

Andres Neumann's Theatrical Archive. Sources for the history of contemporary performing arts

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Abstract: The paper, at the conclusion of the work conducted during the first year of the PhD course in Storia delle Arti e dello Spettacolo (History of Cinema, Music, Fine and Performing Arts) at the University of Florence, briefly describes the structure and content of the theatrical archive of Andres Neumann, preserved at the il Funaro Centro Culturale of Pistoia. The fund is a precious instrument of historiography, because it contains documents relating to the main plays of the international theatre of the last thirty years of the twentieth century. After having presented and discussed some examples of documentary types contained in the archive, in particular regarding Tadeusz Kantor and Anatoly Vasiliev, the paper illustrates the prospects for development of this research project.

Keywords: Andres Neumann, contemporary theatre, Tadeusz Kantor, Peter Brook, Pina Bausch, Anatoly Vasiliev, il Funaro Centro Culturale, Rondò di Bacco.

The PhD project I have been working on is provisionally entitled *L'Archivio Andres Neumann: memorie digitali e storiografia teatrale* (*Andres Neumann's Archive: digital memories and theatrical historiography*). The object of this investigation is the theatrical archive of Andres Neumann, preserved in Pistoia at the il Funaro Centro Culturale, which documents his activity as a theatrical curator, producer, organizer and distributor.

The fund is a valuable instrument of historiography, as it preserves documents relating to the main plays of the national and international

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performing arts of the last thirty years of the twentieth century, with important protagonists, including Tadeusz Kantor, Peter Brook, Pina Bausch, Anatoly Vasiliev, Robert Wilson, Dario Fo, Franca Rame and Vittorio Gassman. The archive, donated in 2009 by Andres Neumann to the Funaro, today consists of 532 archival units, divided into 11 series, containing heterogeneous documentary types: printed publications, correspondences, administrative and organizational acts, *brochures*, programmes, posters, technical sheets, scene sketches, notes, photographs, audio-visual material, for a total of over 75.000 documents.

In the first place, we should briefly recall the main phases in the life of the archive from the year of its donation to the Funaro. In 2009 a first arrangement of the archive was created by Giada Petrone, a close collaborator of Neumann from 2009 to 2019, who, previously, starting from 2005, had also rearranged Renato Nicolini's archive relating to the Estate Romana (1977-1985). Since 2010 the archive has been the object of study within the framework of the project *Memorie digitali dello spettacolo contemporaneo in Toscana 1970-2010*, directed by Prof. Renzo Guardenti, which has led to the digitalization and cataloguing of part of the documents, as well as to the publication of the volume of Maria Fedi, *L'Archivio Andres Neumann. Memorie dello spettacolo contemporaneo*². From 2014 to 2015, a general inventory of the archive³ was realised, curated by Andrea Ottanelli, and, from 2017, it is also available on-line⁴.

As regards the structure of the archive, the first series contains the documentation referable to Neumann's formative years in Uruguay⁵. The second one includes documents concerning his collaboration with Jack Lang, since 1972, at the organization of the Festival Mondial du Théâtre de Nancy.

2. Maria Fedi, *L'Archivio Andres Neumann. Memorie dello spettacolo contemporaneo*, presentation of Renzo Guardenti, with a testimony of Giada Petrone (Corazzano (Pisa): Titivillus, 2013). See also Renzo Guardenti and Maria Fedi, *Dall'Archivio di Andres Neumann. Scene di un teatro contemporaneo*, catalogue of the exhibition in Pistoia (21-23 October 2011) (Pistoia: il Funaro Centro Culturale, 2011).

3. Andrea Ottanelli, *Inventario dell'Archivio teatrale Andres Neumann* (Pistoia: il Funaro Centro Culturale, 2015).

4. Cf. www.archivioteatraleandresneumann.org.

5. For a profile of Andres Neumann see Giada Petrone, «Viaggio nell'archivio di un maestro: una testimonianza», in Maria Fedi, *L'Archivio Andres Neumann. Memorie dello spettacolo contemporaneo*, 121-142.

The third series preserves the sources relative to the three theatrical seasons curated by Neumann, between 1975 and 1978, at the Rondò di Bacco, a theatre space located in a wing of Palazzo Pitti. In the series IV-XI are placed the documents relating to Andres Neumann International, the theatre agency founded by Neumann in Florence in 1978. In the tenth series are preserved heterogeneous documents that could not be included in the others. Finally, the eleventh series contains the posters and the playbills acquired by Neumann during his working life.

