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Chapter 5

The paper *Journalistic Theater: A Case Study of Reporting on People's Emotional Response to Current Affairs with the Body as Medium* was published in 2024 in *International Journal of Communication*.*

Where the text refers to 'the supplementary file', this is made available in this dissertation via Appendix V.

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Journalistic Theater: A Case Study of Reporting on People's Emotional Response to Current Affairs with the Body as Medium

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This article provides a detailed case study of "journalistic theater," focusing on Teatro di Nascosto, an Italy-based international group creating public events in the Middle East and Europe. Employing a reconstruction method, the study explores the production process of *The Catwalk* (2018, 2019), a series of performances on people's daily lives and emotional responses to current affairs in conflict zones. The article offers 3 main perspectives on news work at the intersection of journalism and performance arts. First, *live experience performance* can enhance news work with artist-journalists engaging in intimate relationships for which they "dissolve" in a real-life situation. Second, empathy-driven news work succors performers and audiences with a sense of hope for recovery and healing, drawn from communal experiences, and advancing journalism's "emotional turn" with a compassionate orientation. Third, journalistic theater's physicality extends news work with the stage as a platform and warrants a perspective of embodied journalism, spotlighting the human body as a medium.

Keywords: artistic journalism, theater, conflict reporting, performance, human body, community work, emotion, embodiment, live journalism

In the documentary *For Sama* (al-Kateab & Watts, 2019), winner of several awards, including a 2020 Peabody and 2020 BAFTA for Best Documentary, the 18-year-old student and citizen-journalist Waad al-Kateab filmed her life in Aleppo, Syria, from the 2011 protests until fleeing the country in 2016. Aleppo is then a warzone, friends die, neighborhoods disappear in air strikes, vital necessities are scarce, and al-Kateab keeps documenting: Falling in love, marrying, giving birth, and raising her daughter Sama. Among the glowing reviews, Mike McCahill (2019) for the *Guardian* took *For Sama* to be "the most compelling screen study yet of how this conflict blitzed everyday life" (para. 4). The "homemade" documentary provided the kind of affective reporting on the consequences of conflict that professional journalists could only dream of. Yet for traditional (war) correspondents, if ever a firsthand depiction of people living under siege was

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feasible, news consumers have shown increasing signs of "compassion fatigue" with the constant stream of disaster news (Moeller, 2002). This article argues that the artistic journalism practice (Postema & Deuze, 2020) of Italy-based Teatro di Nascosto, which has reporting on the daily lives of people in conflict zones as its primary goal, could offer an alternative approach to reinvigorate audience engagement along with furthering the evolution of "having been there" (Zelizer, 2007, p. 408) to "being there" as a key journalism characteristic. The nuance fosters research accentuating bodily presence in news work, moving forward the generative role of *emotion* in journalism studies (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2020).

In journalism studies, the conflux of theater and journalism has been noted as an upcoming promising business model (Larson, 2015) that increases audience engagement (Adams, 2021; Adams & Cooper, 2022; Tenenboim & Stroud, 2020) through a more real experience (Sillesen, 2015) of journalistically aggregated and composed source material (Marinho, 2018; Westgate, 2013). Specific to conflict zones, Mano (2007) remarked that artistic (theater) performance has been staged with the journalistic purpose of "documenting people's struggles against colonial domination" (p. 65). Mpofu (2017) suggested that as a "variant of journalism," theater seems to play "a major role voicing issues on behalf of the voiceless" (p. 8). In a similar vein, Nenjerama and Sibanda (2019) propose "protest theatre" as a journalistic platform to circumvent press censorship. None of these theorists claims theater *is* journalism, instead focusing on the various ways in which both professional worlds may contribute to or even strengthen each other. Overall, these studies highlight audience engagement and point at theater's potential societal power of engaged and community-based work, supported by the rigor and truth commitment of journalism. In what follows, the concept of *journalistic theater* is proposed for these various interwoven practices, emphasizing the perspective of both professional worlds as coequal rather than one interloping the other, applied to a singular case study.

Proposing "Journalistic Theater"

With boundaries between amateur and professional news producers blurring (Carlson & Lewis, 2015), a new class of "atypical producers of journalistic content" (Hanusch & Banjac, 2018, p. 34) has emerged. One could argue that the constellation of journalism and theater practices can be debated within these "atypical" participatory journalism discourses, considering the practitioners involved as *interlopers* (Eldridge, 2017). However, such an approach bypasses the vast body of scholarly work on typical theater—the "theatre of the real" (Martin, 2012, p. 5)—a highly professionalized artistic discipline focusing on how the real enters the theater and vice versa. What the scholarly work on the theater of the real suggests is a framework of interdisciplinary collaboration that privileges reciprocal exchange and true blending of worlds rather than a participatory journalism framework, which tends to reify traditional news work at its core, delegating all "other" phenomena to a periphery of influences or effects.

