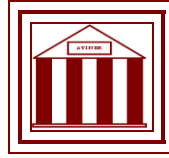


**Athens Institute for Education and Research  
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ART2015-1489**

**Why Do Performing Arts Need  
Deleuze and Guattari?  
A Methodological Inquiry**

**Christina Banalopoulou  
PhD Candidate  
Theatre, Dance and Performance Studies  
University of Maryland  
USA**

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Athens Institute for Education and Research  
8 Valaoritou Street, Kolonaki, 10671 Athens, Greece  
Tel: + 30 210 3634210 Fax: + 30 210 3634209 Email: [info@atiner.gr](mailto:info@atiner.gr)  
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## Why Do Performing Arts Need Deleuze and Guattari? A Methodological Inquiry

**Christina Banalopoulou**  
PhD Candidate  
Theatre, Dance and Performance Studies  
University of Maryland  
USA

### Abstract

Nomads have no history; they only have a geography.  
Deleuze and Guattari<sup>1</sup>

In the following pages I am arguing that the discourse of Performance Studies need Deleuze and Guattari in order to closer investigate the dynamic interplay between intercultural performance and capitalism. I am focusing on the 10-minute “solo chair scene” from Dimitris Papaioannou’s<sup>2</sup> production of *Medea2* which was performed in New York in 2013 as part of Robert Wilson’s *Circus of Stillness: the power over wild beasts*. The Greek avant-garde artist produced *Medea2* for the first time in Athens in 2008. Robert Wilson chose the “solo chair scene” as one of the 25 readymade performances that came from 25 countries from all over the world and assembled the annual summer benefit of Watermill Center. The Greek dancer Evangelia Rantou, performed the “solo chair scene” 20 times on a loop.

Using this scene as my case study, I am applying Erika Fischer-Lichte’s understanding of intercultural theatre as “the agency of mediation” in order to argue that although she challenges the discourse of intercultural performance through understanding theatre’s capacity to blend difference, she doesn’t fully explore intercultural performance’s ability to challenge capitalism from within. As a result she is relying on utopia in order to save difference. Deleuze and Guattari on the other hand, through their conceptualization of nomad, help us realize that intercultural performance envelops the capacity to introduce non-capitalistic ways of existence. Therefore, I conclude that the discourse of intercultural performance should pay closer attention to their theoretical, and yet very applicable, introduced methodologies.

**Keywords:** Intercultural Performance, Nomad, Capitalism, Virtual, Actual.

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<sup>1</sup>Deleuze, Gilles, Claire Parnet, and Gilles Deleuze. *Dialogues II*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2002, pg. 31

<sup>2</sup><http://www.dimitrispapaioannou.com/en/>

## Introduction - The “Solo Chair Scene”

Nothing about Dimitris Papaioannou’s *Medea2* is static. The tragic Medea, moved from dramatic text to the dance theatre, and then straight to Robert Wilson’s Watermill Center. Having the dramatic text in ancient Greek as his point of inauguration, Papaioannou came up with two different dance-theatre productions of *Medea*. In *Medea2*, which was a differentiated repetition of *Medea*, Papaioannou did not tell the story through using representational body language. On the contrary he gave actual flesh to the virtually<sup>1</sup> readymade characters of Euripidean imagination in order to have them disturb the tragic form<sup>2</sup> through using the stage as an assemblage<sup>3</sup> of their physical interactions.

*Medea2* took place in a proscenium theatre where a camera from backstage was recording the front side of the audience and the actor–dancers from behind. The stage had a shape of a two - dimensional rectangular plane made of white fabric. Bodies were moving continuously and linearly from stage left to stage right in ways that did not resemble any kind of everyday human movement. Since they were always standing on mechanically used objects, their movement was always mediated; Jason was embodying heavy boat miniatures that served as alternative κόθορνοι. Medea who appeared two times, was either on a top of a white sheet that someone was pulling, or on a iron surface that was connected to a pulley which was manually handled by one of the actors on stage. Both the sheet and the surface that was connected to a pulley, were performing like an εκκύκλημα, since they revealed to the audience what was happening backstage.

The “solo chair scene” was performed by Evangelia Rantou once the two – dimensional stage was turned into a three – dimensional white box. One of the actors ripped the white fabric that served as curtain and revealed the cubic box that had a shallow pool, full of water, on the bottom. The sets that were posited within this box included wooden black chairs and wooden light brown tables.

