

Giovanni Ambrosio

## **How do I archive a performance which is not mine?**

## **How do they perform an archive which is not theirs?**

*What exactly is the subject of stage and theatre photography? What should it depict or archive? Why images are required? Working outside the limits of a discipline, it is thrilling to shift, in and with theatre photography, from the space designed to be the limited area in which a photographer can activate his point of view to a wider space without boundaries.*

### **Introduction**

From 2014 onward, with the beginning of my collaboration with live performing arts collective Kultursciò'k, while keeping in mind the sometimes violent need to depict and to keep track of ephemeral actions for communication purposes, I have been working on specific ways of collecting images requiring a possible definition of photography for performing arts, possible strategies to be in the same physical space of performance, possible meanings of collecting pictures for archives, possible re-writing processes of stage photography experiences. From form to form, from measurement to measurement, I felt that stage photography was actually able to turn into a pioneer species, able to migrate, from its original soil - the duty of memory as well as the duty of illustrating communication devices - to other soils. Assuming that theatre photography is a peculiar field inside documentary photography as well as understanding that it is itself a performative discipline requiring a relationship between body and space, I had to face the emergency of the idea that my stage related photography works could obey to other laws and claim other rights, migrating towards other forms, entering other spaces.

### **Medea's archives**

Since the workspace of Alessia Siniscalchi for her piece *Medea's Visions* has no borders between movements (body, texts, sounds, structures, materials) and the ideal pre-defined perimeter that could

be intended for their external depiction in other words, the limited space normally allowing a stage photographer to get pictures from on going actions *without being part of them*, I can enter a zone of influence in which I can freely dispose and accumulate fragments and archives. I can even make them disappear. I actually do perform photography and force it to react to the living archive of matters displayed by an artwork to whom somebody else (and in a collective process) is giving birth and shape. Alessia Siniscalchi's and her performers' work has been interrupted, deviated, influenced, even probably disturbed by photography. During two years of rehearsals, bodies, actions, faces and spaces have been peculiarly photographed and stored until the birth of a double archive: on one hand, all the pictures collected and arbitrarily stored in hard drives. On the other hand, the memory of photographic actions and devices into the development of Siniscalchi's performance and into performers attitude. On the stage, they also have to carry the weight, both physical and mental, of images stacks I am clearly and with no doubt building up. They cannot ignore it, since I am invading their allowed space, with my body, with my cameras, with the devices I have been setting up. For instance, before, after and during the piece, they can also get out of proper performance space to come into the photographic space, at a certain point, embodied by a classic portraits studio. Thus, photography records not only *Medea's visions* creation process in its linear development but also its intemtion provided by photography itself. This crack is intended as an attempt to records performers' bodies mutations during their works, as a sort of microscopic tragedy inhabiting their skin and flesh. *Medea's archives* eventually has been built as a score written by the photographic process itself, the memory of rehearsals, the development of actions - both from performers for *Medea's visions* and from my recording actions - during live performance in front of audience. *Medea's archives* goes also with a collection of fragments from a possible manifesto for stage photography:

*Is stage photography a type of documentary photography?*

*And if so, what is it supposed to depict and archive?*

*What's the influence of on image archive on a performing act?*

***A textbook of modern stage photography manifesto writing.***

*13. Everything can be arranged. Everything can disappear.*

*14. How to archive a performance which is not mine?*

**How do I archive a performance which is not mine (?)**

**How do they perform an archive (?)**

*How do I archive a performance which is not mine. How do they perform an archive* is an archive/installation/sculpture/performance with pictures coming from *Medea's archives of Medea's Visions*. The archive is engraved in blocks of printed papers/photographs bound with a plastic ribbon coming from an on-line low-cost printer. The ribbon is fragile and can be easily broken. Blocks have different sizes and weights. In the first display, at la Ménagerie de Verre, Paris, blocks have been disposed in its library shelves and on the floor of corridors and passages between the stage and the *foyer*. Included, a screening of *Medea's Visions* performers portraits coming from the studio set during rehearsals. In the second display, at Bellini theatre, in Naples, a group of dancers and actors perform the archive before and after *Medea's Visions*. They start from a pile installed in the theatre *foyer*. In the first leg the sculpture/performance held in a public space in the city and then moves back towards the foyer until the beginning of the show. In the *foyer*, a sound installation by Phil St. George underlines actions and movements. Dancers can also pronounce lines from *Medea's Visions* and lines written for *How do I archive a performance which is not mine. How do they perform an archive: How do I? — Storage — Death — Come faccio?*

Their bodies *are* archives.

The main written movement is to throw blocks down in order to produce a noise of heavy weight hitting the floor. Some of the blocks are, afterwards, used as pieces into the narrative of *Medea's Visions*, going on the regular stage (Teatro Bellini in Napoli is a classic Italian theatre designed with the classic split between the scene and the audience space) at the end of *How do I archive a performance which is not mine. How do they perform an archive* and then coming back to it when actors and dancers end their show and quit its space. Initial pile is eventually recreated.