Theories of participatory journalism tend to fall within a sociological tradition of *boundary work* studies, inspired by Gieryn (1983). Such work supposes a "core" journalism, which gets defended or is contested at the occupational boundaries. For example, in Eldridge's (2014) concept of interlopers, those who self-identify as journalists defend their profession against those "who claim belonging" (p. 1). The metaphor emanates from the premise that the interloping professional seeks integration or journalistic recognition. Indeed, some theater of the real concepts such as Erwin Piscator's "documentary drama" (Mason, 1977), Boris Yuhzanin's "Living Newspaper" (Drain, 1995), or the "theater reportage" practice of

the study at hand, point at journalistic vocabulary. It is also true that theater studies include rich cases of plays involving journalists in key professional roles (Arent, 1968; Beumers & Lipovetsky, 2009; Casson, 2000; Gardner, 2014; Holdsworth & Luckhurst, 2008; Horn, 1999; Klein, 2013; Megson, 2009; Zhuang, 2014). However, none of these scholars suggest these cases claim to belong to journalism. On the contrary, practitioners of the theater of the real seem to explicitly avoid a too-intimate kinship. British verbatim theater playwright David Hare, for example, distances himself from journalism, stating, "The mistake is to imagine that simply because it can incorporate real-life material, so it can be judged by similar criteria" (Holdsworth & Luckhurst, 2008, p. 211).

Still, there are some arguments for applying a boundary work lens. One could argue that theater of the real can be understood as a challenge to journalism, not only because these theater practices also "recycle reality" but because they participate "in today's addiction to and questioning of the real as it is presented across media and genres" (Martin, 2012, p. 5). Furthermore, journalism as an institution historically made a point of distinguishing itself from other genres of information production (Schudson, 2001): through forms (Barnhurst & Nerone, 2001), ideological values such as objectivity and independence (Deuze, 2005), and practices (e.g., Hanitzsch & Vos, 2017). At the same time, today's news industry is in transition and boundaries blur, leading to contemporary theories of journalism as being liquid (Deuze, 2008), ambient (Hermida, 2010), and an ecosystem (Anderson, 2016). In this context, supposed ideological "core" values such as objectivity are contested (Schmidt, 2023) and constantly find new articulation. The precarity of news work, its porous borders open for collaborating, and the overall elastic nature of journalism require "a toolkit that looks at the field as a moving object and as a dynamic set of practices and expectations—a profession in a permanent process of becoming," as Deuze and Witschge (2018) said (p. 177). Without ignoring contested truth claims of journalism, art, and theater, the study at hand chooses an approach beyond dichotomies, exploring the work of those who self-identify as artists and journalists without getting wound up about whether their work can be defined as located in either journalism, art, or theater. Instead, it is acknowledged that while theater and journalism are distinct worlds (that operate according to particular rituals, rules, and routines), practices enacted by those within these worlds do not necessarily function at the margins but are constituent parts of what makes these worlds.

I am interested in what journalistic theater tells us about the potential of journalism (as well as theater) to perform its function in today's society. The focus of this study is therefore first to understand how a "boundary crisscrossing" artist-journalist works, what this work means to them, and then to reflect on how theater has the potential of being an agent of change in journalism. Postema and Deuze (2020) propose a model moving beyond interdisciplinary dichotomies, arguing that any creative news work can be pinpointed on an artistic–journalism continuum in terms of forms, values, and practices. Following Postema and Deuze (2020), who speak of "artistic journalism" as "a news work hendiadys, with both worlds in copulative conjunction" (p. 3), the study at hand proposes speaking of a comprehensive *journalistic theater*,[2] encompassing enacted journalism, verbatim theater, theater reportage, and other performative and published forms distinctly identifying as both journalism and theater.

[2] Not to be confused with "theater journalism"—the reporting and reviewing of theater performance as a form of cultural journalism.

The Catwalk *Case*

This article aspires to add to this nascent body of knowledge by delving into the work process of Teatro di Nascosto's ongoing performance *The Catwalk* (Henneman, 2018). Teatro di Nascosto, "hidden theatre," is an international group of more than 50 performers, professionals, and amateurs, most of whom have experienced living in conflict areas. Performances for European and Middle Eastern audiences included films, concerts, public live events, monologues, exhibitions, theater plays, and live radio broadcasts. These productions are themed around current affairs in conflict zones that affect the lives of both the (local) performers and audience members. The theater group founder is the Italy-based theater director Annet Henneman, who has been staging events for 25 years in collaboration with local performers in Middle Eastern conflict zones and across Europe. Rooted in theater traditions, journalism, and therapy, she developed what she calls "theater reportage" as a distinct form of journalistic theater. The key goal of Teatro di Nascosto is to share the personal daily-life stories of people living in conflict areas. *The Catwalk* has been staged since 2018 in Iraq, Iraqi Kurdistan, Palestine, and Italy with Middle Eastern and European participants. During the performance, a "radio news reader" announces factual news events at regular intervals. Performers walk the stage like on a catwalk, using a variety of theatrical styles, multimedia, music, body movements, and storytelling, addressing both the audience at large and its individual members.

