performances on stage, without an audience, which they broadcast live. In each case, the profit of the theater was zero or almost insignificant.

At first sight, the decision to post shows online seems advantageous, but the biggest impediment is that most artists no longer earn any money, and others earned much less than before the pandemic. In an interview for the radio post *Free Europe Romania*, Radu Afrim mentions that "Independent artists have suffered the most in the pandemic." (Sebastian Pricop, 2021) In the same interview, he says that "Some people have another job, which has nothing to do with art." (Sebastian Pricop, 2021) Many artists have reshaped themselves because they did not earn enough to support themselves just from the profession of artist.

Besides, „in everyday terms, we think of movement as the transition from one place to another, from something to something else.” (Nistor 2017, 102). This is much more visible in the physical environment, where the changes take place right in front of the spectators.

2. The transmission of emotions is not so intense as real choreography

Due to the pandemic, the spectator had to change his vision in understanding the artistic manifestation. The environment and the company in which he watched the shows were totally different. He was used to have people around him, with whom he could share impressions, emotions. In the pandemic, or at least at the beginning of it, this was no longer possible.

Having shows broadcast online and on different devices, the performers no longer had to relate to the audience, losing the exchange of energy between performers and spectators. This energy is very important because it can create a beneficial connection on several levels. Adolphe Appia states: „[...] let's now examine the movement on



stage. It is of the text and music – the arts of time – but also of the real objects of the space: It is the only possible meeting point.” (Appia 2000, 16) The movement is therefore the meeting between the two coordinates: space and time, which manages to order and deliver a message in a way as close as possible to the soul of the viewers. This is more visible on stage.

The choreographer and teacher Liliana Iorgulescu explains in her study, *Time, Space, Matter in the choreographic language*: „The art of dance makes the body a field of connection with the world, an instrument of knowledge, of thought and expression.” (Iorgulescu 2014, 65) The body is the instrument with which dance works, and it connects better with the world when it can be felt by others. Without having live contact, which is being in the same space with other persons, the shows lose an essential thing, which makes them special compared to movies: the emotion that settles in the common space of the show.

3. Fatigue and inattention due to gadget screens and home environment

When we are at home, our attention is easily diminished, because we may be distracted by the domestic routine. Besides, the screens of the devices are not as friendly to their eye as the liveness, so fatigue may diminish the attention of the spectators.

Man's expression is a hundred times more animated and precise than that of the most vehement discourse. It takes you a while to formulate your thinking, but the physiognomy instantly renders it with energy; like a lightning, it starts from the heart, shines in the eyes and, spreading the light on all the features of the face, communicates the tumult of passions and let the empty soul to be seen.

Noverre 1967, 94

Spectators can see this physiognomy much more clearly when they are in a performance hall. On a screen, it is difficult to discern the expression of the performers.

At the same time, both for those who have a job that involves working with the computer, and for those who are not forced to spend a long time in front of the monitor, watching a show behind the screen can affect them and can diminish the integrated understanding of the director's vision.

4. Dancers do not have adequate space to train

The environment in the rehearsal or performance hall creates a favorable state for practice. At the beginning of the pandemic, this was not possible, so dancers had to train at home. But at home, dancers had to *struggle* to put themselves in the mood for training.

Study hours and rehearsals helped dancers maintain a routine and fitness appropriate for their artistic activity. But more than a year this routine wasn't adequate. Even



after the critical period of the pandemic, when the theaters were reopened, there were not as many study hours and rehearsals as before the pandemic, so the dancers could hardly maintain or improve their physical condition.

5. Interruptions due to internet connection

The most annoying disadvantage of switching choreographic performances to the online environment is the interruptions due to the internet connection. Due to several factors, the connection may interrupt right in the middle of the show. This may be annoying because you can lose important details of the show and, besides, you lose the fluidity of the performance and the sequences. Another issue is the low speed internet, being forced to see the show with discontinuities, which at some point becomes frustrating.

These disadvantages were very pronounced at the beginning of the pandemic, and people were skeptical about using the online environment to watch performances. But, when the pandemic persisted, people understood that it was the only viable option, at least for a while.

The advantages of switching choreographic performances to the online environment are:

1. Watching shows in the online environment
2. More publicity
3. Increased creativity
4. The price of a show ticket has dropped and the audience may be larger
5. Preparation for other similar situations, in which the physical encounter could be endangered

1. Watching shows in the online environment

Even if this is mentioned in the list of disadvantages, this can also be an advantage. First of all, by sharing shows online, anyone from any part of the world with an internet connection can watch the show. This aspect increases the potential visibility of the performance and of the theatre.

Anyone can now watch and share choreographic work on the globe. Even before the pandemic, we could do this, but it was not so used so often by the population, because they were not accustomed to it. In the pandemic, this became the "new normal", which brought with it a different approach to choreographic vision. Even after the restrictions have become less tight, most people were already accustomed to using the online environment to watch show from different parts of the world. . Anyone with a screen can access shows staged anywhere in the world.



2. More publicity

Excessive use of the online environment has brought with it an advantage for all theaters or private institutions that produce shows: increasing their advertising in the online world. This is very important because we live in the age of technology in which any information for the public is good to be in the online environment so that anyone can access.

To maintain their activity, theaters were forced to advertise constantly, more often than they did before the pandemic. At least from from is seen from Facebook, we can notice that the online activity of theaters has increased in the last year.

3. Increased creativity

The way creativity works is debatable, but certain aspects can enhance it. Constraint awakens in some people the desire to break through, so the creations become more and more interesting.