Medea, having a white torn dress on, part of which she was holding with her teeth, and no make up, overturned two of the black chairs and used them as prosthetic extensions of her feet while holding them with her hands. She started walking on them while deflections of her shadow reflections on the water, were projected both onto the back paper side of the box and her white wet dress. After making an imaginary circle, she performed five seconds of active stillness facing the audience and let the chairs fall, allowing her body to succumb to gravity.

Throughout this two-minute scene, Evangelia remained silent. Her face muscles were initially engaging to the action of biting the white and wet piece of her dress. While walking on her prosthetic chair legs her upper torso was

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<sup>1</sup>Understanding of the relations between the virtual and the actual introduced by DeLanda in De, Landa M. *Intensive Science and Virtual Philosophy*. London: Continuum, 2002.pg. 24

<sup>2</sup>Adorno’s argument about the aesthetic necessity to experiment and change the form. Bloch, Ernst. *Aesthetics and Politics*. London: NLB, 1977.

<sup>3</sup>Deleuze, Gilles, and Félix Guattari. *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987, pg. 306

folding towards her lower body because the weight of the chairs was holding her down, shaping a curve with her back. Her wet white dress allowed her spinal movement to be accessible to the audience's gaze and her dark hair was left loose on her shoulders, offering a visual antithesis to all the whiteness of the cubic box.

When she completed the imaginary circle, she raised her gaze and directly faced the audience. She stood upright, stopped holding the chairs and allowed them to fall on the shallow pool making a rumbling sound that broke the sound of her body silence. The chairs fell on the bilateral sides of her body perturbing the water of the pool and forcing her legs to open. She grabbed her dress with her hands and threw herself to the shallow water, embodying the vibrations that came along with the rebound.

Robert Wilson chose this scene to be one of the 25 readymade performances that assembled his 22<sup>nd</sup> Annual Watermill Summer Benefit, *Circus of Stillness: the power over wild beasts*. This assemblage of the 25 readymade performances took place at his personal laboratory for performance: The Watermill Center. Watermill Center is a residency that provides space to a wide range of performances, including lecture series, public events and open rehearsals<sup>1</sup>.

The 22<sup>nd</sup> Annual Watermill Summer Benefit, *Circus of Stillness: the power over wild beasts* included a silent auction, a live auction and readymade performances and art installations from all over the world. The "solo chair scene" was performed by Evangelia Rantou 20 times in a loop on one of the ponds of the Watermill Center garden. The 25 readymade performances included body - painting, bodies blending with and augmenting not only the artificially planted trees, ponds and bushes that shaped labyrinths but also the architectural constructs that were embedded within this area.

The tragic Medea of Euripides was transformed to Dimitris Papaiwannou's dancing Medea, who was afterwards removed from this context and became a readymade performance, put by Robert Wilson within the concept of the *Circus of Stillness: the power over wild beasts*.

## **Intercultural Performance as the Unifying Force**

Discourse that focuses on intercultural performance aspires to avoid assimilation and appropriation and as a result to save difference.<sup>2</sup> Difference though, is not the sum of different identities. Once difference is established through identity, it is solidly undifferentiated<sup>3</sup> since it pauses every process of becoming. It is through this modus operandi that idealized ideas – such as authentic origins - are established as unifying principles. As a result, performance is doomed to derive from original nations, cultures and states and

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<sup>1</sup><http://watermillcenter.org>

<sup>2</sup>Pavis, Patrice. *The Intercultural Performance Reader*. London: Routledge, 1996pg. 11

<sup>3</sup>Massumi, Brian. *A User's Guide to Capitalism and Schizophrenia: Deviations from Deleuze and Guattari*. Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1992. Pg. 91

different identities are inevitably understood as carriers of cultural representation.

Representational thinking “imposes stasis upon that which perpetually moves and differs from itself”<sup>1</sup>. Although Erika Fischer – Lichte in her article “Interculturalism in Contemporary Theatre”<sup>2</sup> theorizes about intercultural theatre’s enveloped capacity to move cultural flows<sup>3</sup>, I argue that her methodological lens is closely bound to representational identities. Fischer – Lichte sees how cultural identities move and meet one another, but she somehow overlooks the ongoing intrinsic changes that put the esoteric core of which that moves, in perpetual motion.