Some questions animated and oriented the work conducted in the archive during the first year of the PhD course in Storia delle Arti e dello Spettacolo (History of Cinema, Music, Fine and Performing Arts) at the University of Florence. Which portions to circumscribe and which sources to select among the over 75.000 documents kept? Which information to draw from the different types of documents and how to use them? Which theatrical sources to make emerge and which topics to present and discuss? Which digital "object" to realize, wanting to value the sources not in a massive way but in relation to archival research and, therefore, in a historical-theatrical perspective?

In the first months, in the impossibility of accessing the archival documents due to the health emergency, an indicative bibliography was compiled on the main protagonists of the archive. Subsequently, since the end of January 2021, a first recognition of the materials has been started, aimed to identify the documents to work on, to guide the bibliographical research and to understand the structure of the archive. In particular, we highlight all the archives boxes of the third series (AN, III, 1-12)⁶, which preserves the sources relating to Neumann's experience at the Rondò di Bacco, where, between 1975 and 1978, among others, he had brought: the Living Theater with *Seven Meditations on Political Sadoomasochism*; Peter Shumann and Bread and Puppet with *Our domestic resurrection spectacle* and with whom he organised the exhibition *Masaccio*, at the Art Institute of Florence; Robert Wilson with the play *Dialogue network*; Tadeusz Kantor with the Italian *première* of *The Dead Class*. Among the Italian plays staged at the

6. The placement of the documents has been shortened as follows: AN (Andres Neumann's Archive), n. series (in Roman number), n. archive box (in Arabic number).

Rondò experimental theatre seasons, we remember, for example, *Morte della Geometria* by Pierluigi Pier'Alli (on poetic text by Giuliano Scabia), *Sacco* by Claudio Remondi and Riccardo Caporossi and *Proust* by Giuliano Vasilicò.

Some portions of the fourth series were also consulted, among which we point out the archives boxes relative to the organization of international *tournées* of Vittorio Gassman (AN, IV, 10-11) and Dario Fo and Franca Rame (AN, IV, 7-8, 12, 26), the units relating to *Six Characters in Search of Author* by Anatoly Vasiliev (AN, IV, 36-38), to *Mahabharata* and *La tragédie de Carmen* by Peter Brook (AN, IV, 14-16, 20-22), to *Gebirge*, *Palermo Palermo* and *Danzon* by Pina Bausch (AN, IV, 46-51, 135-136) and the units regarding the collaboration of Neumann with Renato Nicolini to the realization of the Estate Romana between 1977 and 1981 (AN, IV, 1-4). Obviously, given the amount of documents, the consultation will also continue during the next year.

In reference to the expansion of the digital archive, the digitalization of the entire press review relating to the seasons of the Rondò di Bacco (AN, III, 1-12) has been started. Furthermore, in July, in agreement with Prof. Renzo Guardenti, tutor of this research project, and Dr. Massimiliano Barbini, head of the Library and Documentation Centre of the il Funaro Centro Culturale, it was decided, for the moment, to work on the portions of the archive concerning Tadeusz Kantor and Anatoly Vasiliev and the digital "objects" to be realised were defined. But, shortly, I shall return to this last point in detail.

Now, let's look at some *exempla* of documentary types offered by Andres Neumann's Theatre Archive⁷. In the third series, with regard to the staging of Tadeusz Kantor's *The Dead Class* at the Rondò di Bacco (11-16 January 1978), are stored, for example, performance programme (**Fig. 1**), the poster (**Fig. 2**), the press review, two sketches of the plan (one original and the other in photocopy) depicting the spatial organization for the staging of the play (**Fig. 3**).

7. The illustrations presented in this paper are published by courtesy of the staff of the il Funaro Centro Culturale and, in particular, of Dr. Massimiliano Barbini, head of the Library and Documentation Centre of the Funaro, to whom goes my sincerest thanks.