What makes the case unique is that the work thematically explores an area that journalism struggles to cover adequately: The daily lives of those who live in conflict zones. Henneman, for example, lived with women in Iraqi Kurdistan who have suffered from domestic violence, honor killings, and female genital mutilation. On stage, she blends these women into one or two characters. One reason is that character blending—which ethnographers often do—guarantees anonymity, which is extremely important in this violent context. To the Kurdish audience, the staged narrative is a truthful report of what happens to women, and Henneman is transparent about the blending of characters when asked. However, in journalism, a "facts are sacred" (Singer & Ashman, 2009, p. 3) occupational ideology obliges reporters to prioritize an account with unaltered stories, making it almost impossible to report on violence against women as such reporting immediately poses a life threat to those featured. What this example shows is that the practice of "journalistic theater" would enable news workers to report on otherwise underreported yet deeply meaningful and to some extent newsworthy issues. Through the reconstruction method (Reich & Barnoy, 2016) the study at hand aims to highlight key concepts and issues in the production process along with documenting the concerns journalistic theater-makers face working under precarious conflict zone conditions.

The study follows Postema and Deuze's (2020) artistic–journalism continuum that "comprises those practices involved in an independent pursuit of accurate information about current or recent events and its original and deliberate aesthetic presentation in any sensory form, for public edification and emotional resonance" (p. 12). In that light, the study at hand documents and explores the work process of *The Catwalk* (Henneman, 2018) by asking the following:

RQ1: How is journalism articulated in the work of theater company Teatro di Nascosto?

RQ2: How is Teatro di Nascosto's The Catwalk *a form of artistic journalism?*

RQ3: What does Teatro di Nascosto do (in the case of The Catwalk*)?*

RQ4: How does this involve work processes and values particular to journalism practice?

In addition to advancing theater theory toward journalism and evaluating claims in the literature, this interpretative case study concludes with a conceptualization of key issues in the overall artistic–journalism continuum, where theater and journalism play constituent roles.

Methodology

Teatro di Nascosto explicitly identifies with both journalism and theater (Henneman, 2006) and is sampled as an "unusual case" (Yin, 2018) with the purpose of gaining unique insights into the working processes of a merged journalistic theater practice. Following Becker (2008), central to the artwork is the artist-journalist (Annet Henneman), encircled by an "art world" of collaborators such as actors, promotors, drivers, and local volunteers. The case study focuses on the first *The Catwalk* (Henneman, 2018) performance, staged in Basra, Iraq, in January 2018, and the fourth performance in November 2019, in Volterra, Italy. The second and third *The Catwalk* performances were staged in Sulaymaniyah, Iraqi Kurdistan and Anabta, West Bank, respectively, both in early 2019, and the fifth in West Bank in March 2020. These have been occasionally referred to in the data. Reconstruction interviews (a 135-minute key interview, three (online) follow-up conversations, several chats and e-mail exchanges, and ongoing live conversations recounted in the field notes) and ethnographic research took place between January 2019 and April 2021.

Through the conversations and field observations, the work process of *The Catwalk* (Henneman, 2018) was "reverse engineered" to grasp the "logic behind" the production (Reich & Barnoy, 2016, p. 477). This reconstruction method is particularly suitable for researching complex and ever-changing processes (Deuze & Witschge, 2018), quite typical of the volatile and precarious practice of Teatro di Nascosto. Volatile, because it took place in conflict zones, and precarious as a distinct feature of creative media work (Hesmondhalgh & Baker, 2011). The reconstruction method consists of semi-structured interviews with a key contributor—Henneman—with "a panoramic overview of the entire process" (Reich & Barnoy, 2020, p. 972) and systematically addresses the production process and the maker's "reflections and reasonings around a specific sample of items" (p. 973). The method encourages the interviewee to structure and shape their story without too much interference, starting with the open-ended question: "Can you tell me the story of *The Catwalk*?" Other questions include "Can you talk me through the various stages of the working process?" along with identity-related questions such as how Henneman would label herself professionally, who her audience and peers are and how they regard her, and what she considers to be professional successes. Unstructured follow-up conversations concern the elucidation of keywords, processes, and key issues. The ethnographic part of the research included eight days of field observations through extensive note-taking and photographing (between 22 November and 29 November 2019) during rehearsal and performance days in Volterra, written records of ongoing personal communication with Henneman and staff between 2019 and 2021, and digital (social media) publications by Teatro di Nascosto. During the data gathering and analysis, I kept memos as "a running commentary to oneself" (Eisenhardt, 1989, p. 538) and coded these memos as part of the analysis

(Clarke, 2005). The interview data, observations, documents, and memos additionally have been triangulated with publicly available data and publications on Teatro di Nascosto's online platforms. The field note–taking process follows (Wolfinger, 2002) the adoption of a "salience hierarchy" strategy, meaning that I wrote down observations that stood out as noteworthy. The interview and document analysis was inspired by Urquhart's (2013) interpretation of the grounded theory method of Glaser and Strauss (1967), moving from line-by-line open coding using gerunds to a selective coding for further conceptualization (Charmaz, 2006). Following Charmaz (2006), field notes and memos were categorized rather than using a line-by-line coding to prevent cross-pollination between self-generated data and the actions and words of the participants. A review of theater literature along with informal conversations with other journalistic theater makers and theater scientists took place halfway of the analytical phase as a midway intervention inciting a reapproaching of the corpus in a fresh way (Dunne, 2011).