From this point of view, intercultural theatre becomes the glue or the stitch that bounds two separate surfaces with one another. According to Erika Fischer – Lichte intercultural theatre should perform as “an agency of mediation”<sup>4</sup> that will eventually create “a world culture”<sup>5</sup>. Therefore, the intercultural theatre of mediation places itself in between cultures and freezes their difference, creating a “worldly”<sup>6</sup> sum out of these identically different parts. This process of holding different things together implies origins and ends and imposes stasis on states of constant becoming, reducing them down to static states of being.<sup>7</sup>

As a result, the multiple cultures are understood as different identities that invite each other to processes of “cultural exchange”<sup>8</sup> under the mediating eye of intercultural theatre. According to Fischer-Lichte, this esoteric exchange relies on individual responsibility towards the singularly idealized community. Additionally, it creates ordering principles – such as “the world culture” or “the community”<sup>9</sup> – that not only end up imposing resemblance but are also over – idealized and materially unreachable, dreamy utopias.

Within this understanding of cultural theatre, the dreamy, over – idealized utopias will end up relying on what Fischer – Lichte describes as the “charismatic powers of a humanist image of man”<sup>10</sup>. Since these utopias are products of processes that hold together different identities that are always barriers of cultural origins, they will be eventually established in hierarchical ways. But Fischer – Lichte wants to escape hierarchical appropriations she ends up relying on human charisma in order to establish her utopia.

Within this theoretical framework of understanding of intercultural performance and intercultural theatre in particular, the “solo chair scene” performed by Evangelia Rantou both in the context of Papaioannou’s *Medea2* and Wilson’s *Circus of Stillness: the power over wild beasts*, was the mediator

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<sup>1</sup>Cull, Laura. *Deleuze and Performance*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009. Pg. 8

<sup>2</sup>Pavis, *Intercultural Performance Reader*, pg. 20

<sup>3</sup>ibid

<sup>4</sup>ibid pg. 28

<sup>5</sup>ibid pg. 38

<sup>6</sup>ibid

<sup>7</sup>Shields, Rob, and Mickey Vallee. *Demystifying Deleuze: An Introductory Assembly of Crucial Concepts*. Ottawa: Red Quill Books, 2012. pg. 22

<sup>8</sup>ibid pg. 27

<sup>9</sup>Pavis, *Intercultural Performance Reader*, pg. 38

<sup>10</sup>ibid pg. 37

between cultural exchanges of various identities. Each culture, under the umbrella of respectful responsibility towards the over – idealized community, refuses to impose its own meaning onto the scene. On the contrary the “solo chair scene”, once put in the context of Wilson’s performance, exposes itself to the “possibility of being a cultural factor in cultures of other origins as well as its own”.<sup>1</sup>

This theorization of theatrical activity as an identically different “cultural factor”<sup>2</sup> that was removed from its cultural origin and was re–contextualized in another culture as a carrier of its original cultural meaning, brings different identities right next to each other, stitching them together in ways that freeze their initial mobility and reducing them down to themselves<sup>3</sup>.

As a result, through Fischer – Lichte’s eyes, the mobilizing force of Medea was strong enough to speed up her encounter with another cultural difference, but not strong enough to speed up any esoteric transformations that happen from within and establish new, unthinkable ways of positioning in the world. Although Erika Fischer–Lichte appreciates Robert Wilson’s presentational work by acknowledging his refusal to “implement a sign process on stage”<sup>4</sup>, her theoretical methodology looks for identical representations. Her understanding of intercultural theatre, as the “cultural factor” that mediates, implies a representation of an original identity that was brought to another culture in order to raise consciousness as far as the existence of different identities is concerned.

Papaioannou’s Medea moved the dramatic text and turned it into dance, moved the static chairs and embodied them, moved from Greece to the States and from Athens to New York. The performance of Medea refuses to have any kind of stable point of reference. She / she / it never stops in order to represent or to identify herself. If we assume what Erika Fischer – Lichte assumes, that Medea performs mediation through different cultural identities, then it is my contention that we need to pay closer attention to the performance of the mediation and not to the mediation itself.

The mediated performance is always already a performance. Therefore it does not carry identities in order to introduce them to each other and create a unified utopia that would sum up and include all of them. On the contrary it never stops moving: from place to place, from sign to sign, from state to state, from territory to territory. It never is and it always becomes. As a result intercultural performance should not be understood as a unitary or a static entity that holds different images of the world together but as a movement that is always in between.

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<sup>1</sup>ibid pg. 32

<sup>2</sup>ibid

<sup>3</sup>Bonta, Mark, and John Protevi. *Deleuze and Geophilosophy: A Guide and Glossary*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004pg. 117

<sup>4</sup>Pavis, *Intercultural Performance Reader*, pg. 32

## Medea as Nomad

Multiplicities differentiate themselves from within, blocking any crystallization of signs, meanings or symbols. According to Erika Fischer-Lichte, intercultural theatre holds different identities together and through establishing them into a new “worldly” context, transforms them into new ones. Drawing upon Deleuze and Guattari I argue that multiplicities, as opposed to identities, are multipliable within themselves and, as a result, they produce difference from within. Therefore no identical substance can be attributed to them.