LA CLASSE MORTA

SEANCE DRAMMATICO

T. KANTOR

Nome: Riccardo Scamarcio Cognome: Tullio Scamarcio

Teatro Rondò - Palazzo Pitti
dal 11 al 16 Gennaio 1978 - ore 21.30

PRODOTTORE: TULLIO SCAMARCIO TELEFONO: 055 23.81.00



IL TEATRO

cricot 2

CRACOVIA - FIRENZE - MILANO - 1978

99

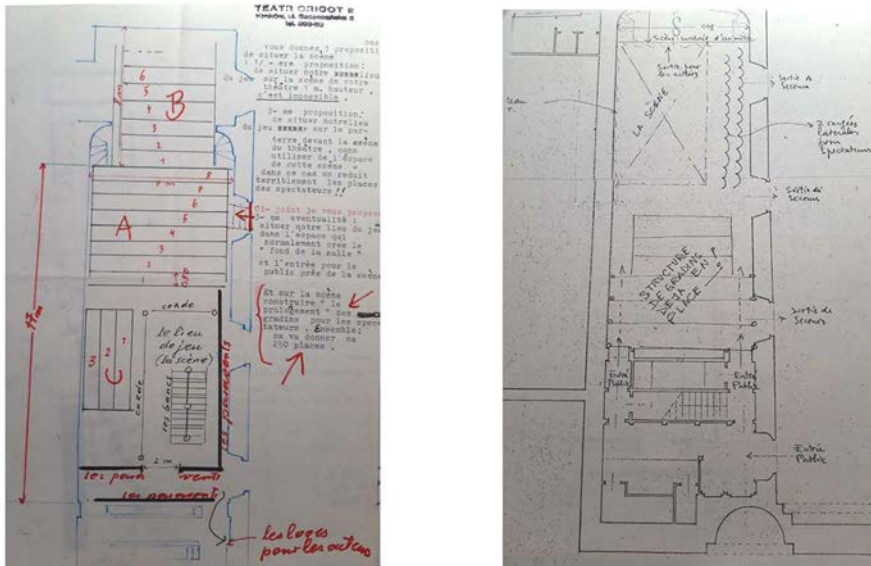


Fig. 3: Sketches of the plan depicting the spatial organization for the staging of *The Dead Class* by Tadeusz Kantor at the Rondò di Bacco (AN, III, 12).

One of the two sketches (**Fig. 3**, on the left), accompanied by typewritten and manuscripts notes, highlights Kantor's hypothesis of placing the scenic space in the area that is normally the «fond de la salle» at the Rondò. Therefore, it is proposed to place the terraces for spectators on the opposite side, extending it also on what is normally «la scène». The other sketch (**Fig. 3**, on the right), instead, illustrates an opposite spatial organization. What was the definitive arrangement of the theatre space? This will be one of the problems to be solved.

Also, in the third series, is preserved a photograph (**Fig. 4**) which portrays the arrival of Kantor's company at the Roma Fiumicino airport in 1979 (Neumann is the first from the left, Kantor is the second from the right). This type of documents moves us away from the fetish of opera and reduces the discourse on the poetics of the director, reminding us that the theatre is made primarily of spaces and bodies. In this case, of bodies that travel. We are also reminded, therefore, of the *theme of the journey*, which is so important for the material history of the performing arts.



Fig. 4: Tadeusz Kantor's company at Rome Fiumicino airport, 1979.
Andres Neumann is the first from the left, Tadeusz Kantor
is the second from the right (AN, III, 11).

Regarding the core issues of theatrical profession, we read the conclusion of an interview, also preserved in the archive, made by Sara Mamone to Peter Brook on the occasion of the staging of his *Mahabharata* at the Spazio Polivalente Il Fabbricone of Prato in 1985. The scholar wrote: «Peter Brook, ai piedi della scalinata, ha un guizzo: “Ma di questo spettacolo, in giro, se ne parla? Ha l'impressione che lo stiano presentando bene?”». Sara Mamone commented: «Benedetto professionismo, al di là della filosofia e dell'anima!»⁸.

8. Sara Mamone, «L'intervista. Peter Brook a Prato presenta “Mahabharata”, un viaggio spettacolare di nove ore sulla storia dell'uomo. “Sulla scena cerco l'anima”», in *L'Unità*, 19 September 1985 (AN, IV, 15): «Peter Brook, at the foot of the staircase, has a jerk: “What about this play, is it talked about out there? Do you have the impression that they are promoting it well?”». Sara Mamone commented: «Blessed professionalism, beyond philosophy and soul!».