Analysis

This section analyzes the repertoire and themes from *The Catwalk* (Henneman, 2018) as "constructed" (Charmaz, 2006) from interviews, documents, and field notes. A description of the production process in the light of journalism and visual data referred to in the analysis can be found at https://figshare.com/s/2bccf108548ad3d83805. Teatro di Nascosto director Annet Henneman describes the work as a mix of journalism, anthropology, and theater. The central theme, she says, is "the daily lives of people in conflict zones," motivated by the team's feeling that regular citizens—unlike those in power—remain mostly invisible in news reports. The group's ambition is to build bridges among cultures. Their key presumption is that what people feel and do in their daily lives—whether in a relatively safe country or in the turmoil of war—provides a common ground for culturally diverse individuals to connect and understand who the other person is, echoing the theater director's recurring research question "Who are you?" Where relevant, a direct relationship to (or deviation from) journalism has been made explicit.

Key Concepts

The key elements emerging from the anthropological nature of Teatro di Nascosto's organic approach are the *body as medium*, *news sharing as communion*, and *symbiosis and antibiosis with social and professional ecosystems*. Interwoven with this categorization key concepts include *dissolving*, *relived experience, improvisation*, *remediation, building rapport*, and *audience engagement*. "Body as medium" means that the participants see the human body as a device to memorize real-life experiences physically and emotionally, and "relive" these on stage. "News sharing as communion" refers to how what happened in the real as "news" and (traumatically) impacted people's daily lives is shared in the community as a relived experience, first together with peer performers in training sessions and then in a public performance. According to Henneman, the hoped-for result of this communion is to initiate "a process of healing." "Symbiosis and antibiosis with social and professional ecosystems" means that Teatro di Nascosto's collaborators experience the artwork as an organic constituent of geopolitical, cultural, economic, religious, and professional ecosystems. The three categories are interrelated: The body is employed as a medium to share in communion what has happened in the real as a relived experience. This potentially initiates a process of healing, thereby claiming a place in the broader social ecosystem in symbiosis or as antibiotic.

Body as Medium

According to staff members, the key criterion of a successful performance is the actor's ability to relive someone's experience in training and in front of an audience. The difference between how the team sees "acting" and this *lived experience performance* is that among performers, any analysis of what it looks like on stage is discouraged, while they are stimulated to have a "don't think of what it looks like, just do!"-attitude. Performers, according to Henneman, are "a channel" for which "any pretending is in the way of conveying a message." They are encouraged to experience the role they play, relive what they felt before in a situation, and to "be who they are" on stage. To make this work, participating performers share news and personal stories in training, and relive these (sometimes) traumatic experiences through reenactment, narrative, dance, and music. The key idea is a combination of Stanislavski's (1989) acting method, with an "anthropologized" adaptation of the theater principles of Grotowski (1968), which is that all experiences are "stored in" and reproduced by the human body. Key concepts for understanding how the body as medium forms the basis for creating a lived experience performance include *improvising*, *body memorizing*, and *dissolving*.

*Improvisation*s cover a large part of the trainings and performances. The goal of this unscripted approach is threefold: First, to ensure the performers stay true to themselves. Henneman emphasizes that "as soon as someone starts to act affectedly,[3] this work is ruined." The second goal is to aggregate performers' stories. For example, before the 2018 Basra *Catwalk* performance, Henneman together with a local journalist decided on the theme of health-care issues. During the first trainings, the performers shared how insufficient health care affected their families. Two weeks into training, the baby daughter of one actor died because the hospital lacked oxygen machines. The devastating occurrence created a trust base for other actors to share similar stories "as family" and use these stories in communal training exercises. The third goal is that improvising enables Henneman to deal with trauma-related in-training issues. For example, during training, an Iraqi actor expressed aggressive behavior. Instead of confrontation or sending him away, Henneman introduced a reenacted slow-motion fighting scene involving all actors, which then became a recurring act in subsequent performances (see Photo 1 in the supplementary file).

The performers' freedom to improvise within scenes during performances creates the atmosphere of sincerity that the makers aim for. Henneman, for example, referred to an unscripted moment in the Basra *Catwalk* performance, staged at a shopping complex, that still gives her shivers: One actor whose close friend Mohammed died, after telling his story onstage to a selection of spectators, walks back, and empathically shouts for the mall to hear: "Mohammed come back!" Improvisation thus inspires performers to share felt emotions with an audience. This resonates with Johana Kotišová's (2020) remarks on crisis reporting, where journalists consider genuine emotions as "facts" that add to the "humaneness" and "credibility" (p. 1722) of the story. Instead of a suppression of feelings, improvisation seems to bring an authenticity that might play a role in how future journalists (re)build trust and emotionally connect with hard-to-reach news audiences.