With the pandemic that suddenly appeared in our lives, choreographers and dancers had to adapt to new conditions. One is that the dancers have adapted to smaller workspaces, so the choreography has become more interesting. Before the pandemic, most choreographers tried to make new dances in large spaces and with as many dancers as possible. In the pandemic, they had to do the exact opposite.

Choreographies made at home or on the street appeared, with only one or two performers. For choreographies made at home, in closed and quite narrow spaces, the creativity of dancers and choreographers has increased, because they have rarely been put in the situation to create in such spaces. The same happened with the choreographies made on the street or in the yard, where the creators have become aware of new ways of building a choreography. I am not saying now that these spaces were not used until the pandemic, but because of the COVID19 pandemic these spaces have become more popular.

At the same time, artists began to film their moments in a way beneficial for the choreography and for the transmission of the intended message. This aspect is very useful because it remains in the memory of the computer over time and can be consulted at any given time.

4. The price of a show ticket has dropped and the audience may be larger

One of the ways that theatres have been able to keep their audience through the pandemic has been to lower ticket prices, . Most theaters have lowered the price of tickets to attract and increase public interest, according to information provided by several artists. This is a benefit for the ardent spectators who frequented the performances.

At the same time, the audience can be larger than in a performance hall, because space is no longer a limitation. According to an article published by Ioana Matei in



the first months of the pandemic, in May 2020, in Business Magazine „The National Theater in Bucharest has moved into the online environment for the time being, and the fact that the public's taste for this artistic event is high is reflected in the views recorded by the performances there: they started with Shakespeare's "Storm", which had 6,000 spectators in the conditions in which in the hall, at the normal development of the show, the capacity is of maximum 900 spectators.”

In the case of adequate advertising and interested public, the online space is suitable for the development and broadcast of choreographic creations.

5. A preparation for other similar situations, in which the physical encounter could be endangered

A long-term advantage in terms of changing choreographic performances in the online environment is that we might be better prepared for similar situations. We hope that this will not be the case, but if encounter similar situations in the future, we will hopefully know what to do.

The major disadvantages have already been mentioned, but there are others, which is why the humanity that has gone to the theater for so long will go on and for which live performances are more than likely a necessity.

One of them is the fact that in the online environment the feeling of unrepeatability is lost. Even if a spectator watches a show several times, each time he can notice other new aspects. However, in the online environment, these aspects are not so noticeable, because the transmission of a live show cannot capture small important details, which can be best seen live.

Another important disadvantage is that the spectator does not switch to festive attire. This has the role of creating a state of well-being. On the one hand, the viewer can wear more comfortable clothes, but on the other hand, the feeling of a special event disappears. In a show that takes place on a stage in a specially arranged space, spectators can meet other people elegantly dressed, with whom they can smile, exchange ideas and appreciate art and artists. At the same time, they can exchange ideas, learn new things and cutting-edge information, or taste a lemonade in the foyer during the break.

Without the physical presence at an artistic event, a feeling of monotony appears (actually continues).

Instead of focusing only on the downsides, we can center our attention on the good parts of the performances in the online environment.

One advantage is that the transition of choreography to the online environment is starting to look more and more like the cinematic part. In this sense, the choreography transmitted in the online environment is closer to the film than to the stage (theater). On this occasion, the dance film industry grew, and the creators began to focus on this



side, which so far has not been exploited to its fullest. With this transition, changing theater direction has become a necessity, because viewing in the online environment is different from watching in the physical environment.

Also, TV theater makes shows more accessible to anyone. Attempts should be made to increase interactivity between spectators (such as online discussions at games), as well as between audiences and artists (online applause or other forms of reaction). If, because of the pandemic, the stage performance was not possible, due to restrictions, then the spectacles might be played on open-air platforms. It would be possible on the street as well. As a consequence we go back to the beginning moments of the show, to the origins.

Conclusions

Switching choreographic performances to the online environment has brought both advantages and disadvantages.

The COVID19 pandemic opened a new door to the creation of choreographic art. Choreographers have adapted to the online environment and have begun to create interesting choreographies, adjusted to the new world requirements.

„The shapes are inextricably linked to movement. Each movement has its form, and the forms are created by and through movement.” (Ginot and Michel 2011, 92). So movement becomes an important tool for creating different choreographies, in different spaces - even if we are talking about the online environment or the physical one.

I believe that in the future, choreography could exist in both environments. The two environments cannot be interchanged because they offer different experiences. Some viewers prefer watching shows in the auditorium, while others prefer the online environment. Whatever their choice, I think the pandemic has opened the door to new possibilities for movement, for expressing this beautiful art of choreography.

March 9, 2022 brought the abolition of restrictions on the 19 Covid pandemic, and the public can once again enjoy the physical presence in the theatre. However, the memory of the two years of distance and isolation is still present in the collective memory. Prudence, perhaps justified, both of the authorities and of the people recommend wearing the mask in crowded places, whether closed or not.

However, both the audience and the artists are eager to have real contact in the performance halls, because the energy transmitted through the live meeting is hard to be replaced. „The art form in which visible movement expression is still cultivated in our time is stage dance.” (Laban 1960, 91). Let's hope that things will stay like they are, with no restriction, so the artists can cultivate the movement's expression in all its beauty, without prohibitions.

Contact with the public through social networks, so common during the pandemic, is finally over. The announcements by which cultural institutions have put up for



sale show tickets were very well received, even the return of ticket packages had particularly positive answers. Experience teaches us that after a period of crisis comes a natural release, a thirst for contact with others, so desirable in the period of isolation. Let's hope that this return to normal will be a lasting one.

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