Among other documents, in the archival fund there are also a handwritten and autograph letter (Fig. 5) by T. Kantor to A. Neumann, dated 20 August 1979, and the typescript attached to it, entitled *Conditions artistiques de la participation des acteurs du Théâtre Cricot 2 au programme de Florence*. Two documents referring to the phases of work, curated by Neumann, aimed at creating a double of the Cricoteka of Krakow in Florence, which was inaugurated in November 1979 at the deconsecrated church in Via Santa Maria n. 25 in the Oltrarno, made available by the municipality of Florence. It is an important theatre space, which, later, in the eighties, was also the site of the Bottega Teatrale of Vittorio Gassman and that, today, is the site of the Centro Nazionale di Produzione della Danza Virgilio Sieni. It was there that the production and realization of the play *Wielopole, Wielopole* by Kantor began, debuting on 23 June 1980 (Fig. 6).

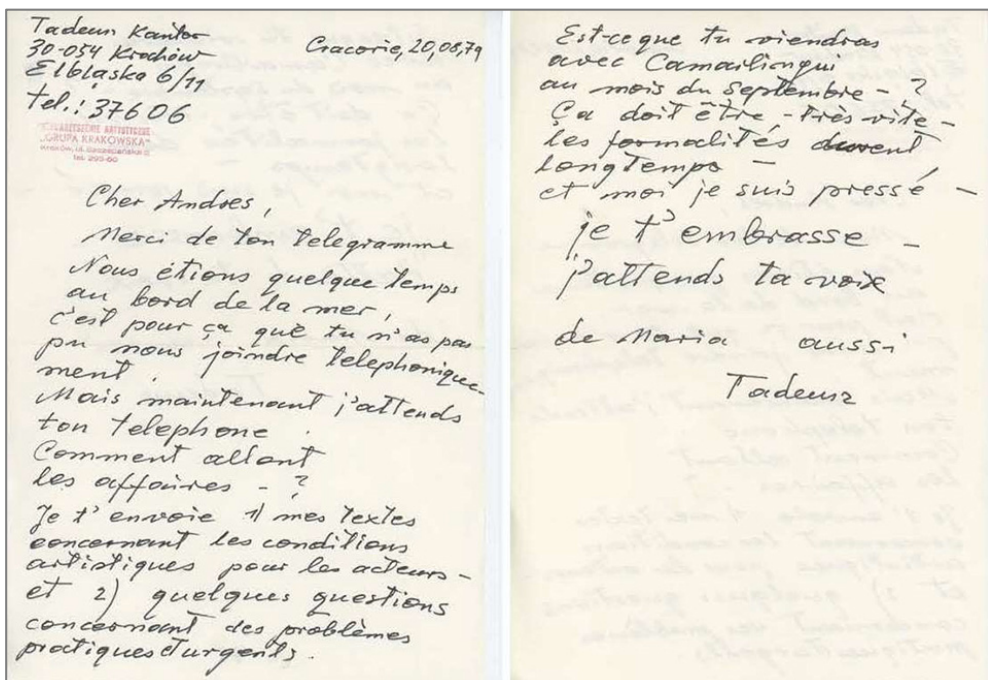


Fig. 5: Tadeusz Kantor's handwritten and autograph letter to Andres Neumann (20/08/1979) (AN, III, 11).