Medea perpetually produces difference from within. Nothing about her remains internally static since she is continuously becoming something different and she never allows herself to be over-coded<sup>1</sup>. She is always in-between becoming mistress and wife and mother and killer and dragon and monster and tragic heroine and a mortal walking on earth and an immortal non – human floating on water with two wooden chairs as her legs ... and ... and ... and ... but she never actually becomes.

During the “solo chair scene”, Medea is walking on water through having two wooden chairs as her legs, performing a not-yet humanly programmed kind of embodiment. In terms of Deleuze and Guattari, she is performing an animal-becoming<sup>2</sup> that is always molecular because it is a becoming that operates locally on a micro level. This becoming aspires to answer the Spinozian question “What a body can do”<sup>3</sup> through performing profoundly creative ways of registering in the world.

When this multipliable animal-becoming moves outside the laws and customs of its own territory—either in terms of nation, state or culture—then it becomes a nomad. According to Deleuze and Guattari a nomad “is a hunter that follows the flows, exhausts them in place and moves on with them to another place”<sup>4</sup> Just like the multiplicity that differentiates itself from within, preventing any crystallization of signs, meanings or symbols, from happening on a micro level, the nomad differentiates this becoming through taking in it onto a macro level.

From this point of view, micro (actual) is always already macro (virtual) and vice versa<sup>5</sup>. The virtual, for Deleuze and Guattari, is the non – actualized zone of potential that generates the conditions that are necessary for actualization.<sup>6</sup> In other words, the virtual is the engine for the actual that can never be exhausted<sup>7</sup>. Only the nomad can explore of these non-exhaustive potential that can be actualized during processes of becoming.

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<sup>1</sup>Bonta, Mark and Protevi, *Deleuze and Geophilosophy*, pg. 69-70

<sup>2</sup>Deleuze and Guattari, *One Thousand Plateaus*, pg. 242

<sup>3</sup>ibid pg. 162

<sup>4</sup>Bonta, Mark and Protevi, *Deleuze and Geophilosophy*, pg. 69-70

<sup>5</sup>De, Landa, *Intensive Science and Virtual Philosophy*

<sup>6</sup>Shields, Rob, and Mickey Vallee. *Demystifying Deleuze*, pg. 190

<sup>7</sup>ibid pg. 191



Once the esoterically differentiated multiplicity of Medea, moves exoterically to other territories (cultures, nations, states etc) Medea is performing nomadism. Papaioannou's ready-made Medea eschews creation for ready-made ideas and forms. She moves from Athens to Robert Wilson's garden in New York, through performing becoming outside of the space that was once given to her. As a multiplicity, Medea performs outside the codes of her local territory while, as a nomad, the performance performs outside Medea's topological locality.

As a result, Medea slips out of domination<sup>1</sup> and "remains difficult to conceptualize"<sup>2</sup> For Deleuze and Guattari, this capacity to non-conceptualization<sup>3</sup> prohibits any kind of accumulated power, either institutionalized or not, to be exercised onto Medea's becoming. Throughout all these endless processes of becoming, that are multipliable esoterically and nomadic exoterically, Medea is constantly becoming imperceptible.

The imperceptible Medea can never become a personality or a subject. Therefore she will never be either a categorized consumer whose desires are produced and coded within the capitalistic system or a documented identity that could be easily traced down and regulated. Medea is always becoming "impersonal"<sup>4</sup> through bodily but non-human non-intentions.<sup>5</sup>

This imperceptibility helps Papaioannou's Medea to pass unnoticed through creating a world within which imitation, resemblance, analogy and representation are completely excluded. Medea resembles nothing, imitates nothing, is analogical to nothing, is identical to nothing and most importantly represents nothing. The performed becoming gets rid of every static point of reference that would turn the ready-made performance into an identical subject with specific biography or motivation.

Within this point of view, intercultural performance, instead of being the glue that unites different identities, becomes a plane of consistency<sup>6</sup> that, according to Deleuze and Guattari, consists of the power to resist any kind of ordering. The concept of the plane of consistency "refers to a surface on which elements of thought can come to be related to one another even if they do not share a pre-existing commonality or compatibility".<sup>7</sup> It is the linking together of multiple elements that is never static.