### **The archive is present:**

Eroding the archive

Weighing its compactness

Crumbling and corrupting

Interrogating Activating

Jouer / déjouer

To perform

Inside out Stacks blocks

How to How do I How do they

The archive is everything and nothing

The archive is accessible and inaccessible

The archive dissolves or compact itself again

It expands The archive is space

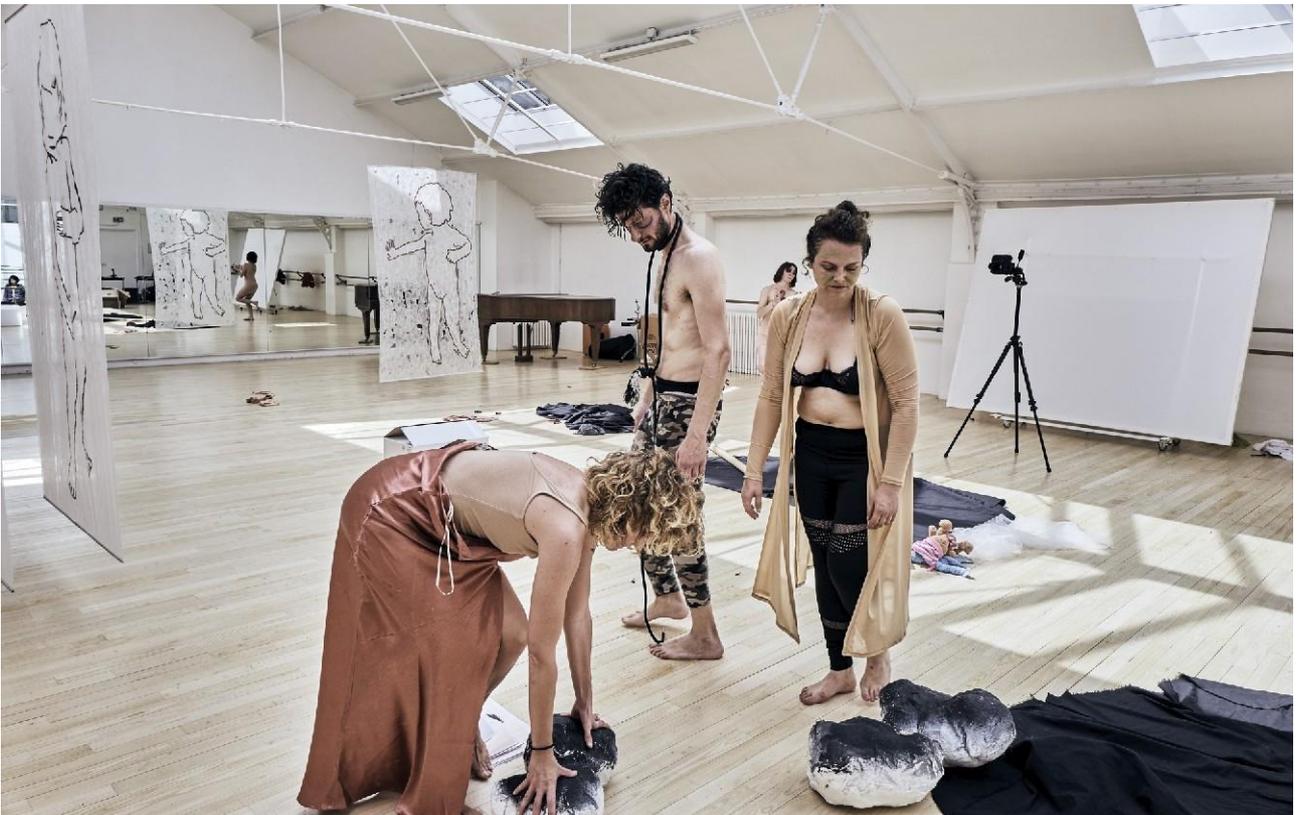
To archive is the beginning

How many pictures

How do I store

What's the meaning. How do I archive a performance which is not mine

Archive is all Archive is nothing.



*Medea's archives 1. May 2018. Rehearsals. Ménagerie de Verre, Paris.*



*Medea's archives 1. May 2018. Rehearsals. Jason's staged portraits. Ménagerie de Verre. Paris.*

Medea and the laceration of Care/Medea: la lacerazione della cura



*Medea's archives 2. March 2019. Rehearsals. Medea stops by for a portrait. Ménagerie de Verre, Paris.*