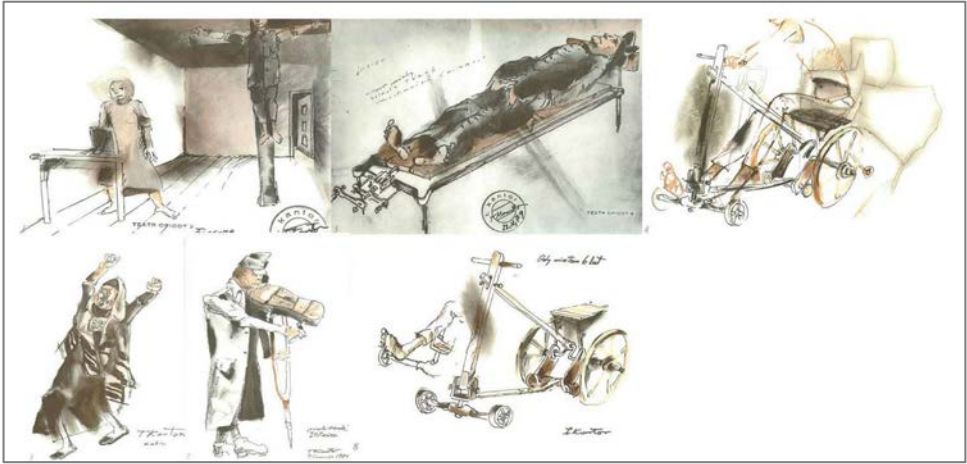


Fig. 6: Preparatory sketches by Tadeusz Kantor for the staging of *Wielopole, Wielopole in Florence* (Via Santa Maria n. 25, 23 June 1980) (AN, III, 11).

In the fourth series, for example, among the documents relating to the staging of *Six Characters in Search of an Author* by Anatoly Vasiliev (AN, IV, 36-38), there are four preparatory sketches: two represent the plan and the sections of the theatre space (**Fig. 7**), two illustrate the perspective view of the scenography for the *mise en scène* at the Moscow Theatre School of Dramatic Art on 27 February 1987. In particular, observe the diagonal curtain, which, since its graphic rendering, is *dramaturgically active* (**Fig. 8**).

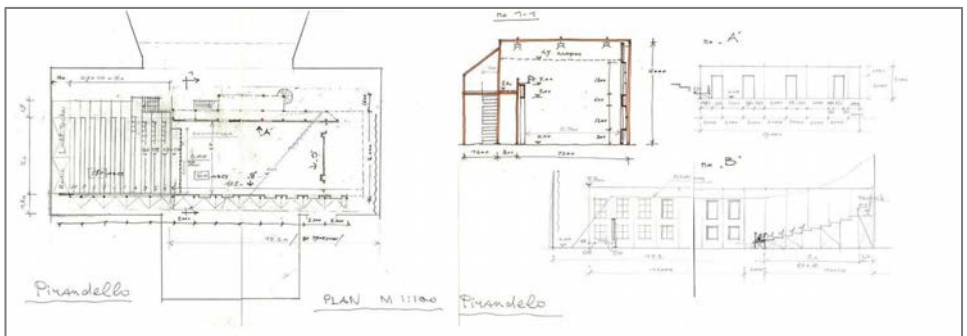


Fig. 7: Original preparatory sketches by Anatoly Vasiliev depicting the plan, on the left, and sections, on the right, of the theatre space for the staging of his *Six Characters in Search of an Author* in Moscow (Theatre School of Dramatic Art, 27 February 1987) (AN, IV, 38).

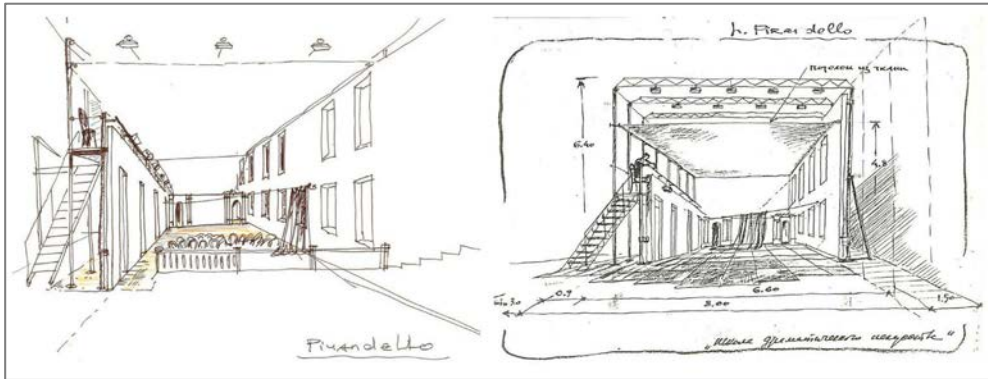


Fig. 8: Preparatory sketches (one original, the other in photocopy) by Anatoly Vasiliev depicting the perspective view of the scenography for the staging of his *Six Characters in Search of an Author* in Moscow (Theatre School of Dramatic Art, 27 February 1987) (AN, IV, 38).