[3] Original: "Gemaakt" (Dutch) also means manufactured, having a sense of being unnatural.

Central to composing a mostly unscripted play through improvisation is a disciplined training focused on *body memorizing*. With a new group Henneman first observes their body movements as the "material" to work with. Through Grotowski-based training, the actors—or rather their bodies—are taught to remember relevant body movements. A recurring element is the shared reliving of a personal story in various emotional and physical states. For example, the routine includes performers walking crisscross at various speeds (see Photo 2 in the supplementary file) while narrating a childhood memory or the story of a struggling close relative. First soft, then loud, then louder in various emotional states and at varied pacing. What this does, according to Henneman, is connect the actors to their feelings, which is necessary as experiences "are locked up in the body," whereas all movement related to mind, emotions, and sexuality is "all inside your body." Other examples of body memory training include the reenactment of events such as feasts, or recent news events, such as demonstrations, police shootings, bombings, earthquakes, and fleeing. Dance and song are constituents of body memory trainings and are seen as crucial for performers to gain confidence in showing their feelings while narrating and portraying personal stories.

Henneman herself deploys her body as medium in various work phases. For data aggregation, she *dissolves* in the daily lives of people in conflict zones with the aim of copying the habitus of the culture she lives in. To achieve this level of body knowledge—aiming for a lived experience instead of "acting"—she lives for months among people in their Iraqi, Kurdish, or Palestine homes, participating in all family-related daily experiences. This rather radical approach of releasing one's own cultural habits and embracing those of another is why the term dissolve seems more adequate to describe her work than "immerse," a term commonly used in anthropology, journalism, and theater research but which assumes emersion at some point. Dissolving suggests a permanent state, which is illustrated by the way she and the people she visits keep referring to each other as close family: A result of the intense family moments she participated in, and decades of preserving close ties.

By incorporating appropriating emotions and cultural body language, she can gradually integrate further into an ecosystem. For example, wearing a hijab in Iraqi Kurdistan insufficiently conceals a Western background. She learns to move like Kurdish village women, as unobtrusive as possible, with small paces and only whispering when talked to. This also enables her to be an eyewitness to situations that would otherwise be blocked from foreigners or reporters, such as when she, behaving like a local Bedouin, witnessed Israeli troops destroying Palestinian-owned houses.

Dissolving thus builds credence within a disaster community, offers an embodied emotional understanding of what the daily life in conflict zones is like, and—by incorporating local habitus—builds a repertoire of body language, gestures, behaviors, ways of storytelling, music, and songs. As a data aggregation method, dissolvement appears to inform on what people find important; what stories and music touch them; what positive memories and traumatic experiences they have; and how people respond to (traumatic) current affairs.

Improvising, body memorizing, and dissolving together enable a reliving of emotional experiences as a form of acting using the body as medium. The approach is grounded in theater methods that require extensive training such as the widely used principles of Grotowski (1968). The human body can be understood as device to incorporate "eye-witnessed" body movements and to reproduce these movements

along with felt emotions, spoken word, and auxiliary visuals for an audience as a "reportage" of how people respond to news events. For this embodied news reporting, the artist-journalist dissolves in a (dangerous) society, to gain an embedded understanding of how people live in a conflict zone.

Centralizing the journalist's body (Francoeur, 2021) as medium draws attention to how such work relates to a reporter's supposed objective stance (Schudson, 2001). In general, conflict reporters have experienced tension between remaining neutral and reporting in an engaging way that resonates with their feelings (Kogen, 2019). In pursuit of objectivity, journalists have been suppressing emotions such as sympathy, compassion, or guilt (Hopper & Huxford, 2015). At the same time, scholars for long have observed objectivity as controversial (Donsbach & Klett, 1993) and confusing (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2014), and agree that a "value-free selection of social events is utterly impossible" (Muñoz-Torres, 2012, p. 574). Although theater reportage pinnacles this tension by embracing the felt emotional responses to current affairs by using the human body as a recording and news production vehicle, the body as medium in theater reportage seems best understood as a journalistic device that is first of all affect driven. Indeed, foregrounding emotion "redefines the classic idea of journalistic objectivity" (Beckett & Deuze, 2016, p. 2) and advocates an (artistic) journalism in which a striving for objectivity coexists with a deep affective understanding of emotional responses to news.