*Medea's archives 2. March 2019. Rehearsals. Ménagerie de Verre, Paris.*



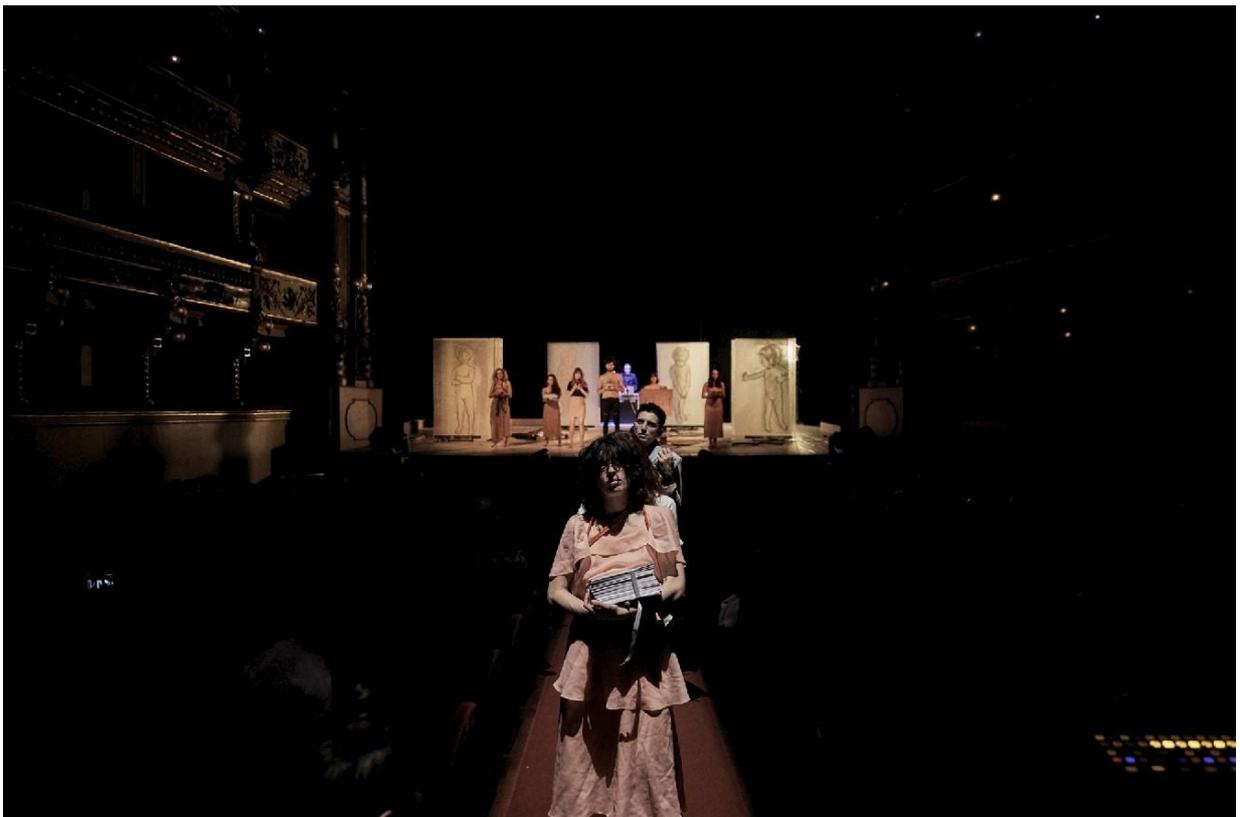
*Medea's archives 3. October 2019. Main stage. Public performance, Nuit blanche de Paris 2019. Ménagerie de Verre, Paris*



*Medea's archives 3. October 2019. Performing archives. Public performance, Nuit blanche de Paris 2019. Ménagerie de Verre, Paris*



*Medea's archives 3. October 2019. Public performance, Nuit blanche de Paris 2019. Ménagerie de Verre, Paris.*

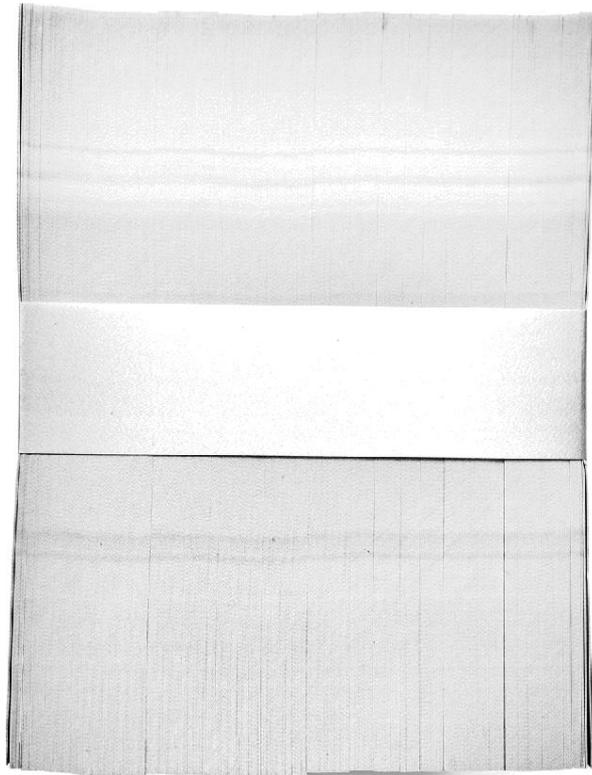


*Medea's archives 4. January 2020. Public performance. Teatro Bellini, Napoli.*

Medea and the laceration of Care/Medea: la lacerazione della cura



*Medea's archives 4. January 2020. Public performance. Jason steps out of stage for portraits. Teatro Bellini, Napoli.*



*How do I archive a performance which is not mine. How do they perform an archive.*



*How do I archive a performance which is not mine. How do they perform an archive.*

Stills from a video shot and edited by Maria Mazzella