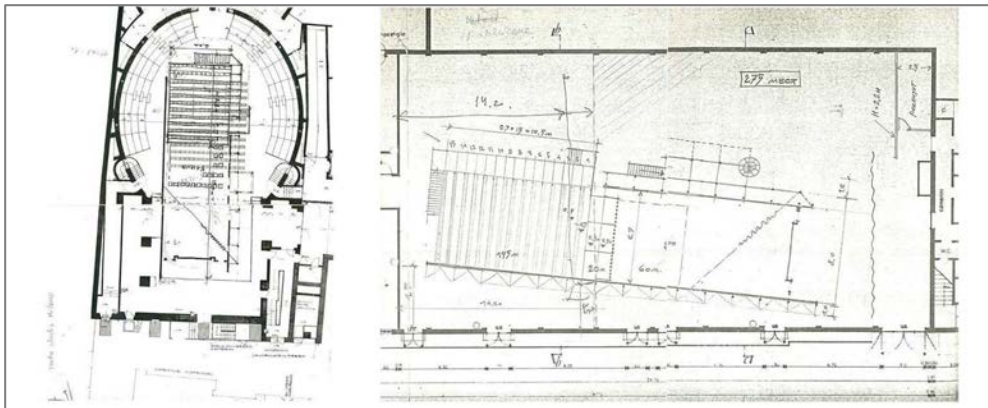


Fig. 9: On the left, the plan of the scene and the stalls area relating to the staging of *Six Characters in Search of an Author* by Anatoly Vasiliev in Milan (Piccolo Teatro Studio, 06-10/07/1988) (AN, IV, 38). On the right, the plan of the scene and the stalls area relating to the staging of *Six Characters in Search of an Author* by Anatoly Vasiliev in Prato (Spazio Polivalente Il Fabbricone, 23/02-01/03/1989) (AN, IV, 38).

Regarding the Italian productions of *Six Characters in Search of an Author* by A. Vasiliev, the archive preserves, for instance, two photocopies of the plan of the scene and the stalls area depicting the spatial organization of the staging at the Piccolo Teatro Studio of Milan (06-10/07/1988) (Fig. 9, on the left) and

at the Teatro Fabbricone of Prato (23/02-01/03/1989) (Fig. 9, on the right). It is clear that the Russian director had exported his Muscovite “theatrical-box” – or, better, his *scenic device* – in the Italian theatres where he had set up the play. It is a sort of *mise en abyme*, a “theatre within the theatre”, more than appropriate since it is the direction of *Six Characters in Search of an Author* by Luigi Pirandello.

Furthermore, among the audio-visual documents kept at the Funaro, we find the video of *The Dead Class* by T. Kantor, enacted in Milan at the Centro di Ricerca per il Teatro in April 1979, and the one of *Six Characters in Search of an Author* by A. Vasiliev, performed at the Piccolo Teatro Studio of Milan in July 1988 (Fig. 10).



Fig. 10: Two frames of the videos kept in the Andres Neumann’s Theatrical Archive relating to the Italian stagings, from left to right, of *The Dead Class* by Tadeusz Kantor in Milan at the Centro di Ricerca per il Teatro in 1979 and *Six Characters in Search of an Author* by Anatoly Vasiliev at the Piccolo Teatro Studio of Milan in July 1988.

Unfortunately, both the U-matics are in a bad state of conservation, but the visible fragments are, however, precious. Obviously, relating to the historiographical use of the sources, also for audio-visual documents and for the scene photos, we must take into account their “never objective” nature of *documents-monuments*, always partial and never neutral. In this regard, it must be remembered – in agreement with Jacques Le Goff – that every document is a lie and that, therefore, it is up to the historian, case by case, not to be naïve⁹.

9. Cf. Jacques Le Goff, «Documento/Monumento», in *Enciclopedia Einaudi*, vol. V (Torino: Einaudi, 1978), 46.

From the methodological point of view, it is necessary to inform that the present project, also inserting itself in the context of the so-called digital humanities, has been declined in an exquisitely historical perspective, in the awareness that digital humanities are not a new research paradigm¹⁰, but a *tool-bridge*¹¹ that must combine the method of analysis of sources with the innovations that the digital world has brought to historical practice¹², in order not to confuse the means with the ends¹³. In this case, digitalization will be exploited, in the second degree, as a useful bridgehead, an additional accessory to the “toolbox” and the *Nouvelle Histoire* techniques: investigation, imagination, analysis, interrogation, comparison¹⁴.