News Sharing as Communion

Through the lens of Becker's (2008) art world, any artwork process is communal. This is even more obvious when community engagement is an explicit part of the artwork such as in many theater of the real projects (Martin, 2012). In the light of news work, journalistic theater-maker Hare (2004) points at verbatim theater as a collective experiencing of presented facts. Similarly, *The Catwalk* (Henneman, 2018) is at the core a communal work. According to Matthews and Thorsen (2020), conflict reporting requires a deep engagement with the "disaster community." *The Catwalk*'s staff and performers deeply connect with the "living citizen" (Gajardo, Meijer, & Domingo, 2023) by having gone through similar challenges, traumas, joys, and fears. Moreover, the analysis of the work process indicates that the staff's core efforts aim at shaping circumstances that increase community sense and an affective sharing of "news" as communion. Key concepts in this category are *building rapport*, *engaging audiences*, and *remediating* processes. The following paragraphs explore how these concepts play a role in granting access to otherwise hard-to-reach conflict situations, the personal daily lives of local families and individuals, and the hearts of performers and audiences.

The concept *building rapport* comprises building trust and creating durable, close relationships of mutual and intimate understanding. Long-term trust is established through years of local community involvement. Daily "short-term" work involves dealing with multiple trust issues, such as government officials attending training sessions and performances or locals who question the (foreign) staff's motives to be there. Long-term relationships with local collaborators play a crucial role in "guaranteeing" staff's sincerity or assessing threatening situations.

In training, physical exercise plays a key role in establishing a trust base among (often traumatized) performers. For example, in Volterra, to create a community sense, the group of international performers

was asked to spend as much time as possible with each other inside and outside training sessions. With that in mind, staff appointed shared sleeping rooms for Kurdish and Palestinian performers. These became hotspots of fierce dispute caused not only by different cultural expectations but also by strongly felt political views. Henneman, a woman working in male-dominated cultures, notes that she learned to avoid discussions altogether and instead employs theater exercises. In this example, the morning after a night of intense sleeping room debates, all joined in learning traditional Palestinian, Iraqi, and Kurdish dances and songs. I observed how performers enjoyed the chance to bond and saw them continue outside the training, during breaks, meals, and evening gatherings.

In performances, building rapport is encouraged through play. Henneman, for example, changes into a typical worrying Kurdish mother scurrying around making breakfast for her son who goes to war; or into a young woman in a deeply religious Muslim region, who, when she likes a man, shows in a flash with only her eyes she is interested; or she chants local childhood songs. This may encourage audiences to trust her understanding of the impact of daily news themes.

Symbolic language and metaphors also seem to play a role in building trust. In one scene, actors representing religious, ethnic, and political groups engaged in a metaphoric battle over a chair. Audience members cheer for their favorites while a commentator reports the "fight," which includes foul play and corruption. Performers and staff say such scenes should be appreciated because they allow the public to express themselves without the danger of being seen as revolutionary or opposing a suppressing regime. The use of metaphors and symbolic language anticipates the tacit knowledge of the community regarding what can be said and what not, thereby offering a safe space for a communal expression of emotions.

The importance of local storytelling platforms such as theater is underscored by Ball-Rokeach, Kim, and Matei (2001). Countering America's crumbling local journalism, Wenzel (2020) proposed new ways of *engaging audiences* through "community-centered journalism," advocating a kind of news work that collaboratively faces community problems and engages members in active participation. Theater reportage's strong community focus—with community members participating in training, discussing news events, and performance first taking place within impacted communities—seems to be the kind of "engaged" journalism many newsrooms are looking for. Lewis, Holton, and Coddington (2014) propose to analyze such forms of community-centered journalism in terms of direct, indirect, and sustained types of reciprocity. The theater reportage community's direct reciprocity is visible not only in performers' appreciation of the online material created by Teatro di Nascosto staff but also much more so offline, when the community members praise, support, and comfort each other, or celebrate after performances (see Photo 3 in the supplementary file). Indirect reciprocity happens, for example, when participating community members share the work in their own social network, both online and by bringing their own networks to a training or performance. Interestingly, Holton, Lewis, and Coddington (2016) found little support for "sustainable reciprocity," stating "journalists were open to building relationships with audiences, but mostly on their terms and not necessarily for the long term" (p. 856). This starkly contrasts with Teatro di Nascosto's long-term engagement approach, including sustaining relationships across countries on a personal level, going as far as people referring to each other as close friends and family.

Teatro di Nascosto does not specifically claim to be therapeutic, however, staff and performers seem aware of the artwork's *remedial* potential. A communal problem in conflict zones is traumatic experiences. Some of the elderly staff members had experienced imprisonment for years. Most young performers have been held at gunpoint, shot at, experienced suppression, or lost family members.

In recurring trainings, performers are demanded to relive impactful events. For example, they are asked to write down the dreams of a deceased loved one. One performer brings a bike. On entering the training facility he breaks down. Henneman stops the training and the group sits together and cries. She puts on music, and then he shares the story of his close friend who always went everywhere by bike and was killed in a bombing. Like the slow-motion fighting scene, this narrative of the bike became part of many later *Catwalk* performances.