But how much do these kinds of becoming cost? Who has access to this plane of consistency? How much capital does one need in order to challenge capitalism from within? Both Papaioannou and Wilson targeted for an elitist, privileged and very well paying audience. In Wilson's case and his *Circus of Stillness* in particular, the cocktail tickets that were on sale one month before

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<sup>1</sup>ibid pg. 126

<sup>2</sup>Deleuze and Guattari, *One Thousand Plateaus*, pg. 399

<sup>3</sup>Massumi, Brian. *A User's Guide to Capitalism and Schizophrenia: Deviations from Deleuze and Guattari*. Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1992 pg. 47 and 81

<sup>4</sup>Bonta, Mark and Protevi, *Deleuze and Geophilosophy*, pg. 47

<sup>5</sup>ibid pg. 47

<sup>6</sup>Deleuze and Guattari, *One Thousand Plateaus*, pg. 70-73 and 513-514

<sup>7</sup>Shields, Rob, and Mickey Vallee. *Demystifying Deleuze*, pg. 137-140

the actual performance cost \$500, the cocktail tickets that were sold during the month of the performance cost \$650, the contributor tickets cost \$1,250 and the prices for the tables varied among \$15,000 and \$50,000.

Although all these processes of performing becoming, challenge the concept of “modes of production”<sup>1</sup> due to their introducing impersonal, non-intentional subjects, or in other words through producing non-subjects that have zero desires or intentions, Wilson’s Circus of Stillness is the perfect example of their extreme commodification. Within the framework of Deleuze and Guattari, and especially via their understanding of the connections between the actual and the virtual, Medea introduces unprecedented and virtual ways of existence that are continuously inclined to be actualized for capitalism’s shake. As a result the non-commodity body turns into an absolute commodity.

Was Erika Fischer-Lichte right then when she chose to rely on charisma and utopia in order to secure non-appropriated and therefore non-commodified difference? My feeling is that we are in need for closer discursive attention to the ways that performances perform within the capitalistic framework. As long as intercultural performance performs within discursively unexplored capitalistic structures, it will continue to be ghosted by appropriation. Both capitalism and intercultural performance perform: we should not focus on the one and neglect the other.

As a result I contend that closer discursive attention needs to be paid on understanding the connections between the virtual ways of alternative positioning in the world introduced by intercultural performance, and their direct actualization on a level of materiality. If Medea is nothing more than a virtual potential that can be actualized in ways that end up serving the system instead of disturbing it, then the ghost of appropriation will never be exorcised from the reality of intercultural performance.

## Epilogue

In these few pages, I challenged Erika Fischer-Lichte’s understanding of intercultural theatre as the “agency of mediation” through the concept of nomad introduced by Deleuze and Guattari, in order to argue that there is an emergent need for closer discursive attention that will focus on the ways that performance performs within capitalism. I used as my case study “the solo chair scene” from Dimitris Papaioannou’s production of *Medea*<sup>2</sup>. This particular scene functioned as a readymade performance for the performative collage produced by Robert Wilson in his Watermill Center in New York.

I argued that intercultural performances envelop the capacity to multiply and differentiate themselves from within, while remaining in constant motion. Although this capacity challenges any ways of existence that are pre-assigned by capitalism, there is also the danger of turning them into crystalized

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<sup>1</sup>Massumi, Brian. *A User's Guide to Capitalism and Schizophrenia: Deviations from Deleuze and Guattari*.

commodities. This commodification alienates their virtual potential from their material actualizations. Therefore, I think that it is crucial for the field of Performance Studies, to investigate through the lens of intercultural performance, the dynamic interplay between the virtual and the actual and its real manifestations.

The virtual should not be understood as a parallel illusionary world that puts catharsis “on sale” in order to maintain the status quo on the level of reality. On the contrary, to paraphrase Deleuze and Guattari, the virtual is what “makes the world go by”<sup>1</sup>. It introduces unprecedented ways of positioning our selves in this world that move beyond profit, narcissism, egoistic anthropocentrism, and appropriation.

Unfortunately though, it seems that until now, when these virtual potentialities are actualized, they become extremely expensive commodities that reinforce class stratification. As a result the discourse of intercultural performance needs to investigate more closely the dynamic interplay between the virtual and the actual. This is why I contend that performing arts need Deleuze and Guattari: because they managed to combine complexity theory and philosophy and theorize about this that has not yet come.

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<sup>1</sup>Gaffney, Peter. *The Force of the Virtual: Deleuze, Science, and Philosophy*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010, pg. 1