Considering the archive as a valuable tool of historiography, the development perspective of this research project is articulated in three directions. From the philological point of view, and regarding the PhD thesis, the archive will be studied in a multiform epistemological perspective, in order to valorise its potential in historical-theatrical key, reconstructing, on the one hand, some phases of Andres Neumann’s work profile, and, on the other, highlighting the strategies and creative processes of some plays, especially regarding the reception and the whole of the spatial and performative dimension.

In the second instance, by contextually crossing the paper sources related to the space (stage sketches, plans, technical sheets, stage photography etc.) with the audio-visual material, we will proceed to the virtual reconstruction of the spaces of some plays (for example, *The Dead Class* by T. Kantor and

10. Cf. Maria Cassella, «Biblioteche di ricerca e digital humanities», in *Biblioteche oggi*, n. 1 (2017), 44. Doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.3302/0392-8586-201701-044-1>

11. Cf. Serge Noiret, «Storia contemporanea digitale», in *Il web e gli studi storici. Guida critica all'uso della rete*, edited by Rolando Minuti (Roma: Carocci, 2015), 268. See also Anne Burdick, Johanna Drucker, Peter Lunenfeld, Todd Presner, Jeffrey Schnapp, *Umanistica_Digitale*, Italian translation (Milano: Mondadori, 2014).

12. In this regard, cf. Enrica Salvatori, «Digital (Public) History: la nuova strada di una antica disciplina», in *RiMe. Rivista dell'Istituto di Storia dell'Europa Mediterranea*, n. 1 (2017), 57-94. Doi: <https://doi.org/10.7410/1291>

13. In this regard, cf. Jeffrey Schnapp, *Digital humanities*, edited by Maria Grazia Mattei, Italian translation (Milano: Egea, 2015), 20-22, 61-62.

14. Cf. Jacques Le Goff, «Documento/Monumento», 38-48; Carlo Ginzburg, «Spie. Radici di un paradigma indiziario», in *Crisi della ragione*, edited by Aldo Gargani (Torino: Einaudi, 1979), 59-106; Georges Duby, *Il sogno della storia. Un grande storico contemporaneo a colloquio con il filosofo Guy Lardreau*, Italian translation (Milano: Garzanti, 1986); Marc Bloch, *Apologia della storia o Mestiere di storico*, Italian translation (Torino: Einaudi, 2009).

Six Characters in Search of an Author by A. Vasiliev). In this perspective, the iconographic sources will be used in order to obtain a theatrical iconography of the second degree, built by the historian who, thanks to the surviving documents, sets in motion those faculties of *imagining* and *abstracting* in a controlled way of which Marc Bloch, first, and Georges Duby, subsequently, had spoken¹⁵. From the operative point of view, the Rhinoceros software will be used to obtain direct three-dimensional reconstructions of the theatre space. Afterwards, these volumetric models will be imported into the rendering software Maxon Cinema 4D, in order to be characterised in terms of colours, materials, textures, obtaining reconstructions enjoyable in different formats (images, videos, models for virtual reality).

Thirdly, a documentary on the archive, that valorises the Neumann's fund and illustrates the historiographical results, will be realised by means of virtual reconstructions of the spaces, the visual presentation of the archive sources, the realization of some interviews and, therefore, the writing of a script that relates in a dialectical way to discourse through images. The intention is to valorise the archive also in relation to its conservation context: the il Funaro Centro Culturale, whose conception and realization the same Andres Neumann has contributed, accompanying the activities of the centre until 2013.

But, if in some points the documentary rather than verbally reconstructing the theatre space, relating to a precise *mise en scene*, shows it by means of a virtual animated reconstruction and, therefore, as no artificial written verbalization could do, couldn't we reconnect, in part and with all the cautions of the case, to the theories of Carlo Ludovico Ragghianti and to his *critofilm*?

Starting from the thirties of the twentieth century, in spite of a logocentrism still not totally overcome today, Ragghianti, eclectic art historian, argued that the theatre realizes art in a way completely independent from the literary form¹⁶, by means of an essentially visual language¹⁷. And he came to underline, with militancy, that theatre is *figurative art* and that, instead, poetry is poetry¹⁸. They were precisely these preliminary considerations that led Ragghianti to

15. Cf. Marc Bloch, *Apologia della storia o Mestiere di storico*, 110; Georges Duby, *Il sogno della storia*, 40-52.

16. Cf. Carlo Ludovico Ragghianti, «Cinema e teatro», in Carlo Ludovico Ragghianti, *Arti della visione. II. Spettacolo* (Torino: Einaudi, 1976), 9.