In another training session, a performer practices a scene addressing individual audience members with short factual stories. While recounting the previous week's news story of a family with children who died in a Gaza bombardment, her emotions overtake her and she starts crying uncontrollably. Henneman intervenes by embracing her, leading the session into a reflective moment and music and song. In informal chats with various participants including her, most reflect on how this kind of intense training helps them cope and feel hopeful.

The real emotions shared in the public performances are provoked by earlier compassionate interventions during the trainings in which performers take time to empathize with each other, mourn with the mourners, laugh with the joyful, be bitter with those who enter the training room resentful, and angry with the enraged. Henneman, who has a professional background in therapeutic methods, offers ways to control these emotions, bring them back at will, and transform these into aesthetics through stories to be shared with a broader audience. This reliving of experiences "locked up in the body," echoes Van der Kolk (2014), whose influential work *The Body Keeps the Score* suggests comparable embodied exercises for trauma recovery.

Although Teatro di Nascosto's staff members all participate in socially engaged forms of theater, the personal bond with performers exceeds that of a therapist-patient. It seems more appropriate to understand their work as building on and being driven by a deep empathy for what the other goes through. Such a compassionate attitude seeks connection with audiences who also want to feel what the news means and whose pain needs to be acknowledged.

News sharing as communion seems to demand deep and long-term rapport building, thereby capacitating the audience to engage on an emotional level and seemingly incite some remediating processes. The news-sharing practice highlights how journalism's affective qualities might address communal experiences of trauma and emphasizes artistic news work's capability of sharing hope and encouragement, tapping into the "joyful" spectrum of news values (Parks, 2021). What Teatro di Nascosto's approach primarily seems to suggest—and this is in line with the relational and embedded approaches found in some non-Western journalism cultures (Hanusch, 2015)—is that a news worker first and foremost must become a respected community member. With reciprocal relationship building as a cornerstone of a news project's success (Borger, van Hoof, & Sanders, 2016), a long-term "being there" implies the existence of organic relationships that vary in intimacy and aloofness. Such bonds hold layers of interests that might call for

moving beyond a straightforward exploration of reciprocity between an audience and the artist-journalist. How an artist-journalist as a community member balances complex and ever-changing professional and social interests, and what counts as "success," may appear inconsistent, however "appear to be coherent" (Witschge, Anderson, Domingo, & Hermida, 2018, p. 6).

Symbiosis and Antibiosis With Social and Professional Ecosystems

The last part of this study articulates the journalistic theater practice in relation to more or less coherent ecosystems. *The Catwalk* (Henneman, 2018) can be seen as an organic work, maturing over decades. Organic implies that the artwork is intrinsically transitory, shifting shape in response to perpetual manifestations of conflict, uncertainty, and flux of the "liquid society" (Bauman, 2005) at hand. "Liquid" is used here because Deuze (2008) introduced Bauman's (2000) term to news work, highlighting journalism's inadequate response to precarity and the "permanent impermanent" nature of late modernity. Where traditional (Western) news industries struggled to come to terms with arrays of disruptions, artistic journalism practices such as theater reportage can be seen as establishing ways of doing the kind of liquid news work befitting a rapidly changing and always contested societal context. Indeed, the collaborators of Teatro di Nascosto seem to experience the artwork as an organic (or liquid) constituent of a society's geopolitical, cultural, religious, economic, and professional ecosystems.

News sharing in communion offers a way to cope with the daily insecurities of geopolitical conflicts, such as corruption, censorship, and forms of harassment including gender discrimination and racism. Teatro di Nascosto's mission to build bridges takes shape in the improvised adaptations of music, dances, and daily-life stories functioning as shared vocabulary across coexisting cultures and religions. Economically, financial resources—which are constantly sought after—are directly reinvested in the projects at hand. Furthermore, (European) staff members barely make enough to live, and some lead an overall nomadic lifestyle. Some months after the Italy performance, Henneman, for example, gave up her apartment before traveling to Palestine, with hardly an idea where she would return to. Such an extreme form of embracing precarity seems both a coping mechanism and a way to experience and understand some of the uncertainties people in disaster communities go through.

Regarding professional ecosystems, "recognition" is a noticeable recurring theme. Dealing with peer critique includes claims by local theater directors that Teatro di Nascosto cannot tell "our story," and international theater world colleagues appreciating or dismissing the work. At the same time, the feeling that neither the theater world nor journalism fully grasps the team's doings creates a situation of moderate isolation. This allows the team to explore the practice's professional boundaries and to shift roles according to changing circumstances. For example, a group of Peshmergas refused to take Henneman to visit the front line because of her supposed ignorance as a reporter. She won their trust by shifting to her theatrical role, singing a Kurdish childhood song about a mother worrying about her son's desire to fight in the mountains, and was subsequently accepted and taken to the front line.

However, reputation—the general beliefs and opinions of others held about the artist-journalist—is important, and artistic recognition by peers does play a role. What the team remarks as success is when

"everything is in place" and a satisfying degree of audience engagement is reached, meaning that the audience is "in it" and touched, and the performers "transfer" what the director wants transferred.

To a large extent, recognition comes in the form of gaining access: Being allowed as (foreign) staff members to participate in people's daily lives, becoming this "family member," and wholeheartedly engaging. Noticeably, the boundaries between professional and private lives blur. This includes, for example, Henneman sharing her apartment and possessions with visiting performers (in Italy) in the same way that she herself is allowed to live with people.

A symbiosis and antibiosis with professional and social ecosystems means that the liquid improvising nature of the work incorporates uncertainty and flashes sparks of hope, comfort, and togetherness as antibiotic against daily disasters. Symbiotically, the work seems to bridge cultures: It offers even those who consciously or not serve a destructive system the opportunity to feel included through recognizable daily-life themes, vent emotions without consequences, and experience a message of hope, leading them to realize that traumas are a shared experience that needs to be addressed both individually and collectively and can be meaningfully engaged in a public forum.

Discussion

What theater reportage demonstrates is that a reconstruction of both facts and emotions about what happened can be a meaningful, at times powerful, component of a comprehensive news account. The results indicate that current affairs–based theater on the consequences of impactful news events in the daily lives of citizens increases audience engagement (Adams, 2021; Adams & Cooper, 2022; Tenenboim & Stroud, 2020). This case study on journalistic theater offers three main perspectives to studies on news work within the artistic–journalism continuum (Postema & Deuze, 2020), including but not limited to journalistic theater. First, "lived-experience performance" can enhance and challenge news work with artist-journalists engaging in intimate relationships for which they dissolve in a real-life situation. Second, empathy-driven news work succors participants with a sense of hope for recovery and healing, drawn from communal experiences, complementing journalism's "emotional turn" with a compassionate orientation toward news work. Third, journalistic theater's physicality not only extends news work with the stage as a platform but also warrants a perspective of embodiment, with the human body as a news medium, in effect "bodying" the journalist (Francoeur, 2021).

Journalistic theater can enhance conflict reporting by creating intimate accounts of what people go through during disasters and conflicts. The accent on the lived experience seems to help audiences discern current affairs as happening to real people whom they can have rapport with (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2019). Instead of shutting down emotionally—for outsiders, a sign of "compassion fatigue" (Moeller, 2002) and for those under conflict, a sign of trauma—audience members are offered ways to liberate what is locked up in their bodies. As a collective experience of mnemonic aesthetics, the theater reportage approach invites audiences to feel the rich spectrum of emotions when encountering deeply engaging news stories without reservation or fear of being judged.

Bringing journalism to a new level where factual reporting and emotional news responses find balance could be a professional practice of (and training in) reliving emotional experiences and transferring these into news productions in such a way that the account is genuine and capable of deep emotional connections with how audiences experience current affairs. "Journalists-as-actors" are challenged to be who they are, aware of what they feel, and adept at transforming the lived experience in their product. One important note here is that the theater reportage's practice works with a long-standing network of intimate relationships. Such commitment to relational news work seems pivotal for reporting on a community's emotional responses to current affairs and makes this approach particularly suited for community types of journalism.

The obliquely touched journalistic theater's potential remedial qualities raise the question of whether some form of *embodied journalism* is a way forward when reporting on disaster communities. What this artistic journalism practice expounds is a form of inherently relational, intimate, and durable community-based news work. Such empathy-driven work complements fact-driven and forensic-oriented practices that are in nature without sentiment. For many, relational news work might feel overly dependent and involved (Costera Meijer, 2001). For others, the human presence may feel more natural, deepening the meaning of "being" in "having been there" (Zelizer, 2007, p. 408) and invigorating the multicolored palette of news reporting with tones of compassion.

Finally, a key role seems designated for the human body as a news medium through which the artist-journalist channels a relived experience of felt emotions, establishes authority, and encourages audiences to engage. Particularly, the spatial and time-related dynamics of the human body (Örnebring & Schmitz Weiss, 2021) draw attention to the news worker's *presence* as a variant of Marina Abramović's (2010) *The Artist is Present*, a performance praised for its authenticity claim (Jones, 2011). In theater reportage, *the journalist is present*—meaning that an artist-journalist allows herself to be emotionally touched by what she witnesses and unabashedly shares and relives her feelings, in a controlled way, with a community. What such deliberate professional vulnerability means for journalism needs further exploration. For example, embodied cognition in journalism (Francoeur, 2021)—especially in the full-body emotional engagement of a theatrical performance—seems to entail elemental tension between remaining independent and being in touch with the felt truths of a community. One key to opening the debate might be to signpost *connectivity* as complementing journalism's autonomous nature instead of experiencing the reporter's personal connection as a potential pitfall. What this study propounds is a salient role for the human body and embodied cognition in debates on affective news work (e.g., Glück, 2016; Kotišová, 2019; Sánchez Laws, 2020) and associated emotional turn studies (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2020) offering physicality and embodiment as crucial elements to sensually and sensibly understand what news and news work feels like.

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