17. Cf. Carlo Ludovico Ragghianti, «Cinema e teatro», 19.

18. Cf. Carlo Ludovico Ragghianti, «Cinema e teatro», 22.

experiment with a genre of film he had called «critofilm»¹⁹, warning that the initial component of the new lemma («crito») intended to inform that it was a critical film²⁰ and that, also, *critique* was to be understood as an activity of penetration, interpretation and reconstruction of the peculiar process of the artwork or the artist through images rather than by means of words²¹.

Certainly, we do not intend to acquire his experience as a model and, therefore, it is not our intention to realize a «critofilm», but to highlight a debt to some of theoretical considerations of Ragghianti, that, in part, inspired the ideation of this digital “object”. The intention is, instead, to make a documentary that considers the archive as a cultural object: a documentary intended as a magnifying glass to reflect again on some episodes in the history of contemporary performing arts, also thanks to the structuring of a discourse through images and the simulation capabilities offered by digital.

Finally, returning to Ragghianti again, the historian also interests us when, in *Arti della Visione*, he reflected firmly on the civil and social function to which the scholars are called. It is worth reading the whole passage:

Nella civiltà di massa che caratterizza il periodo storico che viviamo, si può intervenire verso il pubblico in diverso modo: con la «propaganda», per esempio, ma anche con strumenti e metodi che non lascino passivi e in stato di fede gli ascoltatori e i lettori, e invece contribuiscano allo sviluppo del loro spirito critico, offrendo una materia di dati rigorosamente accertati, e l'esempio di un atteggiamento razionale, esigentemente distintivo nell'elaborarli e nello sceverarli²².

19. Cf. Carlo Ludovico Ragghianti, «Film d'arte, film sull'arte, critofilm d'arte», in Carlo Ludovico Ragghianti, *Arti della visione. I. Cinema* (Torino: Einaudi, 1975), 225-240. C.L. Ragghianti, from 1948 to 1964, had realised twenty-one critofilm, today all preserved and viewable on reservation at the Archivio della Fondazione Ragghianti in Lucca. On the critofilm made by Ragghianti see, at least, *I critofilm di Carlo L. Ragghianti. Tutte le sceneggiature*, edited by Valentina La Salvia (Lucca: Edizioni Fondazione Ragghianti Studi sull'Arte, 2006) and *Carlo L. Ragghianti. I critofilm d'arte*, edited by Antonio Costa (Udine: Campanotto, 1995).

20. Cf. Carlo Ludovico Ragghianti, « Film d'arte, film sull'arte, critofilm d'arte », 240.

21. Cf. Carlo Ludovico Ragghianti, « Film d'arte, film sull'arte, critofilm d'arte », 231.

22. Carlo Ludovico Ragghianti, «Informazione sul critofilm d'arte», in Carlo Ludovico Ragghianti, *Arti della visione. I. Cinema*, 247: «In the mass civilization that characterises the historical period we live in, we can intervene towards the public in different ways: with “propaganda”, for example, but also with tools and methods that do not leave listeners and readers passive and in a state of faith, and instead contribute to the development of their critical spirit, offering an

Ragghianti invited to look at the images to see with different eyes different points of view.

As far as we are concerned, making a documentary means to go back looking at the documents, on the ground, in their context, in order to propose not a mercantile valorisation, but a valorisation linked to the research between the archive sources and the place that preserves them. Besides, considering the scope of the third mission to which the university is called, having the opportunity to share research also with the general public means, consequently, to be able to legitimize the higher education and the university in front of the same community. And, perhaps, to be able to eradicate the still too widespread *cliché* among the non-experts according to which the archives are “dusty places”. As well as pointing out, certainly forcibly, that, instead, the understanding of an archive, starting from the root that is the basis of his word, always leads to a new ἀρχή (*arkhé*), to a new “beginning” of studies. In our case to new and precious historiographical reflections on a specific chapter of the past of the civilizations of the spectacle.

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amount of rigorously verified data, and the example of a distinctive rational behaviour, capable of elaborating and distinguishing them in a demanding way».

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